



# Start Your Engine



It is one of the most extraordinary watches to have made it off the drawing board in recent years. Unveiled at Aston Martin's headquarters in Gaydon, Jaeger-LeCoultre's AMVOX2 chronograph is a statement of strength and confidence. *QP* test drives the watch... and the car... again. Just to make sure.

James Gurney

## AMVOX2 is a chronograph without buttons. All functions are activated by pushing the dial crystal - "as effortless as pressing the Engine Start button in an Aston."

(Above) Magali Metray, one of the industry's few female designers (let alone one of the youngest), has now designed both AMVOX watches, not to mention the first Compressor watches. Not bad for someone still in her first watch design job, with only 5 years under her belt.

(Below) The AMVOX2's unique vertical-trigger chronograph is based on a case- and dial-assembly comprising over 150 components. The mechanism pivots 4° over a lateral axis - enough to give the user a sense of positive feedback while keeping the watch relatively slim. (Below left) As the mechanism pivots towards 12 o'clock to start/stop a cam pushes a train of levers mounted on miniature bearing trains, whose balls are a mere 0.1 mm in diameter. (Below right) Push back towards 6 o'clock to reset.

Despite the DB9's rather restrained lines and the frankly muted colour schemes that Aston Martin offers its customers, its façade of elegant refinement is paper-thin at best. Admittedly, only an hour-or-so's practice is required to control the car in traffic and avoid lurching at stop lights, but the truth is that the DB9 never feels less than what it really is: an extremely powerful and fast sports car that never ceases to challenge its driver's discretion and ability to observe speed limits.

This begs a question of the association developed between the car-maker and Jaeger-LeCoultre, which was not at first completely answered. While the association

lacks for nothing in terms of shared design references, engineering ethos and brand status, the equation breaks down the moment the DB9's rev-counter hits that point, not far over 2,500 rpm, when an exhaust port opens. This is when the inner hooligan erupts into life, evaporating civilised concerns about fine engineering and craft-values in a sea of noise and power. Anyone even thinking about looking at their watch at this point has either nerves of steel or brains of concrete.

### Push the button

This does not mean that the Aston-Jaeger axis is fatally flawed, but it does present a challenge that had to be met. That your

average Aston Martin driver has more than a passing knowledge of watches only added to the pressure on Jaeger-LeCoultre to come up with the goods; to ensure the credibility of association, at least from their point of view. Also, while AMVOX1 was generally well received, there were more than a few voices making it plain that they were not convinced. AMVOX2 could never have been intended as a riposte to these critics - if only because it has been in development for longer than the year since AMVOX1 was announced - but there is no doubt that it delivers.

The AMVOX2 Chronograph Concept, to give it its full name, is an out-and-out response to the challenge of making a watch for Aston Martin. Echoing the crown-free concept of the 1950s' Futurematic, AMVOX2 is a chronograph without buttons. All the functions are activated by pushing the dial crystal.

By any standard, this is a radical development and, as a concept, delivers on the promise of its association with Aston Martin. Not only is it a first in watchmaking, but the mechanism is crisp and robust in use - "as effortless as pressing the Engine Start button in an Aston." It relies on a novel arrangement in which the movement, dial and crystal pivot about a lateral axis. As the mechanism pivots, a cam pushes a train of levers mounted on miniature bearing trains, which control the chronograph functions. The system can be locked with the slider on the side of the case. Following the fascination with revolving sub-dial discs viewed with windows to display the secondary functions of Jaeger's Compressor series, the AMVOX2's chronograph times are indicated by luminescent discs - fancifully likened to the headlights of a DB9.

### Essential ingredients

In truth, the detailing is nearly as impeccable as the original AMVOX1, though, to be hyper-critical, the differently sized numbers do not work as well as they did on the original. One detail that does though, is the window through to the red chronograph lever at the bottom of the dial, which - in a delightful aesthetic twist - mimics the flash of coloured brake calliper that you glimpse through the spokes of a sports car's alloy. It might sound a bit naff, but it really adds to the watch. Of course, the details of the dial generally match the instrumentation of the DB9 as far as possible; an approach that works well, just so long as you don't hold the watch right in front of the DB9's dash, at which point that element of naffness magically reappears.



(Above) The 30-minute and 12-hour chronograph sub-dials are luminescent white discs, recalling the headlights of an Aston Martin or its dashboard counters at night.

(Below) Several design cues have been lifted from the Aston dashboard by the Le Sentier watchmaker - most obviously the matte sheen and angular circles, reflected by AMVOX2's dial.





(Above) Aston Martin's trademark mixture of shiny and matte grey finishes, exemplified here by the DB9, have been translated by Jaeger's designers in the AMVOX2.

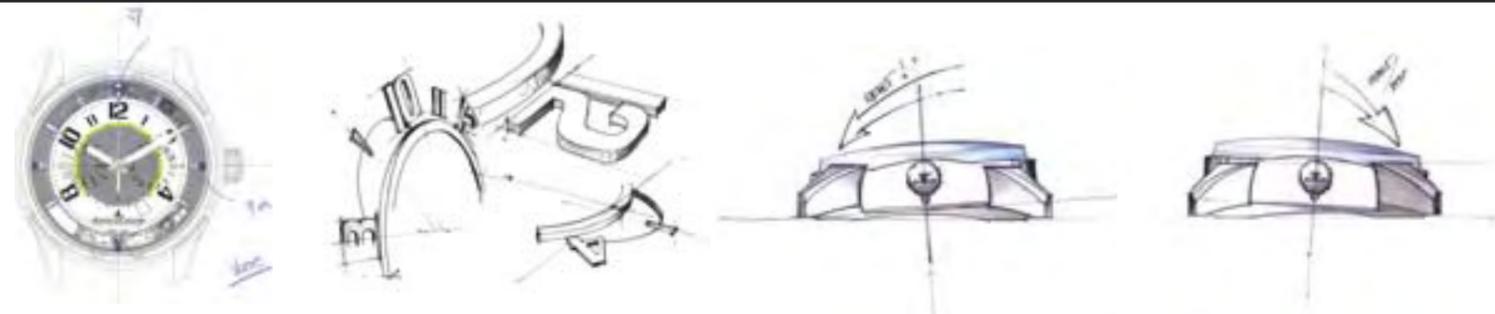
As you switch on the DB9, the message "Power, Beauty, Soul" flashes up on the instrument display. If the AMVOX2 cannot actually deliver on the first, the movement underneath does deliver precision, ingenuity and a quality of design and build that is virtually unmatched for this type of watch. The pivot mechanism realised by Jaeger's Francis Cretin is thought through to the last degree, from the precise level of 'play' in the chronograph levers to the clearance between the main case and the shoulders against which the whole thing pivots.

### Haute technologie

Inside the AMVOX2 is, essentially, the same movement as the Master Compressor Chronograph unveiled earlier this year in Dubai (profiled in Issue 13). Based on the 'auto-tractor' calibre 751 ébauche, calibre 751b exudes a spirit of innovation and boundary-pushing that is rapidly becoming Jaeger-LeCoultre's hallmark. Whether it is the use of ceramic ball bearings for the rotor assembly or the variable-inertia balance wheel that Jaeger says is more robust against both shock and wear than an index, there is sufficient engineering overkill to satisfy any enthusiast.

Another particularity shared with the Compressor Chronograph is the vertical coupling system for the column-wheel chronograph

In case you think this is a failing, it is not. Intentionally or not, Jaeger-LeCoultre has captured one of the essential ingredients of the Aston Martin magic - that touch of the naff; the flash; the way that Roger Moore was somehow more Bond than the infinitely better-cut Connery. Unlikely as this seems, there might be some truth to the idea, as Aston Martin itself has had a role in developing the concept of the AMVOX2 - particularly Aston's CEO, Dr Ulrich Bez. Jaeger-LeCoultre hints that Aston Martin is also behind even more radical concepts, lined up for 2006 and 2007!



control. This makes the system engage more quickly and precisely than the conventional sliding pinions or wheels - particularly important here, given the longer travel involved in the dial pusher arrangement.

Jaeger-LeCoultre is expecting to make the AMVOX2 in a limited series of 750 in titanium and 150 in platinum, with prices around €10,000-€11,000 for the titanium version. (Expect to add another

€8,000-€10,000 for the platinum.) While Aston Martin customers may expect some sort of priority, it is production capacity that is the limit here, rather than any attempt to create a spurious exclusivity - particularly as further AMVOX models are already in the pipeline. It seems Jaeger's designers and engineers have begun to enjoy the freedom that this sort of watchmaking allows and are determined to carry on in the same vein. ○

(Above) Aston's famous Engine Start button (pictured here in a DB9) is reflected nicely by the AMVOX2 chronograph's start/stop/reset mode of action.