

Hidden Potential

STT's ugly duckling grows into Harry Winston's beautiful swan

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For the first time, Englishman abroad Peter Speake-Marin has taken a tangent from the resolute independence of his Watch Workshop, helping to adapt Swiss Time Technology's rugged tourbillon for Harry Winston Rare Timepieces' latest Excenter timepiece. As we all know, HWRT's canny collaborations have always worked to both parties' benefit, producing truly stunning watches to boot. Like its five Opus creations, the Excenter Tourbillon is no exception... not least the flipside of this unique partnership: Speake-Marin's very own interpretation of the new calibre.

Finding a niche for oneself in an overabundant wristwatch market is no easy task nowadays. With the backing of a blue-chip corporate giant, or the luxury of an expendable fortune, one could plough money into a brand-based extravaganza, market it ruthlessly across the board and edge your way in. The other extreme

is to go for quality and plod along steadfastly for years, should you possess the gumption for it.

Peter Speake-Marin has taken the middle road, developing his career patiently and carving a unique reputation for bringing a distinctive Englishness to Swiss watchmaking, all in a

Harry Winston's Excenter Tourbillon, developed with Peter Speake-Marin from Swiss Time Technology's tourbillon calibre.



(Left) Speake-Marin: a truly independent watchmaker bringing an English sensibility to Swiss watchmaking. (Right) Peter Speake-Marin's 'Vintage Tourbillon' version of the Excenter Tourbillon - part of his ongoing Piccadilly collection. Platinum version depicted, limited to 10 pieces (SFr.110,000).



(Above) Platinum TP3AW edition (left; SFr.110,000) and rose-gold TRD3AR edition (right; SFr.93,000) Vintage Tourbillons. Note the depth and clean lines of the Piccadilly cases. (Far right) The uncased HW400A calibre. Classical elements have been incorporated throughout Speake-Marin's adaptation of STT's original calibre: e.g. hand-polished anglage on all bridges and blued steel screws on movement bridges. (Right) The minute tourbillon cage and its beautifully designed bridge. The original calibre from STT was a flying tourbillon, now converted to double-bridged.



relatively short time. After studying at Hackney Technical College in East London, then graduating from Neuchâtel's horological finishing school, WOSTEP, it took just seven years of antique watch restoration back in London and 15 years back in Switzerland working on modern watches to accumulate the necessary skill and resources to set up his own independent workshop in 2000, in the quiet village of Rolle.

Since the first 'Piccadilly' collection was presented about three years ago it has been enlarged and perfected, gaining greater and greater popularity among Californian and South East Asian collectors. The Piccadilly's styles were inspired by the antiques that Speake-Marin used to restore in the heart of its eponymous London district. Since then, he has gained enough backing from clients to develop faster and further than ever before, always retaining a characteristic integrity and independence. Only with the recent patronage of Maximilian Busser from Harry Winston Rare Timepieces (HWRT) has Speake-Marin veered towards the corporate lifestyle. He has been steadfastly working behind the scenes on a personal calibre, which this year resulted in a double whammy: the creation of the Excenter Tourbillon for Harry Winston and his own Vintage Tourbillon.

Realising the potential

For independent watchmakers, one of the major problems is finding or creating a movement that somehow contains the essence of their philosophy. Sooner or later, this issue becomes prominent and problematic though. Making every single bit of the movement yourself is an option, but not economically viable, either in terms of the time it requires or the monoculture it inadvertently propagates. (Someone like Philippe Dufour is a master of the entirely hand-made watch, but he only makes one basic model, the Simplicity day in, day out, with an occasional Duality or a minute repeater every three years or so for variety. Even Dufour is starting to complain in private about the straightjacket his success has created).

This going-solo idea is actually a very modern concept. The other, centuries-old and standard practice is to take an existing movement or parts from specialist suppliers and rebuild it according to one's wishes. This could mean purely cosmetic details such as a personalised rotor and some blued screws, or a total makeover in which the movement is like a piece of clay and the sky is the limit.

About two years ago, a movement shrouded in a problematic past attracted Speake-Marin's attention: the tourbillon originally

developed by Progress Watch, now Swiss Time Technology (STT). Technically, it is a well-developed calibre. Visually, however, it was designed with all the visual allure of a Dickensian spinster with large feet. "It didn't take long before I realised how much potential there was in this movement," recalls Speake-Marin. "It could become beautiful if redone both visually and technically for the high-end market. The fact that so little was done to it initially was actually a godsend for me, because there was so much that could be reworked. My only fear was whether the STT people would be amenable to such major changes to the original design. But once we got together and started discussions, this feeling melted away. We both realised how much we could build on each other's know-how. The machines at STT, as well as the knowledge and engineering at the company were all extremely impressive and I couldn't wait to work with them."

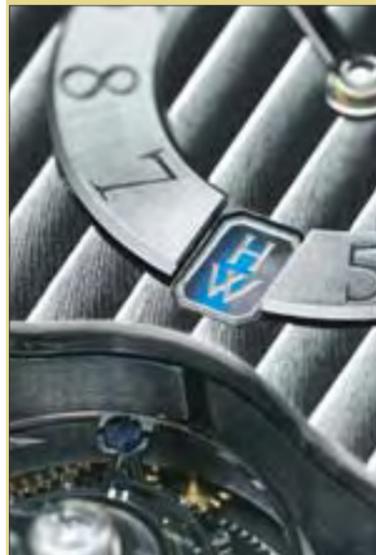
At a later date, the concept of developing this plan was fully hatched with Max Busser from Harry Winston Rare Timepieces (HWRT). Busser's encouragement of various independent watchmakers is well known, thanks to the extraordinary watches

from the Opus series. In this case, a special one-off was conceived for a watch in the Excenter series using Speake-Marin's new movement. Speake-Marin would also have HWRT's blessing to use the movement for his own collection too; another unique example of the co-operation and respect that exists between HWRT and independent watchmaking in Switzerland.

All change

Certainly, much attention was paid to the STT tourbillon's finish, but the actual majority of differences are not merely cosmetic; they really go into the depth of the movement's structure. It is

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(Above) Close-up of the Excenter Tourbillon's low-power-reserve warning window. Upon entering the last 25 hours, the "HW" logo switches to electric blue.

(Below) Caseback view of the Vintage Tourbillon, showing the 110-hour double power reserve indicator. Note Speake-Marin's trademark serpent hands.

proof of Speake-Marin's ability that he not only saw the hidden potential of the overly robust STT movement; he was able to accomplish all the extreme alterations he wanted. For instance, the change from flying tourbillon to double bridge construction – a real transformation when it comes to a movement design. Or the change from the basic design's 72-hour power reserve to the 110 hours of the present HW400A calibre. It truly is a “developed by P Speake-Marin” movement, let there be no doubt. In its present state the movement uses the healthy concepts from the original but represents a light-year's forward progression.

A first glance at this exceptional timepiece reveals two intriguing characteristics. The first is a double power-reserve indicator on the back of the movement – one indicator running from 0 to 50 and the other from 50 to 110 hours. The second came about because this information is not always directly visible to the owner, being on the caseback. The solution was inspired by vintage English racing cars with dual fuel tanks, which use a meter and a colored indicator to show the last few litres' fuel supply. For the watch, an HW logo in a little window switches to electric blue when the remaining power

approaches its final 25 hours, thus signalling to the owner that it is time to rewind. Indeed, Speake-Marin's version of the Excenter Tourbillon is called the 'Vintage Tourbillon' on account of this link with classic motor cars (as well as the strong classical horological elements incorporated within).

The tourbillon bridges, visible on both the dial and movement sides of the watch are beautifully shaped and polished. Instead of the usual red jewels, this watch uses blue sapphires set into white-gold chatons, each set with three blued screws. The ruthenium bridges, a diamond jewel on the dial-side tourbillon bridge, the Geneva stripes of the dial-side movement that serves as the dial itself... All contribute to a technically unique and visually fascinating creation. The Excenter Tourbillon will be available in 75 examples each in rose gold and platinum, plus a small series in diamond-set platinum.

Speake-Marin's own version is very similar, but without the specific HWRT details – not least a round case replacing HWRT's trademark arched lug attachments. Plain, his version still remains gorgeous in its simplicity and restful design. The horological spinster is reborn with rosy English cheeks and small feet, the transformation from Dickens to Austen now complete. ◯



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