



Satellites

Outsider brand Jean Dunand's genuinely original Tourbillon Orbital

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As regular visitors to BASELWORLD and Geneva's SIHH might agree, there are often as many interesting horological happenings going on outside the official exhibition areas as there are in them - if you know where to look. Probably the best known 'fringe operators' are Franck Muller and FP Journe, but *QP* was most intrigued by a low-key presentation in a modest suite at Geneva's Hotel President Wilson, where I was shown what is claimed to be the world's most complex integrated calibre and a 'ground-breaking' orbital tourbillon. With Christophe Claret behind the scenes, this claim may well ring true.

Rose-gold Tourbillon Orbital (€255,000) from Thierry Olevay and Christophe Claret's new 'Jean Dunand' brand. A view of the caseback is afforded here too, showing the unique D-ring key, and moonphase.



(Above) The tourbillon orbits the dial once an hour. As the 'lo 200's barrel unwinds against a central fixed pinion, it drives itself and the tourbillon around, the latter regulating the speed of rotation. The cage itself rotates once a minute against a fixed circumference wheel, reducing the jewel bearings to 14 and therefore reducing friction.

(Below) Close-up of the Tourbillon Orbital's flying tourbillon cage. The escapement beats at 21,600 vph, sandwiched between the revolving dial and baseplate, which are held apart by hourglass-shaped pillars - one of which is just visible here.



Jean Dunand is one of those names that simply sound as though they belong on a watch dial. Yet the person after whom entrepreneur Thierry Oulevay named his fledgling brand was not a horologist, but a Swiss-born artist who became famous as one of the great craftsmen of the art deco era.

Dunand worked during the dawn of the machine age and was especially celebrated for the architectural designs and interior fittings that lent a quintessential deco glamour to some of the great French cruise liners of the 1920s and '30s including *Ile de France*, *Atlantique* and, most famous of all, *Normandie*.

Although Dunand's name faded into obscurity following his death in 1942, only really recognised by art deco enthusiasts, it returned to the limelight following a retrospective of his work staged at New York's Metropolitan Museum in 1998. According to Oulevay, it was a perfect name for the precious brand he has now founded with genius watchmaker Christophe Claret, because it speaks of how art deco embraced the new technologies and materials of the era, while prioritising craftsmanship and functionality - all worthy ingredients in any high-end timepiece.

Credentials

Launching a watch brand with a genuine 'grande complication', an entirely new type of mechanism and a €255,000 price tag is a bold move indeed, but Oulevay stands more of a chance of pulling it off than most.

An expert in the two vital areas for horological success - watch design and marketing - Oulevay gained his initial experience in watches at Piaget, before orchestrating the re-launch of the Bovet brand between 1997 and 2001. He then joined forces with Claret to form World Premiere Watchmaking (WPW), of which Jean Dunand is the principal brand.

"The idea of WPW is to create advanced and unprecedented horological mechanisms as the basis for custom-built timepieces, each one of which will represent the summit of contemporary watchmaking," Oulevay told *QP*.

"Having a stake in the Jean Dunand brand gives Christophe Claret an outlet for his prodigious skills and imagination by enabling him to create pieces at

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the highest level. The first of our 'Pieces Unique' is the Tourbillon Orbital - an achievement never before seen in watchmaking." Well, we have all heard that before, but this time it does genuinely seem to be the first watch of its kind.

Merry-go-round

Invented by Claret in 2000, Tourbillon Orbital features a one-minute flying tourbillon which orbits the dial once an hour on a revolving movement; a fiendishly clever set-up which appears to rely on nothing more complex than a set of reciprocating ball bearings for its operation.

The movement - named 'lo 200' after a moon of Jupiter discovered by Galileo and the year the system was designed - is claimed to return the ubiquitous (yet nowadays redundant) tourbillon to its original role as a precision device, since timing tests have apparently revealed that the combined rotation of the tourbillon and the movement improves the stability of the mechanism to a worthwhile degree.

The watch barrel and the tourbillon orbit the centre of the movement, sandwiched between two plates held apart by beautifully turned, bobbin-shaped pillars and rotating on the aforementioned ball bearings. The top plate constitutes the revolving dial with the pre-requisite aperture to reveal the tourbillon, and the barrel unwinds against a central fixed pinion, so driving the tourbillon and itself around the outside of the movement, with the speed of rotation regulated by the tourbillon escapement. As it orbits, the tourbillon rotates once a minute against a fixed circumference wheel, through a train of wheels that enables the number of jewel bearings to be reduced to 14, so cutting friction.

Perpetual innovation

By now you have probably asked yourself the same question that occurred to me. How do you wind a watch with a mainspring barrel that is always on

the move? It must be a tricky one, because even Claret needed two years to work out the solution, which is to replace the conventional caseband-mounted crown with a folding key set into the back.

Lifting a D-ring on the key engages a central wheel (also on ball bearings) which turns the ratchet wheel to wind the barrel spring. Pulling out the key connects the motion work of the hour and minute hands to set them in either direction and allows the minute hand to turn with the rotating dial.

Having all that going on does, of course, make it impossible to reveal this mechanical marvel with the usual sapphire caseback. But the absence of a winding crown at three o'clock allows for two side apertures, giving a lateral view of the revolving mechanism.

The only platinum Grande Complication to be made by Jean Dunand (€600,000). Three in rose gold and two in white gold will also be made (€541,000 each) - all featuring a minute repeater, perpetual calendar, tourbillon, minute repeater and split-seconds chronograph.





(Left) The watchmaker and the entrepreneur: Christophe Claret (left) and Thierry Olevay (right), outside the former's eponymous brand headquarters. The Jean Dunand brand is named after the Swiss art deco designer, who died in 1942. (Right) Grande Complication's movement comprises 827 components. The two gongs for the minute repeater mechanism are clearly visible here, curving round its circumference.

Olevay told me that this was another first, although the Parmigiani Type 370 features a similar side view, as do the tourbillon and reveil GMT watches from Van Cleef & Arpels. But none of the above can claim to be as entertaining to watch as the Tourbillon Orbital, especially since the barrel's counterweight, which passes the windows every 30 minutes, is large enough to be engraved with the owner's initials. Nice touch.

The three-o'clock side-window also offered Claret another irresistible opportunity for a groundbreaking horological feature, in the form of an



entirely new type of power reserve indicator: a vertical needle that moves up and down between 'full' and 'empty' marks on the crystal, in the style of a car petrol gauge.

Not to forget...

All this innovation somewhat unfairly overshadows Jean Dunand's other offering: the truly beautiful Grande Complication – a hand-wound limited edition, just six of which will be produced and all of which have already been sold, despite a starting price of €541,000. Each movement takes more than 120 hours to assemble and the finished watch



contains 827 components enabling the inclusion of the 'essential' grande complication functions – minute repeater, chronograph and perpetual calendar. Just for good measure, the Grande Complication also throws in a tourbillon, retrograde calendar indication and an isolation device which disconnects the chronograph split-seconds hand from the movement when it is stopped, thus preventing the stopped hand from acting as a 'brake' on the rest of the movement.

It takes a hefty, 42-mm case to contain the movement, which is 8.7 mm thick. Three watches

will be housed in pink gold, two in white gold and one in platinum. I was lucky enough to handle the pink-gold version and I have to say that the finish, as on the Tourbillon Orbital, is absolutely superlative.

But what the type of people who buy watches at this level will really appreciate is the fact that every Jean Dunand product will be different from the last. Part of the package includes the ability to specify your own custom touches, with specific materials and decoration. And that, of course, is what makes a true 'Piece Unique'. ◉

Another world first for the Tourbillon Orbital: petrol gauge-style power reserve indicator, viewed through the caseband at 3 o'clock.

Further information: Jean Dunand and World Premiere Watchmaking. Tel: +41 (0)22 706 1960, www.w-p-w.ch