

Ageing Gracefully

Du Bois et Fils has inherited a worthy identity and staked a claim to that most treasured of watchmaking values – age

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What is in a name? Well, almost everything in the watch business, particularly when the name is dusted with the patina of age. There can be no other business that prizes a brand's age even half as much as the watchmaking business. Where banks and other financial institutions once traded on the antiquity of their foundation, the collapse of Baring's gave age the unpleasant and unprofitable association of complacency. Even other luxury goods makers trade on their histories only as far as they help underpin current offerings. But different rules seem to apply for a significant sector of the watch industry. Here, the patina of age seems to confer a solidity and respect that is valued in itself as can be seen with companies such as Philippe Du Bois et Fils.

Du Bois is in the business of making traditional, good value, dependable and straightforward watches, using, for the most part, modern ETA and Uritas movements. The cases are well finished and feature good executions of familiar dial designs, most of which have a solidly timeless feel to them and are offered at highly competitive

prices. This competition is partly the reason why there is so much importance invested in the name on the dial. A great number of Swiss makers depend on ultra-reliable ETA and Valjoux movements, meaning that, apart from the level of finish applied to the movements and the quality of the case, there are many watches on the market that are functionally identical.

Behind the badge

In search of a heritage sufficiently illustrious to command the public's attention, there have been several companies that have overstretched themselves to the point where their products are but a pale reflection of the original achievements. Du Bois, however, has inherited an identity in perfect keeping with its current production. There is documentary evidence of the Du Bois family existing in Le Locle since the late 17th century and watches were first traded under the name in 1785. Philippe Du Bois et Fils must have prospered, as it had offices and agencies as far afield as Amsterdam, Brussels, Milan and Philadelphia by the end of the century. While good quality watches from this

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(Clockwise) Yellow-gold Montre Perpétuelle, with Valjoux 7751 movement (£4,495).

Two automatic Montre Monnaie chronographs from Du Bois et Fils (£1,995 each).

Grande Rectangulaire, with flared case, power reserve and moonphase (£2,600).

La Rectangulaire in yellow gold (£3,495).

period appear at auction, they do not number greatly, which indicates that while solid, the company did not set the firmament of horology ablaze. Nonetheless, eight generations dedicated themselves to the family business for over 200 years on the same premises in Le Locle.

Wind forward a couple of centuries and you will see a similar story unfolding today. Philippe Du Bois et Fils in its current incarnation produces a core of good quality, classic designs with modern movements, augmented by some more interesting pieces using stock movements from the 1960s, 1950s and earlier. The Rectangulaire watch is typical of the current collection. Based on a rigorously 1920s design, it is recreated with modern materials (such as sapphire glass over the dials) and modern movements, which range from a basic ETA automatic, to a hand-wound Jaquet, to a rebuilt and re-finished Fabrique d'Ebauches calibre 735 from the 1930s. ○

Further information: Classic Time Ltd, Tel: 0118 948 2674, www.classic-time.co.uk