

Kick Start

A blizzard of fresh air from Finland, combining contemporary design with scrap motorcycle components

Alex Doak

You might be inclined to think that the cog shape of Stepan Sarpaneva's Loiste watch is a fond allusion to the delicate components driving the movement within. While certainly inspired by mechanics, the source of inspiration could hardly contrast more with the miniature world of horology.

"The Loiste was born out of a pocket watch that I made from my old Harley's kickstart pinion. I found the bike beautiful, so I made a watch from it! The idea was to make something simple and a bit brutal, but beautiful...like life in Finland."

Thoroughbred

Such elegant simplicity is Scandinavia itself, and inherent within all of this Helsinki resident's watch designs. The clean, bold lines are complemented by a telling choice of unembellished material: brushed Stavax ESR steel – three times harder than conventional stainless steel. What is more, the watches' three-dimensional dials are all machined from either brass or aluminium, reinforcing a brute strength subtly offset by leather straps and soft edges.

Sarpaneva's passion for motorcycling, ignited at the tender age of 11 did not distract him from a prolific



(Left) 'Pink' Oiva model (€4,150). The brass dial contrasts nicely with the brushed sheen of the case's Stavax ESR steel.



(Right) Aluminium-dial variant of the first Oiva model (€4,150).

horological career. Born in 1970, Sarpaneva first graduated from the Watchmaking School of Finland, then moved to Switzerland to further his studies at the renowned WOSTEP school in La Chaux-de-Fonds. In 1994, he began working for several prestigious watchmakers including Piaget, Parmigiani, Vianney Halter and Christophe Claret. During those formative years, Sarpaneva specialised in the crafting of complex timepieces, laying the foundations in his mind for his own company – founded in 2003, back in Helsinki.

"I started to work on complicated watches in 1997 when I began working at Parmigiani," explains Sarpaneva. "I worked in the 'piece unique' and complications department with Mr Voutilainen – he was the man who dragged me into the complicated world. After that, I wanted to see more, and started to work with Vianney Halter. I guess both my work and I acquired some degree of madness there! Since 2001, I have been working for Christophe Claret, first in Switzerland and, from 2003, part-time from Finland, when I started my own company. My dream is to eventually make only my own watches."

Small steps

As well as the Harley-inspired Loiste, Sarpaneva's other models belong to the TV-screen 'Oiva' range (a Finnish adjective for 'splendid' or 'excellent') – an evolution of the now-discontinued Salpa model. All are driven by the ETA 2824-A2 calibre, except the Oiva II, whose day-date function dictates the use of the left-of-centre ETA 2836-2.

Given the time Sarpaneva has spent under the wings of such purist luminaries as Halter and Claret, it surely cannot be long before he moves on from resorting to ETA movements; perhaps even making complications of his own? "Yes, when the idea is good enough (and the customer has big enough pockets!), but first I must learn and make different kinds of simple watches in Finland. Small steps; that's the idea. Not too fast." An answer as patient and considered as one would expect from any good watchmaker. Sarpaneva is evidently in no rush: "The production will stay very small – a maximum of 100 watches per year, up from today's 35."

This will come as a disappointment to many, no doubt. The Sarpaneva 'brand DNA' is so thoughtfully balanced, the watches' neo-retro look so instantly classic, that it seems hard to believe these watches have been in existence for less than two years. Personally, I cannot wait for Sarpaneva to chuck out his next motorbike. The results will be beautiful, however brutal. ◉

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Sarpaneva's Loiste model (€4,200), named after the Finnish for 'shine' or 'glory'.

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