



A colourful variant on the original EOS – the unique, bespoke watch showing times of sunrise and sunset according to the owner's home latitude (£3,995). The cams that move the hands have to be specially shaped to each location and the dial must suit the variation through the year.

# Time to Oneself

Martin Braun takes a highly individual approach to the increasingly impersonal business of haute horlogerie

Timothy Treffry



Watch buffs now have an increasing opportunity to look beyond the long-established brand names; to acquire a watch that reflects the imagination of a creative individual rather than the latest reflection of corporate identity. Watchmaking now shows the vibrancy and capacity for innovation not seen since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, catering for a customer base somewhat broader than the European and Oriental aristocracies, which supported that pioneering generation. One of these new independents is German watchmaker, Martin Braun. The watches he launched at Basel this year show that, while his head is well above the clouds, his feet are firmly on the ground. *QP* profiles one of the most imaginative watchmakers in the business.



The latest elaboration of the EOS, the Boreas, provides an indication of the equation of time above the dial centre (€6,895).

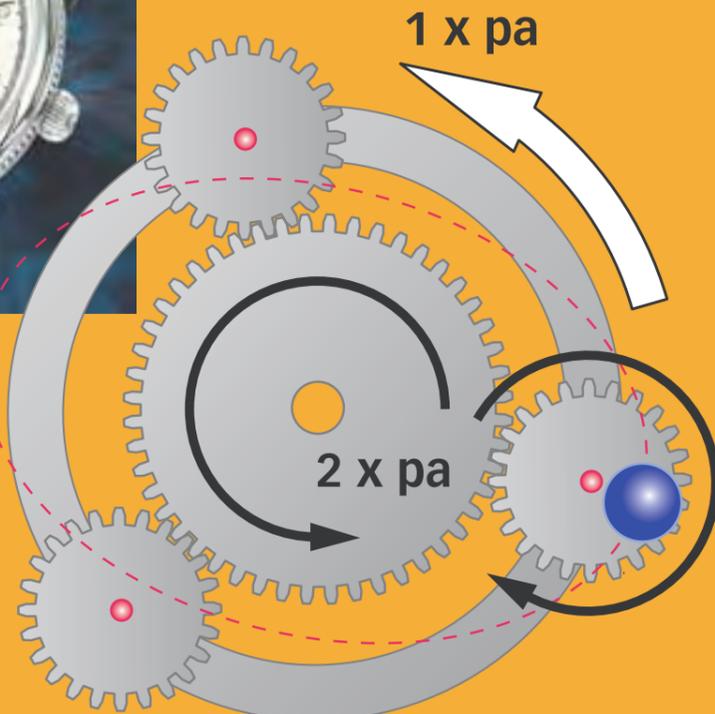
As a schoolboy (Braun is 40 this year), Martin's favourite doodle was the sunburst motif that has since become his company logo. The sun is at the centre of his new Heliozentric watch, which is almost certainly a horological first. The dial portrays the annual movement of the Earth in its elliptical journey around the sun, conveniently divided into the months of the year. For those interested in astrology as well as astronomy, a subsidiary dial indicates the Zodiac.

A variant adds a few stars to further decorate the dial. Those fascinated by the movement of gears rather than celestial spheres can concentrate on the epicyclic system by which the elliptical path of the Earth is produced. Purists may complain that the sun should not be at the centre of the ellipse – rather at one of its foci – and that the elongation of the ellipse is exaggerated. "That," says Martin Braun enigmatically, "is a matter of aesthetics." And that is part of the special appeal of these companies both owned and operated by the watchmakers; you have a product that is very personally related to an individual.

In the Heliozentric watch (€6,995), the Earth, represented by a blue dot, moves in its annual elliptical orbit around the sun. A separate dial gives the cycle of Zodiac signs.



(Right) Part of the underdial gearing to provide the Earth's annual elliptical path around the dial centre. The central 48-tooth wheel turns twice a year, while three 24-tooth wheels travel around it mounted on a ring which turns once a year. The smaller wheels consequently rotate once a year in the opposite direction. A point at the end of the diameter of one of these wheels, representing the Earth, moves anti-clockwise in an elliptical path, as shown. The whole system is driven by the date mechanism.



### Down to earth

The 'feet on the ground' side of Martin Braun is evidenced by his launch of a completely separate line of low-priced mechanical watches – NB Yäeger. Here, the idea is to take solid, reliable, but unadorned ETA movements (the Ford Escorts of the watch world), case them simply with a very practical, slightly military design and market them as entry-level mechanical watches for those taking their first tentative steps beyond quartz. They carry tags such as 'No Barrier Yäeger', 'International Aviation Watches' and 'Take Off into a New Dimension'. The version with the ETA 2824 self-winding movement with date is just €495 (£330) and the chronograph (ETA 7750) is €1,190 (£795). Why pay more?

With this project, Martin Braun is returning to his roots. His father ran an engineering company in Pforzheim that specialised in making watch cases with a useful sideline casing old pocket watch movements as large wristwatches. Many high-quality movements were available because their original gold cases were often sold as scrap during times of economic difficulty, or when the price of gold was particularly high. Once graduated as a Master Watchmaker from the watch-making school in Pforzheim, the young Martin Braun found a ready market for these watches in the 1990s, producing a new watch, the EOS, in 2000 – very much his own and one which was to lay the foundations of a flourishing enterprise.

### Dusk and dawn

The EOS was an absolutely brilliant concept. Intriguing crossed hands below the dial centre indicate the times of sunrise and sunset each day, varying throughout the year. This also changes depending on where the owner lives; the EOS was a bespoke watch, only available to order. It provided, for about the same price as a basic Rolex, a very personal and 'unique' watch.

The shaped cams, which raise and lower the hands to show what the sun is doing, are machined according to the latitude of the owner. As the watches were made to order, the commercial risk of a large inventory was avoided. Five different dials accommodate the fact that the length of the longest and shortest day in, say, Singapore varies by only a few minutes while for Oslo the hands must span several hours.

The EOS was eventually succeeded by the Boreas, which added an equation of time (the cyclical difference between solar time and mean time) to the sunrise and sunset indication.

### Luminous

In-between the EOS and the Boreas, Martin Braun produced, perhaps a little self-indulgently, the Korona; a more universal watch with day/night indication based on the company's logo, which occupies almost the entire dial. Again, all the work



The NB Yäeger watches introduced by Martin Braun. An ETA 2824 automatic at £330 (left) and an ETA 7750 chronograph at £795 (right) provide a good introduction to mechanical watches.

was concentrated on the dial, with movements continuing to be supplied by ETA (watch components are bought in for all Martin Braun timepieces and assembled in-house by a small team of watchmakers).

The dial of the Korona has a central disc on which the logo is painted with the chemically luminous (non-radioactive) compound SuperLuminova®. If we consider the situation at noon, the longest ray of the logo, and the hour hand, point to 12. By 6pm the logo will have rotated a quarter of a turn and the day/night transition will be at 12. By midnight the logo will be upside down and at 6am the night/day transition will be uppermost. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this watch, apart from the cleverness of its design, is the fantastic glow of the dial in the dark. The extraordinary quantity of SuperLuminova used acts as a storage battery for light.

Martin Braun tops up his catalogue with a number of other models that are more conventional, but all have that special look – especially about the dial. With production only totalling about 1,000 watches a year, one can guarantee that ownership of a Martin Braun timepiece will always be a highly personal affair between you and this most individual watchmaker. ◉



The basis of the La Sonnerie II is the automatic AS Calibre 5008 (£3,395). The production of this movement with alarms was stopped in the early 1970s. Braun was not satisfied with the rattling sound of the automatic alarm mechanism, preferring a nice ring. Therefore, he designed a sound spring of solid bronze. In addition, the watch has a striking dial, blued steel hands and a red-tipped alarm hand.



The Martin Braun logo, with its long and short rays, takes a central position in the Korona series to indicate day and night. Here it is 10.10am. The Koronamatik (£2,469) has a disc under the dial that turns once a day, allowing the watch to indicate whether it is day or nighttime. If the hour hand is above the horizon of the sunburst logo it is daytime and if the hour hand is below the horizon then it is nighttime. A peripheral ring turning once a month, carries a red patch to indicate the date.

**Further information:** Greenwich Distribution, 12D Dennington Park Road, West Hampstead, London NW6 1BA.

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