

# Back to Basics

Jaeger-LeCoultre's new movement finds a welcome home

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Of all the watch houses gathered at the annual spring trade shows, few can match Jaeger-LeCoultre's impressive line-up for 2004: 10 fresh models and five brand-new movements.

This is clearly a matter of substance as well as style. QP takes a closer look at the new 970 movement, currently driving the Master Dualmatic Compressor and Master Hometime models.



The Master Compressor Dualmatic (£3,900). As well as this steel-cased model, pink-gold and white-gold variants are available. The open-worked home-time hand is pointing to 04:51 rather than 16:51, as confirmed by the white 24-hour dial. The black subdial indicates seconds.



Forging ahead on the mechanical front does not distract Jaeger-LeCoultre from bringing out some stylish new numbers. Not that Jaeger is shy to dazzle. I could barely tear myself away from the microscope amplifying the giddy mechanics of the gyrating double-axis tourbillon that made other tourbillons appear, well, fairly static. Eric Coudray stood back as his extrovert creation – priced at €180,000 – delighted the crowd with its miniature fair-ground-ride trajectory of spins, rotations and whirrs.

Perhaps more significantly, a less showy innovation with far-reaching implications is the new family of 970 movements. This is the real showstopper from Jaeger for 2004. As its creator, Jean-Claude Meylan explains: “Creating complications like perpetual calendars, tourbillons, minute repeaters and alarm functions – that’s one thing. It is far more difficult to make a simple movement that is really good.”

### Robust

No less than eight years of development are behind this simplified and innovative calibre. “We were looking to create a movement that is more reliable, robust and easier to service,” explains Stephane Belmont, Director of Development. Two of the first incarnations of the 970 movement are the Master Compressor Dualmatic (starting at £3,900) with its 972 calibre and the Master Hometown (starting at £3,700) with its 975 calibre. The 972 automatic calibre has all the sturdiness of a 4x4 jeep, coupled with Jaeger’s trademark elegance and simplicity. Add to that the outsized, macho Compressor case – launched three years ago as a spin-off from the Master series – and a gruelling 1,000 hours’ testing and you have a faithful travel companion, game for whatever your itinerary might throw at it: from bounding through time-zones to a quick scuba-dive on the Barrier Reef.

### Details

The rotor is mounted on ceramic ball bearings, eliminating the need for lubrication and cutting-down on trips to the service centre as, unlike steel, there is no danger of oxidation. Ceramic ball bearings are not new at Jaeger – the 923 calibre incorporated them. But what is new is the uni-directional rotor. Jaeger’s researchers realised

(Top) The steel-cased Master Hometown (£3,700). An 18 ct. pink-gold model is also available. The silvered dial has luminescent dots at each hour.

(Left) An exploded diagram of the calibre 975 – the movement powering the Master Hometown. Frequency of 28,800 vph, with 50-hour power reserve.

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that although a bi-directional rotor was more efficient in test conditions, on the wrist a uni-directional rotor simply does a better job at accumulating energy.

The escapement has not escaped a thorough overhaul either. The balance spring, supplied by sister company A Lange & Söhne, is now welded onto the stud and collet by a laser precise to 300 microns. This brand new laser – the size of a small car – was developed in-house specifically for this task. In turn, the balance cock has been transformed into a sturdy balance bridge, screwed down securely on two points.

Precision setting of the balance wheel is now more accurate. By adjusting four screws on the wheel the traditional regulation index is no longer necessary. Coupled with a larger balance wheel, this makes the whole escapement more precise and stable. The new set-up is described by Belmont as ‘super-armour’ that protects the delicate workings at the heart of the movement. Ticking away at 28,800 vibrations per hour, this is a very self-sufficient and robust calibre that will not be shy of a knock or two. “With fewer parts there are fewer risks of an error,” clarifies Belmont.

### Function in form

The fine-tuning and rigorous simplicity applied to the movement is brought to life in the double-time-zone Master Compressor Dualmatic. The mantra of ‘simple is better’ is carried through to the design and functions of the watch. And those considerate watchmakers of Le Sentier have decided that the simplest way to set your local time is by half-turns of the crown located at 4 o’clock (after unscrewing the patented compression key of course). Each half-turn of the crown causes the hour hand to jump by hour intervals (since time zones vary hourly), without disturbing the minute hand. Re-setting via

midnight will also adjust the date accordingly – forwards or backwards.

Meanwhile, a concealed skeleton hand, synchronised with a 24-hour disc visible through a half-circle window, emerges from behind the re-set hour hand to record the time back home. But why the 24-hour disk in addition to the home-time hour hand? A superfluous belt-and-braces approach? Not at all: the disk will tell you at a glance whether it is either 3am or 3pm back at the ranch – important information if you are to avoid the wrath of your partner usually incurred by inadvertent nocturnal phone calls. The Hometown model (the first to house the new movement) lacks this 24-hour dial, but instead features a simple ‘Jour & Nuit’ indicator.

And if you really want to make your Dualmatic work to the hilt, the compression crown located at 2 o’clock adjusts the inner bezel to set a second time limit relative to the minute hand – perfect for keeping an eye on that parking meter in Peking, or timing how long your flight has been sitting on the tarmac at Heathrow.

### Looking forward

The mechanical innovations brought to life in the Compressor Dualmatic and the Hometown watches herald a comprehensive overhaul of Jaeger’s automatic movements: think of them as Jaeger’s new round, automatic platform for the future. Belmont confirms that the improvements seen in the 970 family will begin to permeate other calibres. “Few CEOs are willing to take risks for the next decade,” explains Belmont, “but we are prepared to. After all, our aim is not to produce large quantities of watches, but to improve and develop interesting watches.” The Dualmatic and Hometown have not provided a cure for jetlag or lost luggage but until then, they are doing their best to make travel as refined as possible. ○



Each of the Dualmatic’s two crowns comes equipped with Jaeger’s patented compression key, raising the Dualmatic’s water resistance to 100m, as opposed to the Hometown’s 50m. One half-turn of the key ensures optimal water resistance by supercharging one of the crown’s four toric joints.

Further information: Jaeger-LeCoultre, Tel: 0800 587 3420, [www.jaeger-lecoultre.com](http://www.jaeger-lecoultre.com)