

# Bridging the Gap

Chopard are as committed as ever not only to jewellery but also to high-end horology

Theodore Diehl

⌚ Chopard hold a rather unique place in the pantheon of watch brands today, even when one compares them to other watch and jewellery brands to which at first they appear so similar. This is in part due to their amazing acrobatic skills that keep them perfectly balanced between, on the one hand, jewellery and jewellery-type watches, and on the other, high-end, self-manufactured watches. The combination sounds so simple, but it is in fact an extremely volatile mixture: too much attention to the jewellery side and horophiles say that the watches are just for show, but spend too much time on the wristwatches and the ladies complain that whilst the guys got their mechanical boys' toys there is no collier to match their dress for the Cannes Film Festival. So how on Earth do you keep everyone happy? After all, happiness is what Chopard are all about.





The LUC 3.97, an automatic with off-centre microrotor and twin winding barrel. It comes in white gold, and is limited to 1,860 pieces. It is also officially chronometer certified.

The answer lies in a series of fortuitous circumstances combined with a long-term vision and a dash of daring. When Chopard met Karl Scheufele the future success of the company was certainly sealed, but many in the watch industry were highly sceptical of what was really going to become of it. Before talking about the new models, it is interesting to explore some of the history behind the amazing growth and development of Chopard watches over the past few years.

Chopard's roots were originally firmly set in the watch-making industry, with Louis-Ulysse Chopard setting up his first workshop in the

exceptionally sleepy and agricultural village of Sonvilier, Switzerland, in 1860. After establishing a successful business and noting the increasing demand for highly decorated luxury pieces, it was decided that Sonvilier was a bit too far removed from the kinds of clients that Chopard was attracting, and, in 1920, the move was made to the centre of Geneva. Once there, Chopard became increasingly successful in combining high-quality timepieces with techniques from the goldsmith's and jeweller's crafts.

In the 1960s, the last of the Chopard watchmaking dynasty, Paul-André Chopard, had to concede that none of his sons were interested in continuing the family business, and therefore the sale of the company was inevitable. During the same period of time, Karl Scheufele, himself a product of a long line of jewellers and watchmakers from the German watch-making centre of Pforzheim, was searching for a new challenge – and the rest is history.

Today, the company is a family affair, with Karl Scheufele, his wife and two children each involved in different aspects of company management, jewellery, perfumes and watches. (Perhaps this close-knit family "team" is the real secret of what keeps the various Chopard "departments" so well balanced). Scheufele's son Karl-Friedrich was appointed to direct the watch-making activities, and he saw at an early stage that the balance between jewellery and watches was not as it should be. It was evident that everyone he spoke with perceived Chopard as a jewellery brand that made watches as an insignificant but required sideline. After much internal family debate, in 1993 the daring decision was made to start up a separate Chopard *manufacture*, with all the astronomical costs that this entailed. Over expensive cups of coffee at such horological events as the Basel show, the watch-making world whispered that Chopard must be insane and that their latest development would never work.

### Silencing the cynics

Nonetheless, the *manufacture* was founded, and in 1996 the first watch with an LUC movement –

the LUC 1860 with automatic calibre 1.96 – was a reality. Offered with *Poinçon de Genève* hallmark and COSC certification, it soon became the talk of the town and won prizes as early as the following year. Still the sceptics mumbled on. However, Chopard did not remain a one-trick pony. In 2000 the calibre 1.98 was presented in the LUC Quattro, whose four barrels, stacked 2 by 2, supplied more than 9 days' autonomy. The sceptics began to mumble more softly. Then, in 2001, the release of the LUC Tonneau with the calibre 3.97 finally silenced them. For reasons of expense, tonneau-shaped watches are often only fitted with round movements, and only the most serious of brands goes to the additional trouble of making an entirely separate calibre for wristwatches of this shape. Chopard did it correctly and went even further, making theirs the first tonneau-shaped movement with an offset automatic winding rotor, allowing flatter movement dimensions and a more attractive view of the calibre interior. With this subtle choice, Chopard proved to the industry that they were more than deadly serious about the future of watchmaking within the company: they were passionate about it and were not going to change course.

The move was also highly fulfilling for the ladies. During this period of manufacturing development, larger and more technical women's watches were becoming fashionable, and some of the LUC models were offered in "unisex" versions with diamond-studded bezels and other accoutrements. Nonetheless, at Chopard the mainstay of the ladies' collection is quartz based, which allows a broad variety of shapes and sizes for the fashion conscious.

### The LUC Quattro Tourbillon

In 2003, as a fitting extension of these activities, it was no surprise to see a "proper" tourbillon added to the LUC collection's yearly development: the Quattro Tourbillon with LUC calibre 1.02 movement. Combining the achievements of the *manufacture* with a new development, Chopard utilized the previous concept of the Quattro movement with 9-day power reserve as a starting point, redesigning it with the intention



The LUC Quattro 1.98, a hand-wound watch with four winding barrels and a 9-day power reserve shown at 12 o'clock. Like the LUC 3.97, this watch comes in white gold and is limited to 1,860 pieces. It comes with a Geneva Seal and is chronometer certified.

of placing the tourbillon on the dial side. With the original Quattro's standard escapement located at approximately 8 o'clock, this required a shift towards 6 o'clock for various gears to work with the tourbillon's central placement. Although complicated in itself, it does allow the complex 4-barrel construction, which occupies much of the movement located between 9 and 3 o'clock, to remain relatively intact.

Looking at the watch, one can be certain that the movement designers were already planning this development right from the standard



Since 1996, Chopard have been making watches that fans of both jewellery and *haute horlogerie* can enjoy.

Quattro's inception. The movement is classical, with Breguet-overcoil balance spring and Variner-type balance, which Chopard themselves developed and patented. In this system, four U-shaped weights, embedded by friction in the balance, can be turned, thereby allowing fine tuning of the frequency of the balance's oscillations. Sunk into the balance, they create no aerodynamic disturbances within the confines of the watch's interior, however minimal this effect might be. Interestingly, the tourbillon has 8 days' reserve as opposed to the Quattro's 9 days, which is because extra energy is required to drive the tourbillon as it is appreciably heavier than a typical escapement.

The dial is typical Chopard understatement: the asymmetrically placed round *guilloché* area that subtly "squeezes" the placement of the Roman numerals III and IX is unconventional, as is the rectangular-shaped tourbillon bridge set into the dial in an attempt to evoke the LUC cartouche. I must admit that all the watchmakers I spoke with at BASELWORLD found this rectangular tourbillon bridge most disturbing, and almost blasphemous, claiming that it was visually distracting from the beauty of the tourbillon itself. But whatever your feelings, this tourbillon is clearly another statement of Chopard's long-term vision and their dedication to creating exceptional timepieces for the high-end. ○



**Further information:** Chopard UK, 22–28 Old Burlington Street, London W1X 1LB. Tel: 020 7439 3304, [www.chopard.com](http://www.chopard.com)