

The Genevan

James Gurney browses through the diverse offerings of Roger Dubuis



The watches that emerge from Roger Dubuis demonstrate a variety and individuality that is, to say the least, perplexing. Bi-retrograde perpetual calendars follow single-button chronographs and the oddly named Windows Perpetual Calendar Dual Time in a dazzling procession guaranteed to impress even the most particular horolophile. But there comes a point while surveying such horological peculiarities when the question “Why?” just has to be raised. Surely such individuality matters only to other watchmakers or the most extreme of collectors? But Roger Dubuis Horloger Genevois (RDHG), as the house is formally known, must be about more than arcane one-upmanship – though there is no doubt that few other concerns have the ability to emulate these pieces. What, then, is the point of RDHG’s parade of watch-making skills?



This bi-retrograde perpetual calendar and chronograph, complete with 52-week indicator, raised the obvious problem of making the various indications sit together in a coherent and legible design. This was achieved to an impressive extent by making six of the hands run from the centre – almost certainly some sort of record.



While the more complicated calibres grab the headlines, it is the simpler offerings that are better at illustrating the way Roger Dubuis watches manage the difficult art of being individual. The mono-pusher chronograph is a satisfying example of the watchmakers' skill and, whether in Golden Square or MuchMore form, is indubitably Roger Dubuis.



The "straight line" perpetual calendar is typical of RDHG's approach to watchmaking in its reworking of a classic complication. It seems almost amazing that no one else has thought to produce a calendar watch that actually reads like a calendar with day, date and month shown together. The oft-repeated quote of Carlos Dias holds that the purpose of Roger Dubuis is to take from the past and give to the future. There is little entirely new that can be offered in the field of traditional watchmaking, and the past is always present in the techniques involved. Nevertheless, it is almost always possible to find a way of doing something that bit better. The present also has its own style that is reflected in the Sympathie case with its resolutely contemporary mass and presence.

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To understand the rationale behind RDHG's extravagance you must first appreciate their *raison d'être*. Their aim is simply to establish a place among the very highest echelons of the watch business, and it is an aspiration that has clearly been carefully conceived and pursued. The principal means to achieve this is by establishing an identity with their desired market that goes right through everything the company does, from the watches to the glam store on the rue du Rhône. Even the fleet of Range Rovers and Mercedes parked outside the company's Geneva HQ seems to be part of the message. Of course, smart premises and the other trappings of wealth are only window dressing, but there is a sense that this is at least the natural setting for the

watches. Ultimately, it is the watches that do the talking at Roger Dubuis. Their well-heeled clientele, being more or less immune to the sort of glitz that is now so commonplace, seek something more than the merely superficial. This is emphatically not to say that Roger Dubuis are known for their modest appearance, but the message here is not about display for its own sake (though some of the designs can easily seem brash at first sight until closer inspection reveals that great care has been taken over them). The message is that Roger Dubuis are about being unconcerned as to what others might think; that normal rules are for mortals – an attitude that only goes to emphasise the comparative freedom from commercial restraint enjoyed at RDHG. This approach goes

Paying attention to the past does not preclude the odd touch of outrage-inducing flair, as the TooMuch shown here illustrates. It is so carefully observant of classic watch aesthetics that it is hard to accuse the design of being radical for the devil of it. Nevertheless...



some way to explaining the extraordinary lengths that RDHG's watchmakers go to when creating movements and designs that are unique in themselves. There is, after all, no need – even imaginary – for a triple-retrograde watch except to amuse both owner and creator. That the movement is tested to "Bulletin d'Observatoire" standards at Besançon, rather than the more conventional COSC "Chronometer" standard, just goes to show the RDHG determination to keep being different. In line with this spirit, everything that the company produces is put through the Geneva Seal testing process, a statement of thoroughness only matched by Patek Philippe in recent times.

Intricacy

Take, for example, the current bi-retrograde perpetual calendar from the centre. Quite apart from the sheer difficulty of its name, any attempt to explain what is truly different and unique among the 200-odd components added to the base movement requires both an expert on the subject and an audience versed in the arcane art of horological engineering. It is clear from the dial that this is a highly complex piece of engineering that no doubt caused endless technical headaches during its development. Although not irrelevant by any means, the exact nature of these headaches is, however, of little concern to the ultimate owner. What is impor-



The bi-retrograde perpetual calendar tourbillon, one of the most complex watches to have been housed in a Sympathie case. The term "unusual" completely fails to describe the gulf between this and an ordinary watch. The "three-bridge" tourbillon is still a rarity, if only for the difficulty and length of time its production entails. This being a Roger Dubuis, the tourbillon is just part of the watch and is not allowed to compromise the design as a whole. The dial is given up to a harmonious and, mother of pearl aside, quite restrained display, with its plain sword hands taking the place of the more usual Roger Dubuis blued hands. This is, nevertheless, a large watch that has a strong presence – it really does not need multicoloured hues to get noticed.

tant – and I suspect this is central to RDHG's strategy – is that such technical dilemmas in the watch's creation represent a quantum of difficulty, and therefore rarity. It is this that justifies the reputation and value of the Roger Dubuis name to their target market. No one ever goes out to buy a bi-retrograde calendar watch in the way that they might conceivably seek out a minute repeater or an alarm watch. Instead, Roger Dubuis owners tend to have been looking for something exceptional, and in these watches

the mixture of technical achievement, rarity and individuality fits the bill.

There is a sense in which Roger Dubuis watches can be likened to a haute couture collection in terms of their lack of compromise and limited availability. As with haute couture, rarity and perfection of finish are qualities that are expected but count for little in themselves without the addition of genuine talent and creativity. Is this the real impetus behind the riches on offer at RDHG? ●

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