



Finely Tuned

The sound of Ulysse Nardin's new Sonata is enchanting. Theodore Diehl explains

i It has been no secret that over the past few years, Ulysse Nardin were busy extending and renovating their company headquarters in Le Locle. More space was being allocated to the watch-making and research departments, and it was clear that Rolf Schnyder, UN's president, had great plans for the future.

UN have acquired additional premises in La Chaux-de-Fonds for the production of movement parts for new movements developed in-house. This positive, long-term approach, with the additional investment in young and talented watchmakers, engineers and designers, is beginning to pay off; despite the present market situation, UN are enjoying increasing attention and a corresponding market share, and their future growth and further development seem set for success. The introduction of their new Sonata wristwatch at this year's Basel fair was attended with great interest by the press and collectors alike, and, judging from what we have seen (or better said, what we have *heard*), UN's newest creation is certainly worth a closer look. Although the main function of the watch is the alarm, purchasers of the Sonata will have many more functions at their disposal, which is why UN have chosen to use the words "multifunctional mechanical instrument" to describe it. It is safe to say that, even at this early stage, there is no alarm wristwatch on the market that can compare with it.

Sonority

At the BASELWORLD press showing of the watch – artfully accompanied by Mozart’s Sonata in C major, performed on a newly baptized Ulysse Nardin concert grand piano that started life as a Steinway – the most striking thing was the sound of the alarm ringing. UN have succeeded where no one else has: the Sonata has been provided with a beautiful and transparent “ting”, which possesses exactly the same sonority as a fine minute-repeater wristwatch. This is already a distinguished feat, as all other alarm watches tend to simply make a buzzing sound much like an irritating insect, or worse still, a sound identical to that of an electric shaver. Speaking for myself, I would much prefer to wake up to the elegant sound offered by the Sonata. You might think this is a simple thing to achieve, but mechanically and acoustically it was really quite a challenge.

Ease of use

Under the inspirational guidance of Dr Ludwig Oechslin, the Sonata retains all the ease of use that one has come to expect from UN. Resetting the date, alarm and time zone, as well as switching the alarm on or off, is mere child’s play. All the hands can be turned forwards or backwards with complete ease and without any danger of damaging the movement. This is another of those so-called “simple” issues that takes a lot of thought to work around, yet increases the owner’s pleasure and enjoyment of the watch a thousand fold. It is also a characteristic that you will not find in other alarm watches on the market. These mechanical aspects are tried and tested, as they have already appeared in UN’s GMT series of watches and have been reinterpreted here in their new movement.

Movement

The Sonata is not only unique among other competitors in the alarm watch section of the marketplace; it is also UN’s first in-house movement, which is an achievement worth celebrating in itself. Dr Oechslin, Pierre Gyax and Lucas Humair have put more than 6 years of design, testing and development into it. This is a long time, particularly by computer-aided-design standards, and is indicative of how much work is involved in creating something really new from the ground up. All of the functions – countdown timer, dual time zones, minutes, hours, sweep seconds, date, alarm setting, alarm chimes, on/off setting – are fully integrated into the new



UN-66 automatic calibre. This new movement contains an amazing number of jewels – 101 to be exact, which must be a wristwatch record.

Appearance

UN have never been afraid to be different or even to shock when it comes to visual design, and right up to the last minute of BASELWORLD, details were being honed and fine-tuned for the best results. Even experienced collectors of UN will have to get used to the styling of the Sonata, but they will invariably agree on one issue: it does not look like anything else in the marketplace. Part of what appears to be the dial, with a Geneva stripe finish, is actually the movement itself. This is broken by an asymmetrical area (a grey area in the white-gold version, and white in the rose-gold version), which is the actual “dial” dividing the face into two main sections, leaving the large date window eminently visible. The countdown timer and alarm-setting subdials are both fastened with three blued screws, faintly reminis-

cent of the house style that FP Journe has made his own. The blued hour and minute hands, with their enlarged leaf-inspired shape and luminescent tips, were imperative for visibility with so much information available on the dial. They were designed by Rolf Schnyder, who is also responsible for the Sonata’s 21st century appearance. “I wanted to create a look that would fit 2003 and that would look to the future as well,” he explains.

The exact release date and prices of the Sonata have not yet been announced, although it is scheduled for release some time in the late autumn of this year. It will be available in 18-ct. white or rose gold, with crocodile strap and deployant clasp. Water resistant to 30 metres and with a diameter of 42 mm, it is destined to become a resounding success. ◯

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