

Phoenix

James Gurney reports on the sophisticated growth of JeanRichard

 JeanRichard, having lost the Daniel prefix (perhaps seen as too obviously historical in tone?), have been performing one of the quieter revolutions in the watch world.



was the decision to take the risk that the market would understand this approach to such a revered historical character; the company still make a great play of the significance of the name.

The semantics of the brand apart, the watches on offer are certainly likeable and that little bit outside the ordinary, an approach that Sowind clearly understood would take time to be accepted. Almost uniquely, Daniel JeanRichard released sales figures for the TV Screen family of watches that showed a decline in numbers (albeit only temporary) after its launch. The general path followed seems to be to combine lightly contemporary design with complications at the less grand end of the spectrum: in other words, no gold or platinum minute-repeaters – though there is a tourbillon. Instead, lesser – but still attractive – elements such as fly-back dates are order of the day. Most of these are based on bought-in calibres that are reworked and finished in-house, as opposed to relying on Girard-Perregaux calibres. In this way, JeanRichard maintain both an identity and, importantly, a price level separate from G-P.

Interestingly, the developments within the industry over the last few years mean that this approach is being rethought. Just as the established movement suppliers are becoming more concerned with supplying the brands they are linked with and restricting supplies elsewhere, so new technologies make it more affordable to produce individual calibres. JeanRichard are already testing a calibre for introduction in the next year (which will be covered in more depth in a later article). About the only disappointment with JeanRichard is that it is their most conventional watch – the Bressel – that seems to be their best-seller. ◯

Set up some 10 years ago as a stable mate to Girard-Perregaux, the company have been upsetting accepted nostrums and turning over expectations in a remarkably determined manner. As with so many other such names, the brand had existed in one form or another right up until the contraction that the Swiss watch industry went through in the late 1970s. Luigi Macaluso's Sowind Group then bought the name in the late '80s. From the outside it seems that a relatively free hand has been allowed, subject only to the proviso that there is to be no stepping on the toes of Girard-Perregaux. The expanded tonneau of the TV Screen won, unsurprisingly, several awards for the sheer freshness of its design – tellingly, the case seems quite normal today – and set the standard for the company's approach to watch design.

It is not, however, the watches themselves that offer the biggest surprise. Anyone with a passing familiarity with the Swiss industry would automatically expect the rebirth of a name with such historical resonance as Daniel JeanRichard to mean solidly traditional designs with lots of engine-turned dials, Breguet hands and onion crowns. Instead, the powers that be at JeanRichard seem to have made the effort to imagine themselves into the mindset that drove the original Daniel to innovate and push forward. A second surprising element

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