

Egérie

Theodore Diehl looks over the latest creations to emerge from the ateliers of Vacheron Constantin

ⓘ Vacheron Constantin have decided to refocus their full attention on the ladies with Egérie, their new release for 2003. I use the word "refocus" here because Vacheron have always given ladies' wristwatches their best efforts. Perhaps their richest period for women was the art nouveau/art deco eras, when Vacheron produced vast numbers of women's wristwatches in several sizes and dozens of shapes – lozenge, oval, round, square, tonneau, elliptical and everything in between – utilizing all known jewellery and goldsmithing techniques, including gold combined with Chinese lacquer and enameling, for which Geneva was, and still is, world renowned.

For the name of this new collection, Vacheron have tapped into the imagery of the *égérie* as a muse, based on the book by Annette and Luc Vezein entitled *Egéries, dans l'ombre des creatures* and the muse/creator combination of such famed duos as Jackson Pollock and Peggy Guggenheim, or Salvador Dali and Gala, among others, as a depiction of the woman as muse, secret confidant and inspirator of men. It's a nice idea, but seeing that many of the relationships mentioned were tortured and turgid to the extreme – Jackson Pollock's relationship and commentary on Peggy Guggenheim's nose is neither particularly inspirational nor polite to say the least – these allusions, for me anyway, detract from the beauty of the watch presented. Perhaps today's businesswomen would be more impressed by Gabrielle-Emilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Marquise de Châtelet and the *égérie* of Voltaire, who wrote a commentary on the



physics of Newton and was a poet and musician to boot. An *égérie indépendante*. Even she might even have been impressed, were she alive today, by the little marvel of engineering inside the case of Vacheron's new creation: Vacheron's calibre 1400 movement, a slight 2.6 mm in height finished to the high standards required by the Poinçon de Genève.

Vacheron has given as much attention to the exterior of this new watch as it has to its interior. The guilloché dial with deco-inspired Arabic numerals at 12 and 6 o'clock has an unusual colour, something between a dark crème brûlée and caffè latte. Before the final case was decided upon, different cases were first developed in three sizes to determine the best for appearance and comfort. Full bodied, tonneau inspired, yet without appearing large and fitting the wrist perfectly, it really is very tasteful and elegant. Indeed, the other case models shown at the press conference were much less

convincing, so Vacheron's homework has paid off here. By keeping this special dial colour and background treatment the same in all versions – whether 18 ct. white gold or 18 ct. yellow gold, and whether with or without diamonds (there shall be no steel versions made) – the continuity of the collection remains visually strong. The use of equally subtly coloured moiré straps complements the dial and adds to the visual warmth while providing cool comfort on the wrist. The quartz versions have closed backs, whilst the mechanical versions have a round see-through sapphire glass-back insert. For a true *égérie* this is perhaps a symbolic detail of the steely resolve that she must possess, encased within a refined and feminine exterior, in order to become the perfect muse.

In the *Egérie*, Vacheron have a great new wrist-watch for the inspirational woman, exemplifying the best qualities of Vacheron both mechanically and visually. ◉