

A GLIMPSE OF BASELWORLD 2016

BY CHUANG PECK MING

BaselWorld, which takes place every March in Basel, the third most populous Swiss city after Zurich and Geneva, is the launching pad of trend-setting high-end timepieces. While the turnout of visitors and exhibitors at BaselWorld 2016 dipped, no thanks to the slump in the luxury goods market, there was no shortage of new watches unveiled. Here is a sample offered by some of the key brands.

1. Rolex Oyster Perpetual Cosmograph Daytona (11,800 Swiss francs or S\$16,638)

Finally, the stainless steel model of one of the most desirable chronograph watches goes ceramic. The Cosmograph Daytona, in both gold and platinum case, is already given a ceramic bezel. So it is a matter of time before the steel version got its. After all, all the other Rolex sports watches in steel are already fitted with a ceramic bezel. Still, the lack of surprise has not made the new Daytona – the first was created in 1963 – any less desirable. Many of the people who saw it coming were also looking forward to it. While the black bezel (with black or white dial) is reminiscent of the 1965 model, the Rolex-made automatic movement that powers the latest Daytona is more contemporary and robust. It is the same one in the current all-steel model, which will continue to be in production. The new steel Daytona with ceramic bezel is priced only slightly more than the existing all-steel model.

2. TAG Heuer Carrera Heuer-02T (S\$21,800 in titanium, S\$29,100 in limited edition, S\$27,650 in rose gold lugs and S\$32,000 in rose gold bezel)

The Carrera Heuer-02T takes accessible luxury to a new high. The new watch is an automatic chronograph which boasts a titanium and carbon flying tourbillon priced at only S\$21,800 – a third of the price of the cheapest Swiss tourbillon watch in the market. There is no compromise in performance despite the low price. The new chronograph-tourbillon is COSC-certified, the only Swiss watch of its kind to meet the high precision standards set by the official Swiss chronometer testing institute. TAG Heuer says that the watch reflects “the perfect mastery of industrial processes and manufacturing costs”. Still, while the main components are factory-produced, the fitting, assembly and adjustment work are done by hand.

3. Jaquet Droz Grande Seconde Dual Time (S\$43,000)

Jaquet Droz timepieces are known more for look than function. By offering its usefulness to travellers as the main attraction, the Grande Dual Time tips the balance more to function. While its roots are marketed largely as artistic, it is also a fact that the brand’s founder Pierre Jaquet-Droz was a great traveller. And it has produced models such as the Twelve Cities, Grande Heure GMT and Time Zones. In the latest Grande Seconde Dual Time, the local time is shown in an upper dial while a lower seconds dial doubles up with an hours and minutes dial giving the reference time. Housed in the 43 mm case, in red gold or stainless steel, is a new movement fitted with a silicon escapement which provides superior chronometric performance.

4. Hublot Big Bang Unico Sapphire (S\$92,300)

The scarcer a watch, the more valuable it is. Hublot is trying to overturn this universal principle of value with the Big Bang Unico Sapphire. It is offering 500 pieces of the watch, each cut out of a single block of sapphire. A sapphire timepiece is not new but it is usually a one-of-a-kind piece, or is reserved for very private collections. The reason? It is very hard work to make one – sapphire is almost as hard and scratch resistant as diamonds. So making 500 of them is a big deal.



5. Glashutte Original Senator Excellence

(S\$14,300 for the steel versions, S\$26,00 for the red gold model) This Glashutte Original classic, with a minimalist design, has been given the honour to launch the brand’s new automatic movement – the Calibre 36 equipped with a silicon balance spring that sets new standards in stability, precision and running time. With a power reserve of 100 hours, or four days, this is a first for Glashutte Original. The watch comes in three versions: two with a lacquer dial; one in red gold and another in a stainless steel case; and one with Super-LumiNova indices evoking an observation watch, in a steel case.

6. Seiko’s Credor Fugaku Tourbillon

(US\$462,000 or S\$623,700, limited to eight pieces) A double surprise. In a rather subdued market, even in the luxury segment, not many expected Seiko to launch a tourbillon under its top-end Credor brand, and one that comes with high-art decor: a *maki-e* (gold lacquer) engraving of the famous Japanese *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* picture on the dial. A tourbillon, the most revered of watch complications, is a first for Credor (and Seiko). And in keeping with the slimness and elegance that characterise Credor timepieces, the Fugaku tourbillon is powered by an ultra-thin Seiko in-house movement squeezed into a 43.1 mm platinum case that is just 8.8 mm thick.

7. Bulgari Octo Finissimo Minute Repeater

(165,000 euros or S\$254,100, limited 50 pieces) Making a minute-repeater watch is hard enough. Making a slim one is harder. How do you ensure sound clarity in a tiny space? Bulgari has not only made a slim minute-repeater timepiece, but the slimmest in the market. The watch is just 6.85 mm thick. And this is achieved without compromising the sound quality. Bulgari has used titanium, a low density metal offering the best possible sound diffusion, to make the case. The indices and numerals are skeletonised to convert the dial and sapphire crystal into an audio chamber that provides maximum loudness.

8. Oris Great Barrier Reef Limited Edition II (S\$3,000 in rubber strap, S\$3,300 in steel bracelet, limited 2,000 pieces)

The contrasting sea-blue and coral yellow add not just beauty to this diver’s watch, but also clarity to its time-display. A big case – 46 mm – with luminous hands and indices help further with the legibility. Sea-blue and coral yellow moreover reflect the colour palette of the Great Barrier Reef. Oris has tied up with the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) to create this limited edition to help protect and preserve the world’s largest reef system – sales of the watch will help fund AMCS’s vital work. This is the second time – the first was in 2010 – that the Swiss watch brand has partnered the society, and in a year when AMCS is celebrating its 50th birthday. The watch, based on Oris’ popular diver’s model, the Aquis, is water-resistant to a depth of 500 m – five times deeper than the minimum requirement for a diver’s watch. A standout feature is an innovative day display, indicated in an inner chapter ring.

9. Grand Seiko Spring Drive Chronograph GMT (13,000 euros or around S\$20,020)

The chronograph looks cool in its sleek ultra-light black titanium case matched by a super tough black ceramic bezel and black dial. Who would have thought that this is a Grand Seiko (GS) timepiece? It is equipped with the Japanese watch-maker’s SpringDrive movement – a state-of-the-art automatic with manual winding mechanism offering eight days’ power reserve and a time-keeping accuracy of plus-minus 0.5 seconds per day, almost as precise as a quartz timepiece. The chronograph-GMT is comfy and durable as a sports watch should be, but its stylishness is a big departure from the sober look that has come to characterise GS watches. Indeed it is the first GS timepiece in black, one of four models in a new Spring Drive sports collection called the Black Ceramic Limited Edition. The other three models are a chronograph GMT with green dial (limited 600 pieces, while the black dial model is capped at 500) and GMTs.



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10. Patek Philippe World Time Chronograph Ref 5930 (S\$97,100)

Two for the price of one? On its own, a Patek Philippe chronograph or world time is already much sought-after watch. With Ref 5930, you get both in a single timepiece – and at a price less than you would pay if the two complications were bought separately. What's more, Ref 5930 is not simply a work stitching the existing chronograph and world time models together. The movement for the new watch has been re-worked so extensively that it can be called new. The self-winding calibre is housed in a 39.50 white gold case. Apart from a one-of-a-kind piece in the Patek Philippe Museum, the Ref 5930 is the only Patek world time chronograph coming into the market.

11. Chanel Monsieur De Chanel (S\$49,000 in beige gold, 300 pieces; S\$51,000 in white gold, 300 pieces)

While other high-end watch brands are stepping up production of women timepieces, the women-focused French fashion house, still a relatively newcomer in the watch-making world, has unveiled its first men's watch. And it is one designed and built entirely within Chanel with a little help from some of today's most respected watch-makers, including Romain Gauthier whose business Chanel owns a small stake. It is an ambitious effort for a first-timer, for the watch boasts not just one but two complications, including a retrograde minute that usually only more experienced brands venture to make. Monsieur De Chanel is powered by Chanel's first in-house movement, a handwound mechanism housed in a 40 mm case. It has taken five years to produce this instant-jumping-hour and retrograde-minute complication – and the result has got rave reviews. But the watch does not come cheap.

12. Blancpain Villeret Quantieme Annual Calendar GMT Steel (US\$27,300)

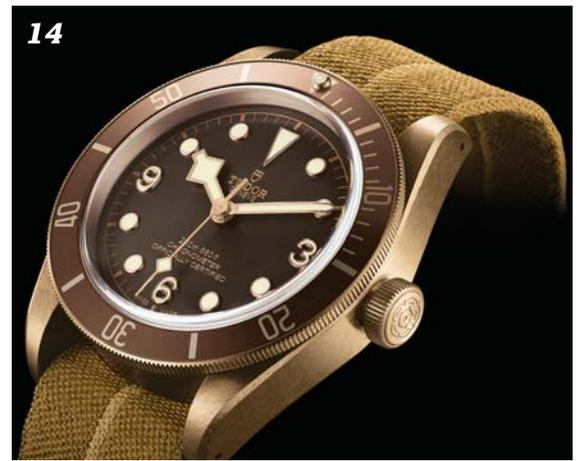
Steel appears to be in vogue during this austere time. Previously dressed in precious metals, this two time zone annual calendar watch has now – for the first time – put on a stainless steel case. But with a five-figure price tag, you can't call it a cheap steel.



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13. Omega Globemaster Annual Calendar (S\$12,100)

The pie-pan dial and fluted bezel mark it out as Omega's Globemaster, launched last year. Powered by the brand's most advanced mechanical movement, the Globemaster has passed tougher tests than those set by COSC to become the first watch to earn the Master Chronometer title. The Globemaster Annual Calendar is a Master Chronometer – and more. More than telling the time very accurately, it also tells the date and month. The months in blue are positioned between the indexes and are pointed to by a blue hand which moves in instantaneous jumps – thanks to a new Co-Axial Master Chronometer movement. The stainless steel case is expanded from 39 to 41 mm, showing off more of the metallic colour dial.

14. Tudor Black Bay Bronze (3,800 Swiss francs or around S\$5,358)

Panerai started it three years ago, and IWC launched one early this year. Now, Tudor has also unveiled its first bronze model. The new watch is part of Tudor's popular Black Bay collection and – apart from the bronze case – looks like the past red, blue and black models. Except that the latest addition is driven by a Tudor movement, which the brand first introduced last year in its Pelagos and North Flag line. The case, at 43 mm, is also two mm larger than past models.

15. Breguet Type XXI3817 (13,500 euros or around S\$20,655)

The difference is in the details. This new chronograph looks very much like the earlier models. But this latest addition is sportier in appearance because of a bigger case (42 mm), grey dial and calf-skin leather strap. Previous models, as small as 38 mm with a dark brown dial and an alligator strap, are seen as more dressy. Flip the new model over and you will see, for the first time, a sapphire case-back that allows you to see the movement that also drives more recent models. ■