

{ Precision }



New Signature 1 (from £170,000) and, left, the Double Tourbillon 30 Degrees launched in 2004  
[www.greubelforsey.com](http://www.greubelforsey.com)

■ Greubel Forsey watches available from Marcus, London.  
[www.marcuswatches.com](http://www.marcuswatches.com)



Stephen Forsey equates the mechanical expertise in his Bentley with his firm's watchmaking skills



## EXQUISITE TIMING

THIS FIRM COMBINES INNOVATIVE WATCHMAKING WITH IMPECCABLE HAND-FINISHING

**A** LONG WITH FELLOW watchmaker Robert Greubel, Stephen Forsey founded the watch company Greubel Forsey in 2004. A combination of technical innovation, audacious design and exquisite hand-finishing has won them the industry's most prestigious awards along with a legion of fans. Forsey talked to *Precision* about parallels with the car industry and the pursuit of perfection.

"Up until the 1970s watchmaking was almost exclusively mechanically orientated. The electronic watch brought a massive shock across the whole industry. For 10 to 15 years in the 1970s and 1980s there was little or no investment in the mechanical watch development because people assumed it was finished. But of course it wasn't.

"The arrival of quartz in some ways freed up the mechanical watch industry. Because quartz now occupies so much of the cheaper, utilitarian end of the market, the mechanical watch market has evolved to be a very different thing. It has become more artistic, while continuing to improve upon all of the technical side.

"Now, of course, you can tell the time by looking at your smartphone. But this technology is very transitory. If you have a nice mechanical



watch it's something that stays with you, just like when you have a car that has some deeper significance than just being everyday transport.

"I drive a 1925 Bentley 3-litre Speed Model. It's partly a family story as my grandfather did his apprenticeship in the service department on

those cars when they were almost new and I am a third-generation Bentley driver. My father Stuart also has a 3-litre, which he has owned since 1959. The design is approaching its centenary and yet it's still a perfectly usable car that you can drive comfortably at the legal limit.

"It is also the first car WO Bentley built, and there is a purity to the first time you create something. This is something I thought about when I was making my first timepiece with Robert. It took us four and a half years to build our first piece, the Double Tourbillon 30 Degrees. It has two rotating cages, one inside the other, so it is two tourbillons in the space of one. With the angle of inclination, and other elements, we were able to bring a new level of performance.

"It was fantastically difficult to do because we had very limited resources. But we were lucky that what we were working on was ready to launch in 2004. The watch-collecting public was receptive in that year and in the first few days after the launch we had orders far in excess of our expectations.

"We were able to make the maximum number of watches that we'd hoped, which was one or two each month. This is a very small number, but within a few months we were able to reinvest and finance the building of a slightly larger team.

"We entered the Double Tourbillon 30 Degrees in the International Chronometry Competition, which is a bit like the Le Mans 24 Hours for mechanical watches. It is a gruelling independent test in which you hand your watch to this organisation and they subject it to successive tests of temperature, shock testing and magnetic field exposure. And it's all independently done. So it's like preparing your car for Le Mans but having no control over the driver. They test it and they score every 100th or 1000th of seconds a day of variation in performance under these different conditions.

"Not only did our piece survive all the tests – which wasn't the case for all of the entrants – it maintained the highest level of accuracy, a variation of between 0.3 and 0.8sec per day over the whole competition. This performance has not been matched to date in the tourbillon category.

"Today we produce just over 100 pieces a year. So it is very small and very bespoke. Maybe one day we'll be able to make 150, possibly even 200. But it takes a long time to put all the techniques together. One of the most time-consuming things is the hand-finishing. When looking through the eyeglass you can really see the difference between machine-made parts and hand-finished ones.

"Finishing is extremely important to us. Think of the interior of a car: you can make it perfectly well from moulded plastic, but the touch and the aesthetics of beautifully hand-sewn leather gives you something that is beyond comparison."