

Launches

Telegraph TIME

CONTRIBUTORS



Nicholas Foulkes
Patek Philippe's official biographer admires its new perpetual calendar
Page 5



Avril Groom
Our luxury-goods expert meets IWC ambassador Rosamund Pike
Page 10



Simon de Burton
Christopher Ward's Morgan-inspired watches impress our motoring correspondent
Page 13



James Gurney
The QP magazine founder salutes Val Cleef & Arpels' creative horology.
Page 14

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A VERY SOUND INVESTMENT

Greubel Forsey's new chiming super-watch was more than a decade in the making. Has it been worth the wait?

Words Alex Doak

There can't be many viable businesses that hire an engineer into a staff of just 110, not expecting them to come up with the goods for another 11 years. Greubel Forsey, however, is no ordinary business, and did just that in the name of yielding something truly spectacular. Its chiming super-watch, a Grande Sonnerie, unveiled at Geneva's SIHH watch fair in January, certainly qualifies (as does its price point – a cool £1.1 million).

In “grande” mode, tiny hammers ding-dong every hour and quarter-hour against two wire gongs circling the movement; in “petite” mode, just the hours. If you want to “hear” the time, a lever will activate a minute repeater, which chimes the hours, quarters, then remaining minutes.

Producing a grande sonnerie brings the boutique brand into a highly exclusive circle. However, Greubel Forsey's example abounds with

customary innovation. Cased in titanium – acoustically preferable to gold or platinum, according to British co-founder Stephen Forsey – its chimes could outstrip all-comers for purity and timbre, let alone volume.

Add in a separate self-winding power reserve of 20 hours for the sonnerie alone, and the fact that it's water-resistant to 30 metres – remarkable for a watch such as this – and it's clear that Forsey's engineer has hardly been wasting his time.

“Simply achieving this water resistance is a hell of a challenge,” says Forsey.

“As soon as you close up the watch you lose 10 to 15 decibels. With water-resistant seals, up to 20.”

Forsey maintains the brand has something even more spectacular up its sleeve. We just might have to wait a while.

The Grande Sonnerie is available at Marcus Watches; 020 7290 6500; marcuswatches.com

