

The new kids on the block

EMERGING BRANDS

Simon de Burton on some of the big names to arrive in recent years

Sales of luxury wristwatches are at an all-time high, so it is hardly surprising that the roll-call of dial names lengthens every year as old makes are revived and entirely new ones are established. But with an estimated 350-plus quality brands already competing for sales, any fresh arrivals need to really stand out. Here are a few "new kids on the block" purporting to offer something a little different.

Bremont: The first Bremont watches only went on sale in July, but already the British-based company has attracted the backing of luxury goods gurus Robert Bensoussan, (who developed the Jimmy Choo brand) and John Ayton, co-founder of Links of London. Founded by display pilot brothers Nick and Giles English, Bremont offers six types of aviation-inspired, chronometer-certified timepieces. Among limited editions planned for next year is a watch containing components made from parts of a Spitfire aircraft (£1,950-£2,950). www.bremont.com

Dent: Edward Dent was one of the greatest watch and clockmakers of the 19th century. He was most famous for creating the mechanism known as Big Ben, which drives the clock at the Palace of Westminster. The name was revived this year by a small consortium of British businessmen who have created an initial two lines of Dent watches called Parliament and Ministry. The design of the former is inspired by the look of Big Ben while the latter is similar in appearance to an original Dent ship's chronometer (£8,000 - £25,000). www.dent-watches.com

Manometro: The name means "pressure gauge" in Italian, and that is just what these watches designed by Giuliano Mazzuoli are supposed to look like. Mr Mazzuoli launched the range in 2004 and it quickly attracted

a cult following. Now an "S" version of the watch made from carbon fibre and titanium has been introduced, as well as a chronograph and a limited edition in rose gold. The latest model to join the line-up is the Contagiri, which is styled to resemble the rev counter of the new Alfa Romeo 8C supercar (£1,800-£13,000). www.giulianomazzuoli.com

Backes and Strauss: Founded in 1789, Backes and Strauss is the world's oldest diamond company - but it only made its first watch 12 months ago. The firm's movements are manufactured by Franck Muller, with the main feature of the three Backes and Strauss watch collections (Regent, Berkeley and Piccadilly) being that they are all meticulously gem set with varying quantities of hand-cut diamonds. The most valuable creation to date is a one-off model called the Royal Berkeley that costs £575,000. Entry-level watches start at £4,900. www.backesandstrauss.com

Cool runnings

It was in 2002 that former financier Jorn Werdelin and his business partner Morten Linde, a leading Danish designer, decided to start a watch brand with a difference.

Both passionate skiers, they wanted to market an elegant, sports-orientated mechanical watch that could also serve as a platform for a clip-on, electronic data instrument capable of recording everything from altitudes to temperatures with the information being downloadable through a PC interface.

Their vision became a reality exactly a year ago when the first Linde Werdelin watches and "instruments" went on sale - but Mr Werdelin admits that getting the product on the market was not easy.

"We could write a book about the difficulties of creating the brand, which ranged from getting the watch and the instrument to work together to just raising awareness about what we were doing among people who might be willing to spend £3,000 on a watch



Inventive: Jorn Werdelin and Morten Linde

but who only know of the well-known makes. The resources and effort required to build the company from scratch have been immense and I would really not recommend anyone to put themselves through it, but from our point of view there is nothing else we would rather be doing."

Now, however, the Linde Werdelin Biformeter and its accompanying instrument is selling in several countries. Sales to places as diverse as Peru and New Zealand have been dealt with direct from the brand's London headquarters, which clients can also visit (by appointment) to view the range. This week a special version of the watch called the Trigon went on sale on the luxury e-tailing site www.20ltd.com. Just 22 examples of the Trigon are available at a price of £4,200, including the instrument.

To learn more about Linde Werdelin watches and the capabilities of the high-tech instrument, see www.lindewerdelin.com

TW Steel: This new, Dutch-based brand is quite shamelessly jumping on the big watch bandwagon. Measuring up to 50mm in diameter, most have quartz movements, although the Grandeur Swiss Edition is mechanically-powered. Intended for people who do not want to wear their expensive Panerai while down at the beach or playing sport (£175-£595). www.tws-steel.com

Vogard: The USP of this traveller's timepiece is that it is the first watch that can be instantly adjusted to a different time zone by simply twisting the bezel - the action causes the hour hand to reset itself to show the time at whichever destination city engraved on the bezel is aligned with 12 o'clock. The basic "Business Officer" version shows 24 city names while the "Super Traveller" shows 36. Special models are also available, such as the Bogey Golfer, which is engraved with 24 of the world's top courses. Bezels can also be made to order at extra cost (£3,000-£14,000). www.vogard.com

Villemont: The first Villemont watches appeared in 2004 and eschewed mechanical complication for an exceptional level of finish. This summer the company merged with another young brand, Amundsen Oslo. The first product of the collaboration is an all-new watch called the Solar Navigator, which incorporates a mechanical system that allows the wearer to find the current compass position of the sun by aligning a red arrow with the time. The watch also has a mechanical alarm (£4,500-£10,000). www.villemont.ch

Volna: Entirely Swiss-made, despite being named after the Russian word for "wave", the watches are inspired by Soviet submarines. They demonstrate their underwater credentials by having extreme waterproofing features such as distinctive, left-mounted double crowns and "security indicators". The first collection is called Typhoon (after a ballistic missile submarine), measures 46.5 mm in diameter and is available in three different versions in steel or titanium (from about £2,000). www.volnawatches.com