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HIGHLY EVOLVED

Last month we featured the astonishing \$4.7-million dollar 'Meteoris' from respected Swiss manufacture, Louis Moinet. Well, if you thought that was impressive, wait until you meet their latest pair of remarkable creations – but first, who was Louis Moinet?



A portrait of the great man himself

Bourges, France, 1768. Unto a family of well-to-do farmers a child is born, and right from the off he demonstrates a startling amount of precocity. As a student he excels in the study of classical subjects and regularly scores top in his class. Outside of his schooling, he takes private drawing lessons from an Italian painter and spends much of his free time cultivating a keen interest in horology by learning the tricks of the trade from a master watchmaker.

By the age of 20, the young Louis Moinet is a fully-fledged polymath with his sights set on Rome, then the artistic and cultural capital of Europe. After spending five years there studying architecture, sculpture and painting, he then moves to Florence and cultivates a career as a master painter – but it's not long before he's back in the country of his birth to take up a

Professorship at the Louvre.

Around this time, he resolves to devote his energies to the theoretical and

practical study of watch making. He gets back in touch with his old mentor, and within a decade the roles of student and teacher have been reversed. Now a master watchmaker in his own right with a number of technical accomplishments under his belt, including an astronomical watch and an innovative balance cock to assist with rewinding, he assumes the presidency of the Chronometry Society of Paris.

As the 19th century rolls around, Moinet's growing stature in the watch world brings him into the orbit of Abraham-Louis Breguet – watch maker by Royal appointment to Marie-Antoinette, inventor of the tourbillon and all-round key figure in the history of horology. The two worked together closely from 1811 until Breguet's death in 1823, following which Moinet continued to hone his skills, furnishing various heads of states and dignitaries with timekeeping instruments of the most rarefied variety, while labouring for around 20 years on the 'Traité d'Horlogerie' – an exhaustive, heavily illustrated two-volume encyclopaedia on the art of watch making that was finally published in 1848.



Jean-Marie Schaller (Louis Moinet CEO) and Philippe Truan (CEO of manufacturer Roger Truan SA) present the Time Explorer



The "Jurassic" Tourbillon - parts of which were some 150-million years in the making...

Quality, not quantity

Moinet passed away in 1853. 157-years later, his name lives on in the form of one of Switzerland's most exclusive watch brands, which has as its credo 'Mechanical Art in Limited Edition'. A typical Louis Moinet timepiece will be visually unique, include a distinctive mechanical movement or some form of patented technology you won't find anywhere else, and – most crucially of all – be produced in very small quantities. The annual production of the company as a whole doesn't even exceed 1000 pieces.

Put simply, that means that the modern incarnation of Louis Moinet is in the business of producing extraordinarily beautiful objects, which see them attempt to break new conceptual ground while still paying respect to years of accumulated heritage – a good example being this month's cover star.

The "Jurassic" Tourbillon

Well, where to start? Let's begin with the mechanics – manually-wound with a power reserve of 72-hours (indicated at the 12

position), it's centred around an exclusive tourbillon movement with a carriage at the 6 position that revolves once per minute. The 18-carat white gold case is an original Louis Moinet design made up of 50 parts, but the main story here concerns the precious and exotic materials it's made from. How exotic? We're talking a remnant from a species that's been extinct for over a 150-million years.

That's right, making up part of the dial is an officially authenticated dinosaur bone found in western North America. It's believed to have originally come from that well-known giant herbivore, the diplodocus, and enormous care obviously had to be taken when doing the necessary cutting and highlighting without damaging it.

As if that wasn't enough, the bezel and horns have been set with 56 Top Wesselton VVS baguette diamonds weighing in at a total of 3.46-carats, with the whole lavish arrangement secured by a genuine galuchat strap, an ultra-rare textile sourced from the skin of sharks and stingrays. Limited to 12-pieces, its asking price is in the region of a cool £187,830. But wait, there's more...

Time Explorer

The "Jurassic" Tourbillon is the first in a planned series of 12 that will be issued under the 'Time Explorer' banner. And here once again we see just how far Louis Moinet are prepared to go to in order to wow time connoisseurs. At this year's *Baselworld* watch expo they presented the Time Explorer 'time-travelling machine', a three-metre long, two-metre high objet d'art.

Festooned with all manner of counters, controls and levers, it's been conceived as the ultimate 'journey through time', its nine 'portholes' allowing onlookers to glimpse a series of major historical milestones. Yes, as you can probably tell we've only had the chance to learn what little we know about it from a distance but to our eyes, it would seem to be Louis Moinet all over – incredible to look at, conceptually ambitious and occupying an elite space all of its own.

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