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Andreas Strehler Sauterelle - in-depth watch review by ESCAPEMENT

Written By: Angus Davies 18/03/2014

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Starstruck

Angus Davies reviews the Andreas Strehler Sauterelle, a watch featuring a remontoir that delivers enhanced accuracy.



As a father of two teenage children, I frequently don my chauffeur's hat and execute my parental duties, transporting my offspring around Northern England. It would appear that my social life has taken a back seat. My sole raison d'être, as far as my children are concerned, is to provide a more convenient alternative to public transport.

Ordinarily, by 10pm, I am cocooned in my bed, enveloped in a duvet and reading a book. Recently, my driving roster meant my pyjamas remained neatly folded beneath my pillow, while I left the house, braving rainy skies, to ventured into the darkness at some ungodly hour.

Arriving at a theatre, on the outskirts of Manchester, I parked my car and entered the building. My daughter, Isobel, and her friends were sat in the audience watching the "Britain's Got Talent" auditions. Typically, I had arrived early. I purchased a cup of coffee, and sat in foyer of the theatre, trying desperately not to fall asleep.

While I sat, sipping my black Americano, I marvelled at the anxious wannabes waiting to enter the theatre for their looming five minutes of fame. Brightly coloured outfits, Aladin Sane makeup and prematurely diva-esque behaviour, fused together to deliver a fascinating spectacle.

We live in a period where ambition exhibits an unseemly lack of restraint. Maybe my opinion is formed because I do not yearn to be a celebrity. Moreover, the desire for popularity appears to be based more on the notion of fame, rather than any desire to share a talent or craft that will enrich the lives of others.



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Perhaps it is me. I don't understand the concept of idolising celebrities. Actors, sporting professionals and musicians in many cases enhance our lives with their innate talent, honed to an elevated standard. This is a concept I understand. However, even with this warranted standing, I cannot remember ever feeling starstruck on meeting any of these professionals.

Nevertheless, I can become starstruck when I meet a watchmaker of world renown. It is one of the few occasions when I can attain a flush-faced hue to my cheeks, overwhelmed at being in the presence of greatness. My adoration of watchmakers is based on their incredible ability. The ingenuity they exemplify, the fine motor skills they exhibit, with adroit use of tools and patience, manifest in a finely finished movement.

One celebrated watchmaker I have met on a couple of occasions is Andreas Strehler. The Swiss watchmaker was born in 1971 and has been responsible for creating some impressive work. He spent four years at the venerated Renaud et Papi as "Head Prototypist". Later he would work for other brands including Chronoswiss, H. Moser & Cie., Maurice Lacroix, Harry Winston and Maître du Temps.



However, like any great master, he also creates work which bears his own name. In 2008, the Papillon was created. The reference to butterflies would become part of the Andreas Strehler DNA and features in the brand's logo.

The two arms to Strehler's business has led to him being referred as the "Engineer to the Brands, Watchmaker for the few."

In 2012, the Cocon was launched, presenting time on an unusual, yet very elegant, elliptically shaped dial.

Last year, Andreas pushed the boundaries of horological invention with the Sauterelle, meaning "grasshopper". The name refers to the unusual jumping action of the seconds hand. However, the technical mastery of the Sauterelle goes beyond the alluring, dead-beat motion of the seconds hand.

The dial

The dial, constructed of massive silver, ensnares eyes with its exquisite near-elliptical form.

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An off-centre hour and minutes display reside adjacent the crown. The hour and minutes are delivered with blue leaf-shaped hands. Simple, sinuous and stylish, they impart time with notable clarity.

The area beneath the hour and minute hands is decorated with guilloché, expressed in a series of interfacing fan shaped patterns that communicate with light, creating delightful pockets of brightness and shade.



Four applied Arabic numerals adorn the dial. They are depicted in an italicised font avec serifs and exhibit a traditional note that contribute to a harmonious whole.

Encircling the dial is a minute track, marked with a combination of gold pearls denoting each five-minute integer with black strokes residing between.

Located at 8 o' clock, an aperture allows the wearer to see through the watch from front to back. However, more pertinently, it allows horological voyeurs to see the balance bridge and screwed balance wheel.



Most notably, positioned at 10 o'clock, a three-arm bridge spans an aperture, with the unusual blued seconds hand moving in discrete one-second steps beneath. It is the combination of the unconventionally shaped seconds hand, star-shaped wheel and spiral spring which provide an indication that the movement within the Sauterelle is atypical.

The Remontoir d'égalité

There is an inherent problem with the majority of watches. The tension of the mainspring when fully wound transmits too much energy to the escapement. Conversely, as the mainspring becomes increasingly relaxed it transmits too little energy to the escapement. The resultant variation in amplitude impairs the accuracy of the watch.

Strehler's innovative idea is to fit a Remontoir d'égalité to the seconds wheel or fourth wheel of the gear train. The satellite gear provides a uniform portion of energy to the escapement through the seconds wheel. The energy from the barrels is stored in a spiral spring, similar in character to a balance spring. This spiral spring is re-loaded from the gear train through the seconds pinion every second. The crucial point is that the seconds wheel pinion and the seconds wheel itself are only linked through the spiral spring and the remontoir-mechanism. It is this regular energy imparted to the balance that distinguishes this timepiece as extraordinary.

It maintains this constant supply of force until the twin barrels are depleted of energy.

The approach taken by Stehler delivers enhanced accuracy, smoothing out the peaks and troughs of energy usually supplied to the balance on "conventional" timepieces. Conventional is not a word that I would use to describe Andrea's work. It is truly exceptional by any measure.

The case

To the casual observer the dial and bezel appear elliptical. However, as I previously alluded, it is a near-elliptical form. Look closely and four corners can be discerned. The subtlety stands testament to the perfection Stehler continuously seeks.



The profile of the dial and case provides a wide-angled horological vista. It is beautiful, graceful and notable.



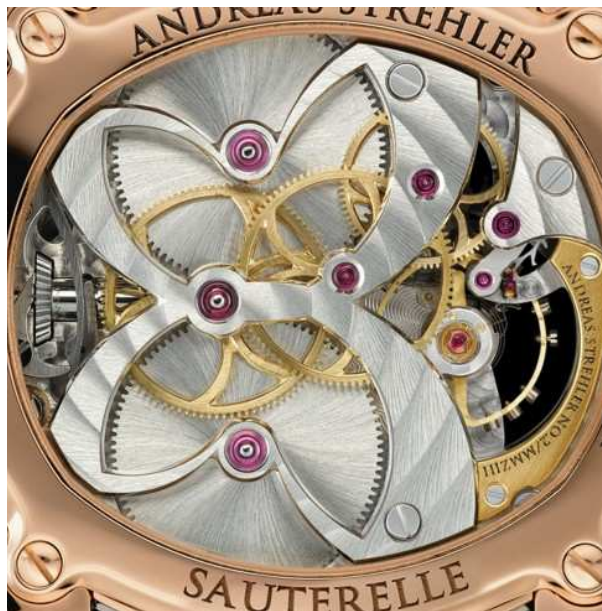
The watch has a width of 41mm, excluding the crown, and a length of 37.30 mm from the upper edge of the bezel to its southern based counterpart. The lugs are long, employing several curving lines which magnificently engage with ambient light.



An exhibition caseback reveals the micro-mechanical world within. It provides a fascinating insight into the mind of an artisan, where compromise cannot be accepted and the pursuit of perfection is a continuous source of motivation.

The movement

The Remontoir d'égalité is worthy of much praise. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to discuss the styling of the movement and its exalted finishing.



A large, butterfly shaped bridge is the first design element to arrest attention. Its innovative profile does not eschew traditional craftsmanship. The circular Côtes de Genève motif is peerlessly presented. The jewel sinks are polished to a brilliant

gleam. Most notably, the anglage is exceptional with the internal bevels showing no indication of the difficulty involved in their creation.

The two barrel covers evince a spiral-shaped motif, the wheels are circular grained with fine concentric lines, bestowing a sublime brilliance.

Another aspect I find particularly alluring is the sight of the openly disclosed winding stem. Once again, Strehler's fastidious attention to detail can be seen with the conical gear wheels used. The profile of the teeth ensure perfect transmission, with minimal wear.

Closing remarks

Writing this review, I invariably find myself repeatedly using the words, "remarkable", "unusual", "ingenious", "innovative" and "exceptional". I have thumbed my thesaurus trying to find applicable alternative adjectives. In reality, there are insufficient words to adequately convey the magnificence of the Sauterelle and, more notably, its creator, Andreas Strehler.

I am not alone in my admiration for this exceptional engineer and artisan. In 2013, Andreas Strehler was awarded the Prix Gaïa in the category "Artisanat-Création". The prestigious accolade is not always awarded each year. It is only conferred when the Jury of the International Watchmaking Museum in La Chaux-de-Fonds feels a candidate, from the names of nominees submitted, is worthy of the prize.

In a society where celebrity is often undeserved. Strehler deserves much attention.



I suspect I will remain starstruck every time we meet.

Technical Specification

Model: Andreas Strehler Sauterelle

Case: 18-carat red gold; dimensions 41.00 mm (w) x 37.30 (l); height 10.00mm; water resistant to 3 atm; sapphire crystal to front and caseback.

Functions: Hours; minutes; dead-beat seconds.

Movement: hand-wound movement; frequency 21,600 vph (3 Hz); 25 jewels; power reserve 78 hours; 156 components

Strap: Hand-sewn black alligator leather strap supplied on a 18-carat red gold pin buckle

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www.astrehler.ch