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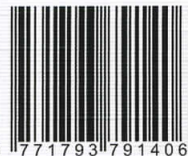
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A TANNED, BRUNETTE BEAUTY

The new 'Chocolate' iteration of Christophe Claret's X-TREM-1 brings aesthetic majesty to a veritable technological marvel.

TEMPORAL

by **nick scott**

photography **ian skellern**

To call Christophe Claret's approach to watchmaking avant-garde is like referring to David Bowie's musical canon as eclectic: it takes the phrase into new, more rarefied, pastures. The French-born, Switzerland-based independent watchmaker doesn't so much expand traditional creative paradigms as charge at their extremities with a metaphorical battering ram.

Take his Poker watch, which he introduced to rapturous acclaim in 2009, for example: thanks to a complex set of rotating disks and dampers, it's capable of summoning each of the 32,768 card combinations a player can be dealt in a game of poker, allowing the wearer and two friends to engage in a spontaneous game of Texas Hold'em. His baccarat and blackjack watches showed the same breathtaking creative tenacity.

As serious students of the art of watchmaking know, Claret's approach is devilishly clever: most notably, his incorporation into a wristwatch of a conventional detent escapement — a technology that usually requires permanent stability to operate effectively — was an unprecedented masterstroke.

So when this watchmaking luminary, who develops state-of-the-art movements for other brands as well as his own catalogue from his state-of-the-art atelier in Le Locle, introduced the X-TREM-1 in 2012, many beard-stroking observers contained their staggered reactions behind sage, knowing nods of appreciation. The horologically savvy knew they were witnessing something special, though. The X-TREM-1 — the name stands for Experimental Time Research Engineering Mechanism — displays the time via two 4mm-diameter steel orbs located inside two parallel sapphire cylinders, flanked by hour and minute scales with gold printed indexes, on either side of the case. These small, hollow spheres are not physically connected to the movement in any way, and appear to be floating, like the bubble in an unfeasibly high-end spirit level. In fact, they're propelled up and down by magnetic force — the traditional nemesis of watch movements, which makes this piece all the more compelling.

If that doesn't dazzle you, consider this: the magnets that create the necessary fields to entice these orbs into their correct position are moved by surgical cables that, despite being ultra



Facing page: a watchmaker assembles and cases the movement of the X-TREM-1.

thin, can handle tensile forces of up to a kilogram. Just thinking about the standard of precision micro-engineering required to make the mechanism work — even just to keep the magnetic fields contained within a minuscule area — confounds the mind.

This timepiece is a fantastic case study for those who have mastered the basics and want to experience the outlandish innovations of progressive horology.

As for its appearance, the jewel in the X-TREM-1's crown is its flying tourbillon, which is fitted with shock-absorbing double ceramic bearings and, along with its ornate cage, is inclined at a 30-degree angle to make it more visible, at a glance, to the owner. Another nice touch that tech-types will relish is the fact that the tourbillon movement and the time indication gear trains have separate barrels to maximise power distribution and longevity (each boasts 50 hours of power reserve). The caseback, meanwhile, offers a view of the movement through a sapphire window.

In short, it is a veritable mechanical marvel. Horology is a bit like Test cricket — the more you find out about it, the more you realise how much there is to know, and thus the emotional

purchase it exerts grows exponentially in the mind of the serious scholar. This timepiece is a fantastic case study for those who have mastered the basics and want to experience the outlandish innovations of progressive horology.

Claret has, in the past, asserted that “technique must always take precedence over aesthetics”, but he has proffered more than a hearty nod towards the cosmetic aspects of his craft with this new ‘Chocolate’ version of the piece, whose red-gold, grade-5 titanium case is treated with a moody brown PVD. This iteration, only eight of which will be made, also features a matching alligator-skin strap. As with the Marlin Blue option with the new Bentley Mulsanne Speed (see page 210) there is something about this organic colour option that brings the X-TREM-1's seductive lines and contours to aesthetic fruition.

“Creativity has no limits,” according to Claret. “The proof is found in music, where every year, new tunes arrive. It is the same in watchmaking. A creator must be receptive to all sorts of things, whether something in nature or in all kinds of objects — machine tools, automotive, aerospace, science ...”

If the timepiece pictured here is the fruit of this absorptive creative ethos, may the sum total of all mechanical design that exists continue to seep, osmotically, into the creative crannies of Claret's extraordinary mind. 