

MORE FOR THE WOMEN

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IT IS a sign of the times. This year’s Grand Prix D’Horlogerie De Geneve (GPHG) is seeing a big jump in the number of women’s models competing in the luxury watch industry’s equivalent of the Oscars. With sales down, luxury watchmakers are turning towards a still-not-fully tapped market for women’s timepieces to make up for the drop. They are launching not only more watches for women, but also giving them the marketing attention usually reserved for men. The GPHG often figures large in this marketing game-plan.

A total of 72 women’s watches are vying for a place of honour in GPHG 2016, up from 51 in 2015. This helps boost the overall number of contenders in the 12 categories of the annual event, from 193 a year ago to 199. The winners will be announced on Nov 10.

The competition appears to have stepped up a bit this year, but it is really in the ladies’ section that has intensified. The number of timepieces here has more than doubled from 21 last year to 48 in 2016.

In the categories for ladies’ mechanical, jewellery and artistic crafts timepieces, the heat of the battle is about the same as it was two years ago, with a similar number of watches competing.

The competition has eased a lot for men’s watch models, as the number of models challenging in the men’s list slipped from 32 in 2015 to 23 in 2016.

The smaller number of chronographs and tourbillons making an appearance in this year’s GPHG should not come as a surprise. These are complex timepieces that are costly to make, especially when new innovations are added. Watchmakers tend to cut back on them in bad times when there is a need to stint on costs.

Yet in two other complicated categories, ‘calendar’ and ‘mechanical exception’, the number of competing models rose – from seven to 14 for ‘calendar’ and from 14 to 16 for ‘mechanical exception’.

Also unexpected, as more less expensive models are launched to appeal to budget-conscious buyers at this time, is the dip in the number of contenders, from 18 to 15, in the ‘petite aiguille’ section aimed at great but affordable timepieces.

Many of the brands taking part in this year’s GPHG are recognisable names – Chopard, Ulysses Nardin, Hublot, Bulgari, Piaget, TAG Heuer and Seiko. Many are also not so familiar – in particular, independent

watch makers such as ArtyA, 4M, Yeslam, Rudis Sylva, Memorigin, Alf Lie and Gronefeld.

The GPHG judges have narrowed the contending timepieces to 72, or six for each category. Here is a sample of the pre-selected watches:

1. Ladies high mechanical
The Serpenti Incantati Tourbillon Lumiere puts a tourbillon in Bulgari’s iconic Serpenti with a twist. After coiling around the wrist, the snake is now reinvented by wrapping itself for the very first time around this watch – the reptile literally twines itself around its dial, framing an entirely skeleton-worked tourbillon movement.
Price: 180,000 Swiss francs (S\$250,200)

2. Petite aiguille
Seiko’s Presage Automatic Chronograph Enamel Dial sits nicely in this category of great but affordable timepieces. Indeed, this limited-edition watch, modelled on Seiko’s and Japan’s first ever wrist watch, the Laurel, released in 1913, is spearheading the brand’s big push into the global market for mechanical timepieces. The enamel dial, housed in a 42 mm steel case, is the work of skilled craftsmen led by Mitsuru Yokozawa, a master in the craft.
Price: 2,800 Swiss francs (S\$3,892)

3. Jewellery
Voutilainen’s Scintillante is an unusual timepiece because the watchmaker is known more for his technical rather than artistic skills. The autumnal colour theme of this watch, driven by a hand-wound movement, is reminiscent of a walk in the woods when leaves cover the ground with their many colours. The timepiece is decked with 423 gemstones, 9.65 carats of sapphires and 0.55 carat of diamonds.
Price: 285,000 Swiss francs (S\$396,150)

4. Ladies
Ludovic Ballouard’s Upside Down Art Deco has all the numbers inverted, except for the number indicating the current hour. The latter is spotted by a black dot which appears in front of it. The numbers flip instantly at the end of the 59th minute of each hour. The watch has only one hand which indicates the minutes. The seconds are shown on a rotating disc that is fully set into the dial at the number 6 position.
Price: 85,000 Swiss francs (S\$118,150)



Audemars Piguet’s Millenary is about design – and how much AP’s design team and horological engineers see eye to eye and work closely together to produce a hand-wound mechanical timepiece whose parts, such as the balance wheel and bridge, are an integral part of its decoration. In a bold expression of precision craft, diamonds and onyx are interlaid in a hypnotic relief on the watch’s face held in a grey gold case.
Price: 72,400 Swiss francs (S\$100,636)



the clock because its display was positioned much higher than the movement. Besides a constant force movement, which offers superior precision in time-keeping, the limited edition watch (188 pieces) also has a new elegant 1941 case named after the year that the watchmakers’ father was born.
Price: 54,880 Swiss francs (S\$76,283.20)

7. Travel time
De Bethune’s DB25 World Traveller has a second time zone and world time expressed in an intriguing display on a 45 mm white gold case. It is supposed to be easier and more convenient to use than the travel timepieces in the market today.
Price: 150,000 Swiss francs (S\$208,500)

8. Calendar
H Moser & Cie’s Endeavour Perpetual Calendar Concept Funky Blue is probably the most minimal perpetual calendar ever produced. The striking blue dial has nothing but the date, hour and minute hands and a small hand topped with an arrow. The leap year sits on the movement side. Yet underneath lies an ingenious hand-wound movement which allows the date to be adjusted forward or backward at any time of the day. The watch has a power reserve of seven days.
Price: 60,000 Swiss francs (S\$83,400)

9. Chronograph
Zenith’s El Primero 36’000 VPH, as the name suggests, boasts not just the world’s most precise series-made chronograph but also a movement that beats at a high frequency of 36,000 vibrations per hour and enables a tenth-of-a-second display.
Price: 6,900 Swiss francs (S\$9,591)



10. Tourbillon
Bovet’s 1822 Ottantasei Flying Tourbillon is the sixth timepiece and fourth tourbillon that the brand created together with Italian design studio Pininfarina. It was produced virtually in-house using traditional materials that strictly follows artisanal fine watchmaking standards. Though equipped only with a single barrel, the tourbillon has 10 days’ power reserve. The ultra-light complication, housed in a 44 mm titanium case, is a mere 66.86 g in weight – including the strap.
Price: 165,000 Swiss francs (S\$229,350)

11. Sports
Ulysse Nardin’s Grand Deck Marine Tourbillon is from the brand’s Marine Chronometer collection of nautical-inspired design timepieces. The watch boasts a dial that features hand-crafted wood marquetry evoking a ship’s deck. A boom pulled by super-strong nanowires indicates the retrograde minutes, while the jumping hours are displayed on two concentric disks. The 60-second flying tourbillon, powered by a hand-wound movement, is enclosed in a 44 mm white gold case.
Price: 280,000 Swiss francs (S\$389,200)

12. Mechanical exception
Audemars Piguet’s Royal Oak Concept Supersonnerie took eight years to make. This minute repeater is “precision-made to awaken sound”. “It brings unprecedented acoustic performance, exceptionally refined sound quality and the clear harmonic tone of traditional pocket-watches to a contemporary minute repeater wristwatch,” says Audemars Piguet.
Price: 561,600 Swiss francs (S\$780,624) ■