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Stories

The Roger Dubuis Excalibur Spider Skeleton Double Flying Tourbillon's movement



A Twist on Tradition

By Keith W. Strandberg

Roger Dubuis Pushes the Boundaries of Innovation.



FEATURE: A TWIST ON TRADITION

KEITH W. STRANDBERG



A view of the back of the Excalibur Spider Skeleton Double Flying Tourbillon's movement

Roger Dubuis, the man and master watchmaker, is one of the most respected traditional watchmakers alive today. Known for his immaculate construction, incredible finishing and high complications, Dubuis is a living legend, and has returned to his namesake company as an inspirational icon.

A TRUE MANUFACTURE

The brand has the unique distinction of being the only watch concern that has 100 percent of its production certified by the prestigious Geneva Seal. Given that fact, you would be forgiven for thinking that Roger Dubuis is a staid, conservative company, focusing on traditional watchmaking and eschewing anything radical or revolutionary.

You would be forgiven—but you'd be very wrong.

Roger Dubuis has a deserved reputation as an enigma in the watch industry. It is a manufacture in the traditional sense of the word and a rebel when it comes to design and innovation.

Rationalizing and communicating these two sides of the company have always been a challenge for the brand. Jean-Marc Pontroué, the company's CEO, is embracing this duality and celebrating it with the introduction of the brand-new Excalibur Spider Skeleton Double Flying Tourbillon, a watch that combines cutting-edge design and materials with the best of traditional watchmaking.



“We don’t want to please everyone, but we want to be noticed. We accept that some people won’t like what we do, but they won’t have seen it somewhere else.”

—Jean-Marc Pontroué

AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Though Roger Dubuis is a big company that has an impressive and fully integrated manufacture and is a part of the Richemont Group, Pontroué sees the company—and runs it—almost as an independent brand.

“The beauty of our brand is that first and foremost we have a true manufacture. Everything we claim we do you can see that we really do,” Pontroué says. “Here, when we say Geneva, it has a meaning, as everything we do is Geneva Seal. The manufacture concept, the internalization of all our know-how, is a reality—we are not dependent on anybody. We do it all in-house.

“On the other hand, we run our brand like it is our own, like it is our own money,” he says. “This gives us power in the daily decision-making. We have the chance to be small in the big Richemont Group. [Richemont] supports us because they trust in what we are doing, so we can open in stores in new countries at a time when others are more reluctant. Roger Dubuis has very special positioning: We have a lot of resources at our disposal, but we can be very flexible, entrepreneurial and reactive.”

THE EXCALIBUR SPIDER DOUBLE FLYING TOURBILLON

This year has been designated the year of the skeleton, with Excalibur in the vanguard, taking the concept of skeletonization beyond just the movement and applying it to every aspect of the watch. “When we started to think about the product for 2015, we focused on one family as we always do,” Pontroué explains. “This year, the concept is skeleton and it will be all about Excalibur. Skeletons from other companies have always been very traditional, very classic, very patrimonial, and we were the first brand to develop the modern, architectural skeleton. We are one of the leaders in tourbillon sales and we wanted to highlight this competence, the tourbillon, and focus on the skeleton.”

“There are more than 700 watch brands in Switzerland, so we have to be different,” Pontroué continues. “We have to give people a reason to consider us. There is an exclusivity factor, spectacular design and a unique mechanism.” The movement powering the double tourbillon is skeletonized like a spider’s web, while also incorporating the star shape, which has become a signature of Dubuis’ skeleton timepiece range. The emphasis within the skeleton range and in the new Excalibur Spider is the architecture of the movement.

“We are using our bestseller movement—the double tourbillon—and making it sportier with the Excalibur Spider. We’re taking the concept to the extreme approach by skeletonizing the case,” Pontroué says. “The point is to create this assortment that is very different from everything else. The architectural skeleton is our signature and this is different from our existing range of skeletons.”

“Roger Dubuis has a target group of modern-minded, successful people, but they have different taste than their fathers and grandfathers did,” he continues. “They are entrepreneurs who have been very successful, and they have their own style. We attract people who are in their rebellious stage, who want their own way of expressing themselves. We believe that this target group doesn’t necessarily go for the standards of the existing watchmaking industry. They want to be the ones who have discovered these new brands, like Roger Dubuis.”

GIVING BACK

At the same time Roger Dubuis is looking to grow the company and increase market share, Pontroué is determined to give back. Recently, the brand partnered with Emirates Airlines to auction a special timepiece to raise money for the airline's foundation. "We developed a corporate social responsibility program with Emirates Airlines," Pontroué explains. "Anyone can bid on an one-of-a-kind Excalibur Skeleton Double Flying Tourbillon, with the minimum bid being \$280,000." In February, bidding will end and Emirates Airlines will fly the winner to pick up his or her new watch from Roger Dubuis' manufacture. "Twenty people have already made a bid and we think we will have about 50 bidders by the end. All the proceeds go to the Emirates Airlines Foundation, and none of the money will be used for administrative costs. We are calling it 'Time for Change' and this is truly the spirit of Roger Dubuis. Where others might ask 'Why?' we ask 'Why not?' There were lots of reasons not to do it, but that's exactly why we did it."

THE FUTURE

Roger Dubuis has plenty of room to grow: Its global presence is just beginning, as the company is still opening in countries that other companies have been in for quite some time.

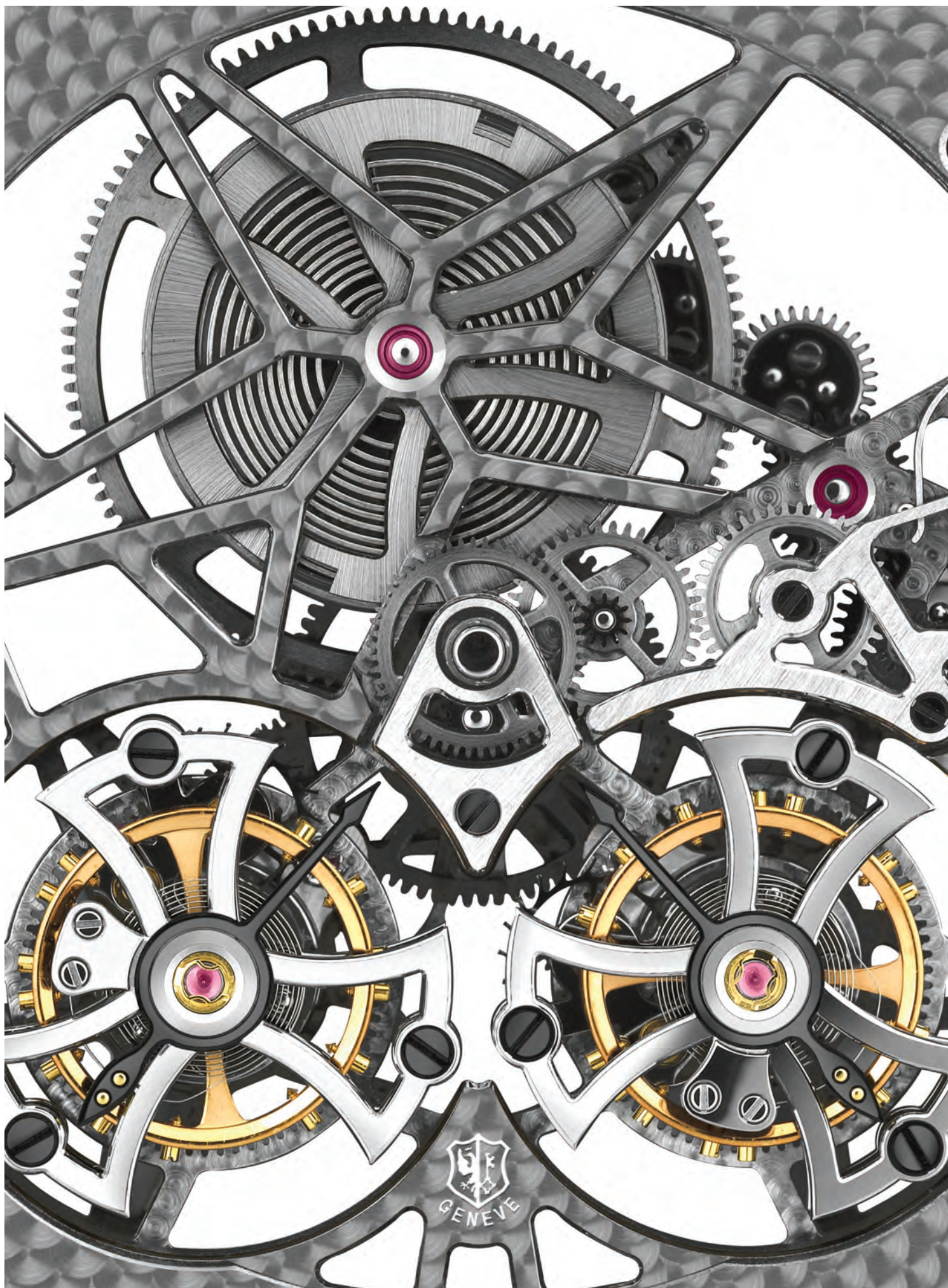
"The Swiss watch industry has been faced with challenges recently, but here at Roger Dubuis we have been relatively immune," Pontroué says. "We are still building the brand, so the conditions are impacting us less than they are others. We are opening in new countries like Korea, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan. We are still building the foundation of the brand."

Whatever the future brings, you can count on Roger Dubuis not changing its winning recipe for success. "We have to be very eye-catching," Pontroué notes. "We don't want to please everyone, but we want to be noticed. We accept that some people won't like what we do, but they won't have seen it somewhere else."

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