

George Daniels

Dr. George Daniels CBE (19 August 1926 – 21 October 2011)
The 20th Century's greatest horologist

In a world where the word 'genius' is all too easily conferred, George Daniels thoroughly lived up to this superlative with a unique talent, single-minded determination, self-belief... and a healthy spirit of adventure. George Daniels was perhaps the most unlikely man to become an outright master of horology. Brought up in abject poverty in London, and spending much of his childhood on the streets, he nevertheless showed early aptitude by taking apart and reconstructing the family's only alarm clock. On leaving the British army in 1947 with a gratuity of £50, he bought some tools and got a job repairing watches.

Combining his day job with diligent evening study, Daniels became a Fellow of the British Horological Institute, eventually opening a watch-repair workshop in 1960, in London. Becoming interested in the works of the notable early 19th-century French watchmaker Abraham-Louis Breguet, he soon became the leading expert on the maker, writing the definitive book and often being engaged to practically advise on Breguet's work.

In 1968, Daniels created his first pocket-watch for a friend, Sam Clutton, who convinced him that his future lay in hand-crafted high-end timepieces. During his career, George Daniels completed 27 unique watches (not including prototypes) as well as the Millennium series,. Each of these unique pieces is a significant step in George Daniels' horological journey. Each is, today, a supremely important achievement in watchmaking. And each is a physical manifestation of a unique mechanical artist.

A true genius.

Additional notes:

The Daniels Escapement

A passionate horologist throughout his career, George Daniels applied himself relentlessly to the major task of redesigning the mechanical watch escapement to compete on equal terms with the quartz watch which was threatening its future.

By 1974 he had completed designs for the most successful of his revolutionary escapements, the Daniels Co-axial. This escapement represented the greatest advancement in mechanical escapement design since the invention of the lever escapement by Thomas Mudge in 1754. Its success lies in the tangential impulse and lock in both vibrations of each oscillation without sliding friction which, unlike the conventional lever escapement, remain unaffected by changes in viscosity of the lubricant.

After rigorous testing, the results were extremely positive and, following a twenty-five year campaign, found international support in the notoriously conservative watch industry, later being adopted by Omega for use in its premium watches.

The Daniels Method

All Daniels watches were made by hand entirely under one roof and without assistance. George Daniels was the first watchmaker to achieve sufficient mastery of all the 34 skills and techniques requisite in creating a watch entirely alone and by hand. This is now recognised as 'The Daniels Method'.

Every component was made from raw materials in his Isle of Man studio without the use of repetitive or automatic tools. Thus, no two watches are identical and each is accepted as a work of art.

The Daniels Ethos

Daniels watches were never made to order and all started life as a vehicle for testing escapements or some other idea to further the art of the mechanical timekeeper.

The form of the watches is complete simplicity and no concessions were made to artificial styling. The hands, first used on watch No. 1 in 1969 are of the simplest form, which along with the contrast of the hand engraved and hand engine turned dials, created a look that, when married to its elegant and unique, hand made movement, was instantly recognisable as a Daniels watch.

Daniels's watches have very clear and clean dials, usually with subsidiary dials interwoven with the main

chapter ring; a clear Breguet influence.

A new era in mechanical watchmaking

The advance of the quartz watch in the 1960s and 70's was responsible for a massive shift in focus for the Swiss watch making industry which caused great concern to George Daniels . The revival of the mechanical hand-made watch by George Daniels in 1969 attracted the attention of connoisseur collectors of watches from which blossomed a new era in precision wrist watches.

Extra complications were included in Daniels' watches. These included tourbillons, perpetual calendar and a minute repeater mechanism which along with many more too numerous to mention, continued to enthral the connoisseur collector. George Daniels viewed horology as a continuous scientific art, with social significance and useful qualities, which continues today under the leadership of Daniels' protégé Roger Smith.

The decline of the mechanical watch industry was reversed and there can be no doubt that George Daniels, with his pioneering approach to watch making made the most significant contribution to horology by demonstrating that the mechanical watch can, in the long term, out perform the electronic quartz watch.

The Anniversary watch, designed by George Daniels with Roger W. Smith to celebrate 35 years of the Co-axial escapement, became a fitting tribute to a momentous achievement in watchmaking.

Recognition

During his career, George Daniels' work earned him many awards, one being the prestigious Tompion Medal – then, only the fifth ever to be awarded.

He was a Master of the Clockmakers' Company of London and was awarded their Gold Medal, a rare honour, as well as the Gold Medal of the British Horological Institute, the Gold Medal of the City of London and the Kullberg Medal of the Stockholm Watchmakers' Guild.

Already a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), Daniels was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2010 New Year Honours.

In July 2006 Sotheby's of London staged a retrospective exhibition of all Daniels work, which was the first time all pieces were displayed together and presented a unique view of the progression of his work.

George was also given the title of "living national treasure" by Country Life Magazine and his life story is detailed at the People's Archive.

After his death, some of Daniels' collection, including some pieces he made, was sold by Sotheby's in a 134-lot sale. One of the most anticipated and important auctions in horological history, the auction raised over £8 million for the George Daniels Educational Trust. The most expensive item was his 'Space Traveller's Watch' which sold for £1,329,250.

Spirit of Adventure

George Daniels was a 'Renaissance Man' in every sense of the word. A witty raconteur, acclaimed author and, with his other great life's passion – a motor racer and collector of classic cars, mainly Bentleys.

- 1908 Itala 100 hp Grand Prix Car: won the 1908 French Grand Prix and 1910 Brooklands All-comers Plate (fastest lap at 101.8 mph)
- 1954 Bentley R-Type Continental Fastback by H.J. Mulliner: ex-Frank Taylor of Taylor Woodrow Construction
- 1929 4½-litre Bentley Tourer by Vanden Plas: ex-Maharaja of Bhavnagar
- 1907 Daimler 45 hp Roi-de-Belges Tourer: built for the Earl of Craven
- 1929-32 Bentley 4½-Litre Supercharged Single-Seater: know as Bentley Blower No.1, developed and driven by Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin, it set the Brooklands Outer Circuit Lap Record at more than 137 mph in 1931
- 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 : Formerly Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin Le Mans Works car and owned by Italo Balbo