

THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2016

SUCCESSFULLY CONFRONTING “CONVERGING TECHNOLOGIES”

THE TRADITIONAL WATCH MARKET IS RESILIENT, SAYS SEIKO

INTERVIEW BY WILLIAM GEORGE SHUSTER

Seiko, named a “Brand of the Year” for 2015/2016 by the World Branding Forum, out of 2,600 companies in 35 countries, expects an upbeat 2016, says Shinji Hattori, President and CEO of Seiko Watch Corp., despite “converging technologies” impact on the watch market. He talks to BWDN about that, plus e-commerce and Seiko’s important Baselworld debuts, including its first-ever tourbillon.

BWDN: How was 2015 for Seiko? What do you expect in 2016?

Shinji Hattori: Through the third quarter, our financial results for the 2015/16 fiscal year (ending March 31, 2016) are excellent. We will increase income for the sixth year in a row.

2015 was a great year for Seiko, thanks to the global success of Astron, GPS Solar and the increasing demand for our Grand Seiko luxury timepieces. All signs show we will increase this momentum in 2016.

In your ten years as Seiko Watch Corp.’s CEO, what is the most significant change you have seen in the watch industry?



*Credor
Tourbillon,
Seiko.*

One of the most significant is the rise of what we might call “converging technologies”. In the 2000s, it was forecast that expansion of mobile devices would put pressure on the watch market, especially by younger people. Now, it is said that the traditional watch market faces another challenge from the smart watch. However, Seiko’s experience is that the traditional watch market is very resilient. While mobile phones and smart-watches will impact the market, they won’t take sales away from traditional brands, like Seiko, with a clearly differentiated offer. Our sales of mechanical,

solar and GPS Solar watches are unaffected by this converging technologies trend, and I believe that this will remain so. In the next five years, traditional watches with exceptional added-value will do well.

Is e-commerce affecting the watch market and Seiko?

E-commerce is having a significant impact. Consumers want to buy watches online, and we must adapt distribution strategies to accommodate this trend. However, Seiko respects its “bricks and mortar” customers. We believe face-to-face discussion with informed retail personnel is the best way for consumers to experience a Seiko watch. So we don’t sell directly online, and we don’t sell our most exclusive collections to online retailers. However, we encourage our own retailers to offer Seiko online and in-store. Many do so very successfully. This is the best combination.

What is new in 2016 for Seiko’s luxury brand Grand Seiko and prestige lines Astron and Prospex?

Here at Baselworld, Grand Seiko proudly presents two new creations that take its essential values in exciting and creatively rewarding directions. Astron is introducing another new calibre, and Prospex has important new creations for the ocean-racing sailor. However, perhaps our most important debut is an entirely new elite collection called “Presage”. It showcases our mechanical watchmaking skills. Our first-ever tourbillon is here, in our high-end Credor brand. It is based on our ultra-thin mechanical movement, a mere 1.98 mm in depth. The whole calibre measures only 3.98 mm, including tourbillon. The design is inspired by the wood prints of the Edo period artist, Hokusai. This remarkable luxury watch presents Japanese craftsmanship at its finest in its movement adjustment, metal engraving and lacquer finishing. Only eight pieces will be made for selected Seiko Boutiques worldwide. **I. I., D79 & D83**



*Shinji Hattori,
President and CEO, Seiko
Watch Corporation.*



*Lady KonTiki
Diver, Eterna.*

MAKE A SPLASH

ETERNA’S LADY
KONTIKI DIVER
UNITES SPORTINESS
AND ELEGANCE

BY SABINE ZWETTLER

For the first time in 23 years, this Swiss watch brand introduces a new member exclusively for ladies in its legendary KonTiki line. This new diver’s wristwatch for women is water-resistant to 200 metres and equipped with a rotatable diver’s bezel. Even a quick glance at its dial instantly reveals prominent Roman numerals at 3, 6 and 9 o’clock, generously proportioned hour indices and the characteristic triangle at 12 o’clock, which proclaim this model’s kinship with the famous adventurer’s watch that accompanied Thor Heyerdahl on his voyages. The date is shown inside a window at 4 o’clock. The Lady KonTiki Diver is available in various versions, including a luxurious variant with a rose gold case and diamond indices embellishing its dial. **5.0, AOI**

A JEWEL FROM YESTERDAY IN NEW SPLENDOUR

MAURICE LACROIX INTRODUCES AIKON

BY SABINE ZWETTLER

The Swiss watch brand Maurice Lacroix presents the new Aikon line. The collection, which includes models for women and men, demonstrates that a brand’s own history frequently offers the best role models for future creations. The Aikon is conceived as a contemporary update of the popular Calypso from the 1990s. The bezel with its six eye-catching prongs runs like Ariadne’s thread through the entire collection. The 35-mm-diameter ladies’ model has a black, silver or mother-of-pearl dial enlivened by diamond-studded indices. The gents’ version is 42 mm in diameter and features a black or silver-coloured dial embellished with horizontally striped guilloché. The men’s chronograph is 44 mm in diameter, with blue totalisers against a silver-coloured background. A quartz movement powers all models. **I. I., E63**



*Aikon Chronograph,
Maurice Lacroix.*

THE CREST OF THE WAVE

U-BOAT PRESENTS ITS NEW, LIMITED EDITION SKELETONIZED WATCH

BY ROBERTO CHILLERI

Given the enthusiasm that greeted the first skeletonized U-Boat, previewed at Baselworld 2015, Tuscan designer Italo Fontana decided to raise the odds. The next step is the Chimera Skeleton Titanium, with a grade 5 titanium case. The dial, as always, is pure understatement, but the three chronograph counters now become four, one of

them indicating day-night. The automatic movement, visible through the dial and the back of the case, is a U-Boat development of the Arola Squelette U-77 Valjoux Top Soigné. Bezel and case are connected by external ties that provide strength and water-resistance up to a depth of 100 metres, and the crown is fitted with the patented automatic

extraction push-button. The watch has chronograph, hours, minutes, seconds, and date functions, plus the novelty of the fourth counter indicating the 24 hours. The vintage leather bracelet is another detail linked to the U-Boat style. Titanium, lightweight but extremely resistant, is ideal for the 46-mm case. Only 150 watches have been made and this Chimera Skeleton is certainly not just any timepiece. U-Boat has more news in store, which will be revealed in good time: the Tuscan designer has already implemented the prototype for his first ultra-flat model, and is testing glass that in just one thousandth of a second will change colour. **I. I., B67**



*Automatic chronograph
Chimera Skeleton
Titanium, U-Boat.*