



ANCHORS AWEIGH

In the steady hands of its president, Karl-Friedrich Scheufele, new haute horlogerie brand Ferdinand Berthoud is positively buoyant during trying times, says CANDICE CHAN

THE CHRONOMETER FERDINAND Berthoud FB 1's Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève (GPHG) 2016 Aiguille d'Or award, the event's highest accolade, came as a surprise. It is, after all, the brand's first and only watch in production.

"I was more than thrilled, I was excited! It was a great recognition of what we have been doing for the last five years for the Ferdinand Berthoud project. It was also unexpected because as a 'young' old brand that had just presented the watch recently (in 2015), I was really not expecting such a recognition so fast," says Karl-Friedrich Scheufele, president of Ferdinand Berthoud. If his name rings a familiar bell, well, Scheufele is also co-president of Chopard.

If you consider that the award has a history of going to storied brands the likes of Patek Philippe, Vacheron Constantin and Girard-Perregaux, and that FB 1 was judged alongside 71 other finalists, including established names such as Audemars Piguet, Ulysse Nardin and Speake-Marin, its win defies even bookmaking odds.

Though a brand officiated only recently, it is named after Ferdinand Berthoud, the 18th-century Swiss watchmaker regarded as an authority in horological theories. Bestowed the title Master Clockmaker by order of King Louis XV in 1753 in Paris, Berthoud was recognised for his published works and contributions to horological history. Central to this were his marine chronometers, two of which were used during the Royal French Navy's numerous charting expeditions and marine surveys in the late 18th century.

Indeed, it was a Berthoud chronometer that first piqued Scheufele's interest in the man and his horological feats, having come across his marine chronometer no. 6 in 2006, when he was building up L.U.C.EUM, Chopard's watch and clock museum. Digging further into Berthoud's past, Scheufele was delighted to discover that he was born in a little village just on the outskirts of Fleurier, the hometown of Chopard's watch manufacture.

Scheufele was also moved by Berthoud's passionate commitment to research and unceasing willingness to pass on his know-how. "A lot of watchmakers are very focused on their work and not necessarily very willing to share the secrets of their work. Ferdinand Berthoud wrote a book for people who don't know about watchmaking very early in his career," he shares.

This 4,000-page tome has since been acquired by Scheufele, who likens the reading experience to a discovery process that opens up "a wealth of inspiration for us".

The decision to acquire the Ferdinand Berthoud name was made also in 2006. That the name was initially registered to someone who wanted to build quartz-powered watches under the Ferdinand Berthoud branding was the final push that convinced Scheufele he needed to revive and restore the brand to its former glory.

After successfully convincing the previous owner to sell his rights on the brand, it took him another four years before attempting any



KARL-FRIEDRICH SCHEUEFELE



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: THE FB 1



FERDINAND BERTHOUD'S
MARINE CHRONOMETER
NO. 6 AND ITS GIMBAL
SUSPENSION SYSTEM



groundwork on the business and almost a decade before launching the FB 1. "The name Ferdinand Berthoud is over 250 years old. I knew no one in the industry was waiting for us to launch so I had time," he explains. In 2015, it was finally unveiled. "The greatest challenge behind this watch was to create something credible, authentic and meaningful that would pay tribute to Ferdinand Berthoud. We asked ourselves: If he were to make a wristwatch today, how would he have done it? The brainstorming process was long. We had a number

of ideas that we brushed aside because we weren't convinced by them," says Scheufele.

Directly inspired by Berthoud's marine chronometer no. 6 and its gimbal suspension system, the FB 1 is designed in a specific architecture composed of an octagonal case with a round bezel. The eight-sided shape also serves a functional purpose: Fitted on four sides are water-resistant lateral sapphire planes to offer a peek at the elaborate movement, which can also be admired from the sapphire caseback.

Like Berthoud's chronometer, the FB 1's FB-T. FC calibre features a pillar-based construction with a fusee and chain transmission system to supply regular torque. It is equipped with a tourbillon escapement that oscillates at a leisurely 3Hz and has a constant force regulating device with a suspended fusee and chain system that's one of the longest in the industry (measuring 28cm and composed of 474 steel links and 316 pins). Equipped with an unusually large differential gear that prevents the movement from stopping during winding, the fusee and chain are directly connected to the winding crown via a single wheel, resulting in a very fluid and pleasant winding experience.

The power reserve device is also very unusual: It is inspired by a mechanism developed by famed British watchmaker George Daniels and is a nod to Berthoud's links to English watchmaking (in 1764, he was elected to the Royal Society in London as an associate overseas member in recognition of his watchmaking publications). Linking the power reserve mechanism to the barrel is a driving wheel that moves (according to the tension of the barrel spring) a truncated cone up and down along the arbor, secured to the mainplate. A mobile arm measures the motion of the cone and transmits this information to an indicator on the dial.

The 1,120-part movement has also been entirely embellished in the vein of Berthoud's regulator-type clocks. It features painstakingly decorated gear wheels, satin-finished and bevelled half bridges,



"We have no choice but to be among the best – whatever the next interpretation of his work may be"

FROM TOP: A TRUNCATED CONE THAT'S PART OF THE FB 1'S POWER RESERVE MECHANISM; THE 28CM FUSEE-AND-CHAIN SYSTEM

as well as polished and chamfered chatons. The dagger-shaped hour and minute hands have been cut out and faceted while the unusually long sweep-seconds hand is in bronze (not gold because it would warp at that length) with a round counterweight mirrored after Berthoud's regulators.

With the prefix chronometer to its name, the FB-T.FC calibre had to be COSC-certified. However, it has yet to earn certification from The Geneva Seal as well as the Fleurier Quality Foundation, the latter co-founded by Chopard. "The Geneva Seal is not an option for us because the watches are made in Fleurier. However, the finishing requirement is also different — we were inspired by the Berthoud finishing, which is very different from that of The Geneva Seal. The Fleurier Quality Foundation certification could be an option in the future. As a co-founder of this certification, it

is very close to my heart so it is something I will keep in mind," Scheufele explains.

The FB 1 is offered in two variants, one in white gold and titanium with a vertical satin-finished ruthenium dial and another in rose gold and black ceramic with a vertical satin-finished black dial. Production output is extremely limited, with 15 watches made last year and another 25 planned for this year. There is no immediate intention for retail expansion but Scheufele does not rule out its possibility in the future; for now, the watches are being offered to an exclusive retail network of seven retailers around the world, including Sincere Fine Watches, the brand's exclusive

partner in the region.

While work on the FB 2 is well underway, it will be at least another two years before the watch is unveiled. Until then, the brand will assume its steady course on the open seas with Scheufele, its far-sighted captain, at its helm. "Ferdinand Berthoud was an outstanding watchmaker and we want to keep up this legacy. We have no choice but to be among the best — whatever the next interpretation of his work may be," says Scheufele. **P**

