

PAUL GERBER'S NEW REF. 420 TRIPLE ROTOR 'GUILLOCHÉ' QUESTIONS THE COMMON PARADIGMS OF 'HAUTE HORLOGERIE'

My first 'New Watch Alert' for 2023, the Ref. 420 Triple Rotor 'Guilloché', is what I consider 'essentially Paul': unique 'in-house' watchmaking with a twinkling eye

My affection for the work of **Paul Gerber** is pretty well-known, I guess (see [here](#) and [here](#)). When he showed me the first parts back last spring to explain what he's up to, I knew I just *had* to have one of only 46 pieces of the **Triple Rotor 'Guilloché' (Ref. 420)**, a more affordable watch from the master in Zurich with several solutions unmistakably typical for him.

It is also a watch which makes you reconsider your concept of fine watchmaking!



Yet, it surprisingly is also a watch with a high degree of components made by Paul himself:

- Cal. 42, an automatic ETA 2824-based movement enhanced with Paul's own triple rotor winding mechanism with solid gold weights
- 42mm case in surgical grade titanium with large screw down crown
- anthracite guilloché dial (CNC) made by Paul
- indices in Paul's own font, made in his atelier
- hands of his own design, made in his atelier
- enlarged date



The original concept of the watch is far from new – Paul introduced it already in 2011 with the same movement and same case, just with a more tool-watch-like 'Flieger' design and a dial concept that he first tested with the 'PuristSPro 10th Anniversary' version. But the new dials and hands really pushed the watch to a new 'must-have' level, at least for me.



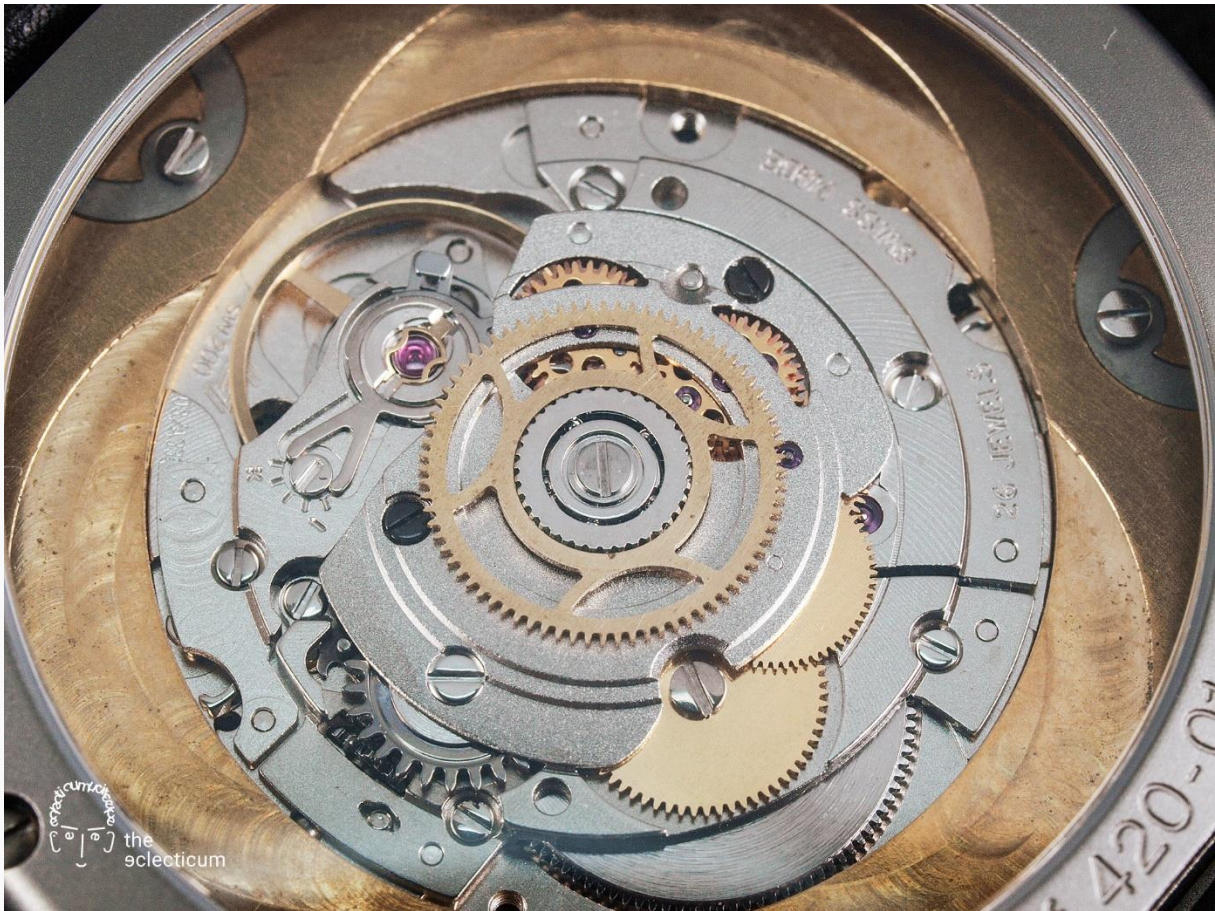
(Paul Gerber's Ref. 420 'PuristSPro 10th Anniversary Edition', 2011)

Triple Rotors – guided by a magician?

Prime mechanical attraction of the watch is the modified ETA movement on the back: the three rotors dance across the top plate, and then suddenly you notice that their radii actually overlap, but they still never crash into each other... how's that possible?



Now remember the name of the first watch in this series, 'Synchron'.
Indeed, **synchronisation** is the reason why the triple rotor winding mechanism works: look at the image below with the rotors removed: notice the large central wheel which not only collects the kinetic energy of the rotors, but it also ensures that they are precisely placed at a defined angle relative to each other. Together with the considered shape of each rotor its impossible that one bumps into its siblings.



(A central wheel synchronises...)

The entire changes consist of three rotors (made of 18ct gold each), three custom-made ball bearing (one/rotor) and one additional gear. That's it! Ingenious, isn't it?



(...overlapping rotors)

The dance of the three rotors is mesmerising to watch and also comes with a unique tactile quality as well – thanks to custom ball bearings. The feeling and the sound of the automatic winding is the watchmaking equivalent of a nest of young cats: there's always a commotion going on inside, with a much more substantial acoustics than one is used from the base ETA movement.



(Movement holder finished to symbolise the rotors' radii, fixed to the case with unique brackets)

Of course, there is no real technical reason for the triple rotors, but it is more like an intellectual exercise, and for sure more fun!

Aesthetically yours truly

Different from most other independent watchmakers, Paul Gerber defines the entire design himself, without the help of specialists. Case shape, guilloche pattern, hands and even the fonts used are his own.



Speaking of the latter, Paul mentioned to me one day that he developed this specific font many years back – and forgot about it. Moving to a new computer some time back he discovered it again and contemplated how he could use it – the Ref. 420 was his choice as a more everyday piece. Here it comes matte finished on top with polished sides:





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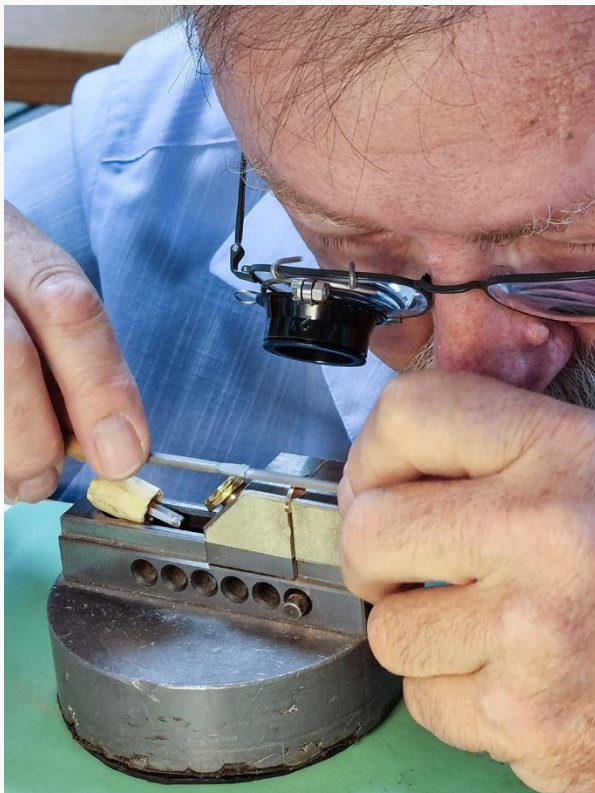


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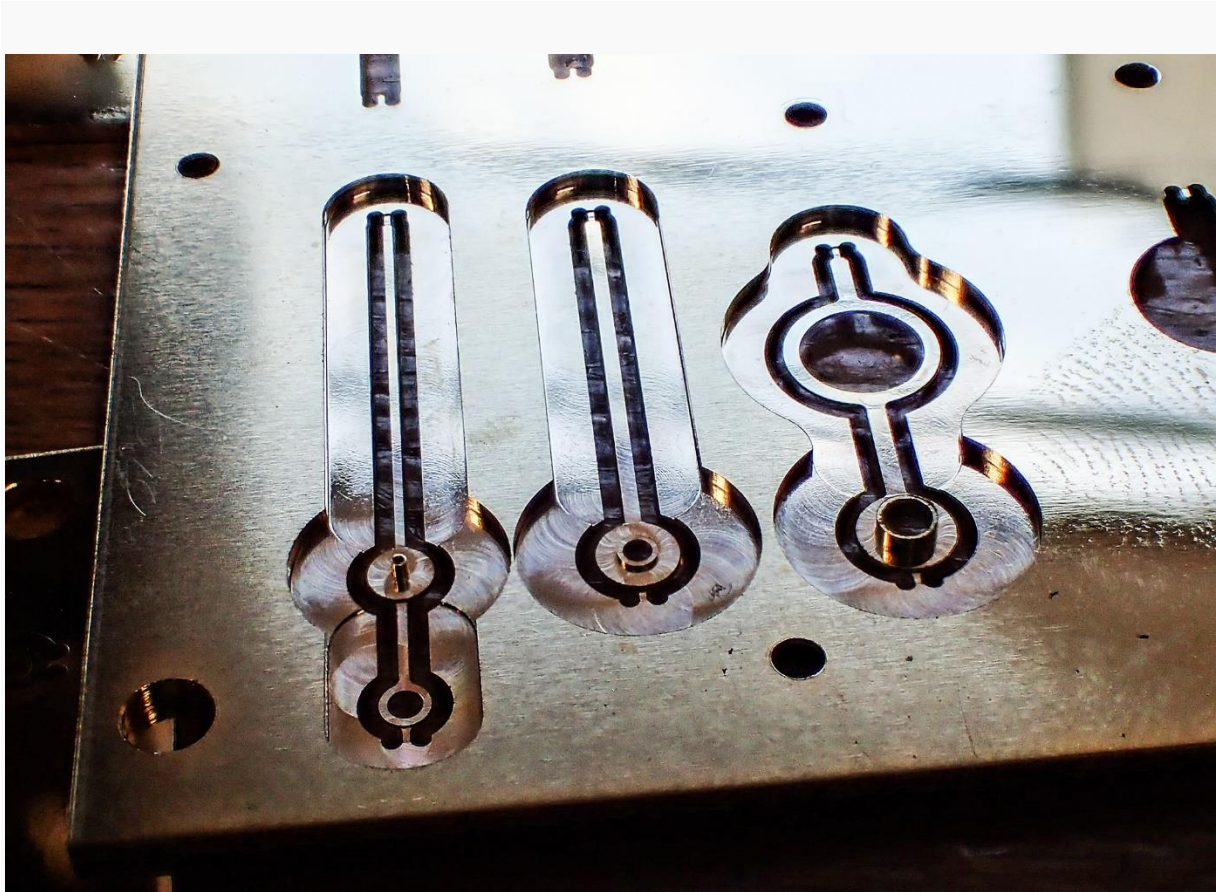




The face of the watch is entirely made by the master himself, including guilloché, indices and hands, a luxury he enjoys and which he can afford as technically he retired, and without any employees he and his wife Ruth can run the atelier as it pleases them.



(Paul finishing rotor parts; image © Paul Gerber)



(Raw hands, readily cut; image © Paul Gerber)

The sole exemptions are the (German) case and the anthracite galvanisation process for which he counts on the expertise of Comblemine (Kari Voutilainen's renowned dial workshop) as it is quite intricate to achieve in a consistent way which holds over time – an issue which Paul faced first with the PuristSPro watch when he (still) completed the dials entirely himself.



Fine Watchmaking – rethink the paradigm!

One might argue that the Ref. 420 could come in a more polished design (for lack of a better description), but in the end, wouldn't such request be an oxymoron? After all, 'we' cherish independent watchmakers exactly for their 'independence', and what could come closer than if a watchmaker constructs, designs and manufactures on his/her own without compromise?

Side note: Some time ago I discussed with Paul about design changes over some fine wine, with the goal of having more fluid, refined lines. We brainstormed, drew, rejected and started again. Next morning, he called me and told me: *'sorry, I can't do it, that's just not me'!*

... there you are!

Fine Watchmaking – rethink the paradigm!

This in the end leaves one with a watch with an unusual degree of real 'in-house' creation, a welcome surprise particularly at the price Paul is asking for it. It's also unaltered pure watchmaking in the typical whimsical, slightly ironic and always funny 'Paul-style', and I am glad Paul sticks to it!



With that said, watches like the Triple Rotor 'Guilloché' present an alternative to common notions of 'Haute Horlogerie' and to a large extent also to 'independent watchmaking'. Both terms are firmly associated with exquisite finishing, thoroughbred manufacture movements and the like. While this is *per se* commendable (and certainly what 'the market' largely demands), the work of watchmakers like Paul Gerber invite us to broaden our minds and consider concepts that are a bit outside of the established concept: watches spun of original ideas, watches which surprise us, and which are perhaps intellectually more exciting convey a pure glimpse into the personality behind them.

Wasn't it the legendary George Daniels who coined the following sentence in his book 'Watchmaking': *"If one runs out of ideas one can still invest time in finishing?"*

Be eclectic!

And since we are at it: **happy birthday, Paul, and here's to many more years as you will never run out of ideas, for sure!**

Ornatus Mundi