



The Genie 03 houses a pop-up anemometer module to measure wind speed, giving a reading on the register on the top



# OH BREVA WHERE ART THOU?

*On the up, as it happens. Timothy Barber talks to the founder of a watch firm whose wacky scientific complications bely a seriousness of horological intent – and is now manufacturing in-house*

One problem facing any fledgling watch brand is the pressure to emerge fully formed: for the first watch to tell the full story, and for that story to have legs.

That's particularly tricky when you appear out of nowhere – nowhere being, in Vincent Dupontreue's case, the fashion industry (he founded and sold his own denim label), which for some in the watch world is even worse – with an idea so different, and a price so terrifyingly high, the words "gimmick" and "vanity project" get bandied around like confetti.

The first watch from Dupontreue's Brevia marque, the Genie 01 unveiled two years ago, forecasts the weather. It does so via a bespoke movement that incorporates specially-designed "aneroid capsules" – barometric cells – within its 415 parts, with a hulking gold case and a price tag of a cool £123,000.

John Kettley it isn't. When it appeared, complicated though the aneroid technology appeared to be, the question of "how" seemed more easily answered than that of "why".

I'll admit that the Genie 01's charms, such as they might exist, were lost on me. But the clue that there was more to this venture than a high concept and the lolly to make it work, soon came with Brevia's appearance on the shelves of William & Son. William Asprey's Mayfair boutique boasts a particularly select roster of top-of-the-class watchmakers – think F.P. Journe, De Bethune, Laurent Ferrier and a small player called Breguet. If the folk at William & Son saw mileage in Brevia, maybe there was something to it after all?

An altimeter version of the same watch followed (Genie 02), using the barometric tech to determine altitude to within a few metres (or feet), after which came titanium models in which the Brevia design language – heavily knurled crowns protruding all over the place, open-worked instrumentation-as-dial, streamlined lugs – suddenly made sense: this was a rugged sports/adventuring watch, not a precious metals piece. But the question remained (and we asked it two issues ago): was there life in Brevia beyond barometric cells?

The answer comes with a highly satisfying, spring-loaded click, as an apparent sub-register explodes outwards from the dial of the Genie 03. In a gap underneath, a tiny propeller spins. What the actual heck?

"So, now we tell you how fast you're going," Dupontreue explains when we see the new watch in Geneva. "It's an anemometer."

Kudos to Dupontreue for picking a gizmo that sounds even more arcane than an aneroid capsule, but for most people this will be a more familiar sight: an anemometer is the spinning device that measures wind speed. And if it's moving along at pace rather than stationary, that reading – delivered on the Genie 03 via a one-hand gauge atop the anemometer – becomes a simple speed

measurement. *Et voila* – the first speedometer wristwatch. The price tag is £39,000.

I'd rather fancy taking one out on a bike, but Dupontreué reckons it's most applicable as a bit of skiing kit. A self-described "weather addict", Dupontreué flies light planes, is a keen skier and sails on Lake Como: weather, altitude and speed are things that feature heavily in his life. "It's very selfish – all the watches I do are because I need them," he says. "The Genie 03 could be for going in a convertible car or a motorbike, but unofficially I'm a bit less of a motoring addict than I am a skier."

So far, so vanity project, right? Well, not really. The seriousness of Brevva, not just as a project but as a business, was arguably marked out from the beginning by the involvement of Jean-Francois Mojon, the wizard of watchmaking responsible for HYT's liquid time-keeping, IWC's Siderale Scafusia, MB&F's Legacy Machine and Harry Winston's Opus X. Unsurprisingly, the movement Mojon and his company Chronode designed and made for the Genie 01 and 02 – all frosted black bridges and sleek, solid beauty with a tremendous level of finish – is excellent.

The Genie 03 displays a similar level of accomplishment. Problems around water-proofing and shock-proofing the module were overcome through considerable R&D. The technology to reduce the design of an anemometer to the size of a pen lid, and make it give an accurate, reliable reading, has been patented.

"It took a year to make sure the propeller would be strong enough but thin enough against the force of the wind. The propeller itself takes 72 hours to make," says Dupontreué.

The shock, however, comes with the news that that work, and the entire development of the watch, has been carried out in-house by Brevva. The partnership with Mojon is no more. In no time at all, Dupontreué has established a workshop of experienced watchmakers and engineers, where all three models, in their various versions, are being made. And production is ramping up.

"It was always planned that we'd develop in-house watchmaking – we don't want to rely on other people," Dupontreué explains. "Last year we produced 50 watches, this year



Left: The movement for the Genie 03 has been designed and created by Brevva in-house  
Below, left to right: The Genie 02 and Genie 01 in rose and white gold

For more on the Genie 03, see SalonQP.com

hopefully two to three hundred, next year six hundred. The volume should go up and the average price point will come down."

It's the latter point that seems salient. While a £123,000 weather studio for the wrist might be a polarising concept, Dupontreué has always been playing a long game. He says he's taken a 50 per cent hit on his margins in order to keep the price of the Genie 03 down, but has plans in the pipeline for watches at half the price again (though not under the Genie name). Starting out at the super-high end,

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though, was necessary to build the expertise and the profile, he says.

"I really do wish we could have something now that's more accessible. It's quite a pain to have such expensive products, but we cannot do it differently," he explains. "We can go a bit lower in price point year after year with a more understandable watch. So we've started with the hardest thing, then gradually we can give people products that are easy to catch up with. Next year we'll have something easier, but it wouldn't have such an interesting look or such an interesting story without the ones that already exist."

What has surprised Dupontreué, he says, is the extent to which the Genie 03 is bringing people to Brevva who had previously missed the point (myself included). It's a complication that's easy to understand and to read, if highly complex and groundbreaking to pull off; it emphasizes activity as well as science; it's horologically satisfying with a new, in-house micro-rotor movement that will be used in other watches in the future; and it's playful.

"When we originally launched, people saw it as Brevva equals weather, or air pressure. But now people are seeing us go in a different direction, and they see the wider spirit of Brevva doing cool scientific instruments," he says. "I find the mix of design, technology and industry super-sexy: you can do super-sexy things with a very hard technical knowledge behind it all. With Genie 03 people have started to understand better the Genie 01. It's really interesting, because we hadn't thought about this, but suddenly people get it."

