

< new model >

# Space CONES

BY MICHAEL THOMPSON



Max Büsser and a friend

Warp speed: The Starcruiser is MB&F's Horological Machine No.3. With its crown to the left, it becomes the Sidewinder.



The ceramic ball bearings, pictured at right, are visible through the back of the case (below). They power the timekeeping as seen at the top of the watch in the cones.



With its trademark battle-axe rotor and two high-profile subdials, MB&F continues its high-flying horological journey at warp speed

**M**ore than a few people have told Max Büsler that his watchmaking ideas were the stuff of dreams. But during his storied seven-years leading Harry Winston's lauded Opus program, he managed to turn many such dreams into watches, launching careers and igniting new horological directions for others to explore.

When he announced the start of his own brand, MB&F, which is short for Max Büsler and Friends, expectations were high—and he didn't disappoint. The first two Horological Machines, as he calls his timepieces, were instant hits that confirmed his vision as one shared by many collectors.

The third Horological Machine, which debuted in late 2008, continues the firm's fixation on dual dials and unusually shaped futuristic cases, but at the same





The firm's battle-axe 22-karat rose gold rotor is now an iconic design for the two-year-old brand. Now it's visible from the top. On the opposite page is a clear view of the watch's inverted movement, with the indicators and date wheel exposed. The case measures 47 mm by 50 mm and is 16 mm high.

time clicks up the fun factor and the wearer's ability to customize.

Do you know any other timepieces that can be ordered with optional alignment? Here, the owner chooses either a left-crown model or the top-crown edition. Or, in MB&F parlance, would you prefer the Sidewinder (crown left) or the Starcruiser (crown up)?

With either option you are wearing a watch that is both sculptural and kinetic. The latter adjective refers most directly to the rotor that spins in front of the wearer. Unlike the first two Horological Machines, this third edition shows

off the 22-karat rose gold battle-axe rotor whereas those previous models required one to take off the prized possession in order to view it (through the back).

The rotor has become a symbol for the brand, not simply due to its sharp profile but because it's a bit of a mystery why it spins at all given its apparently symmetric shape. The secret, as all Büsserites know, is that this gold, echoing the entire watch, is a miniature sculpture. That is, rather than simply a stamped oscillating mass, one half of the rotor is machined to a far thinner dimension than the other

side, imbuing "kinetic sculpture" with genuine meaning.

#### **Inverted movement**

That battle-axe is not just there for show either. It winds the watch's movement just as it would if it were on the back, but on this watch the back is now the front.

The movement, which Büsser's friends forged from an oscillator and gearing from their friends at Girard-Perregaux, is inverted. It's upside down but nonetheless powers the timekeeping elements so prominently displayed on the top of the case.



How did the firm move the power train to the same side of the watch as the display? In a more traditional movement, watchmakers would have added new gearing that would require additional support on the top and bottom of their pinions. This would have also required a thicker case, something the HM3 design didn't need given its unorthodox and already thick sapphire cones.

Instead, the HM3 team led by Eric Giroud with movement development by Jean-Marc Wiederrecht (who was the first winner of the award for Best Watchmaker at the

2007 Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève) and Nicolas Stalder ignored the ordinary and created two 15-mm diameter high-tech ceramic bearings, which are visible via the case back. Using these, rather than a series of friction-creating gears, reduces the number of times metal touches metal, thus making the entire mechanism feasible in a wrist-friendly size. The bearings connect to the cones on the top of the dial, which impart the hours (and day/night) and minutes.

Those sapphire cones essentially replace the hands used on a standard watch. Such cones, which

have never been seen on a watch previously, add another unusual three-dimensional element to the profile of the HM3. The surface of the sapphire had to be polished carefully and for an extended period of time in order to render them fully transparent. Wearers need not worry about the security of the cones—each is brazed onto their gold rim to insure their adherence to the case.

The cones allow the wearer to simply peek under a shirtsleeve or glance at the wrist while driving to see the time, indicated by the rich red hash mark on the side of each cone. The date can be seen by noting the large number near a pyramid that is engraved on the case/dial.

There are many small details here that Büsser and his team include as a matter of course. Note the heads of the screws. Rather than standard slots, which might invite damage should a screwdriver slip, the team has re-designed the heads into a cloverleaf shape that ensures a more secure fit. Plus, they look good.

Furthermore, all sapphire surfaces have been double treated to generate maximum antireflective properties.

In addition to the choice of perspective (Starcruiser or Side-winder), owners are also offered the choice of red gold with titanium or white gold with titanium. Price: \$74,000. ©