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HALF TIME SHOW

BY **KEN KESSLER**

There can be no greater challenge for both the watchmaker and the intended client than devising a method of displaying the time that causes the observer to stop and think. It is the antithesis of conventional and accepted practice — that of conveying the time as quickly and intuitively as possible.

Even the most hidebound of digital watch wearers have to admit that two hands rotating on a dial provide an iconic method of showing the time. It's so clear that one doesn't even need numbers. You just know what the time is when you see a "little hand" in one position and a "big hand" in another. For Ludovic Ballouard, that approach is, well, boring.

Only 41 years old, the French-born, Geneva-based watchmaker set up on his own in 1998, having worked with such maestri as Franck Muller and F.P. Journe. He has now produced his second assault on time telling with the **Half Time,** taking its name from a familiar sporting events expression, but twisting it to his own wily ends.

For this affront to convention, Ballouard has split every Roman numeral into two, the halves appearing on two concentric, contra-rotating dials. When a specific hour is reached, its two halves meet in a window at what would be the twelve o'clock position. In this respect, the Half Time recalls what were known as "digital watches" — purely mechanical displays of printed digits — before electronics made the numbers appear on LEDs or LCDs.

Ballouard, however, eschewed the simple rotating-disc-with-whole-numbers method, as still used for date displays in mechanical watches. Instead, by splitting the numbers in half, he has created a visual deception, unreadable numbers that only snap into coherence at the correct time, and in one spot. A retrograde hand at the six o'clock position indicates the minutes.

If a quote can sum up a **WATCHMAKER'S PHILOSOPHY,** then **LUDOVIC BALLOUARD** has done it in ten words: "I wanted an **UNUSUAL COMPLICATION,** which would **ALSO BE FUN."**

The Half Time's unconventional, two-part display rotates, forming one "whole" numeral to indicate the hour. Its 41mm case is offered in platinum (shown) and 5N red gold.

Ballouard produces around 50 numbered pieces a year, ensuring their collectability. Novel displays aside, they are masterpieces consisting of more than 300 components visible through the sapphire glass caseback and housed in a 41mm case in platinum or 5N red gold. As Ballouard cheerily explains, "The heart of the Half Time is happy to proudly show itself, but only to its owner."

From top: Exposed through its sapphire crystal back, the Half Time movement is revealed in all its novel complexity.

The Upside Down's case comes in either platinum or 5N red gold. Both versions can be enhanced with diamond accents on the case, lugs and buckle.

The numbers on the Upside Down's dial are inverted except for the current hour. Every 60 minutes, the passing and arriving hours snap into their new positions.

ON THE UPSIDE

This eccentric approach to displaying the time began in December 2009 with the now-famous **Upside Down,** which earned Ballouard the Special Prize of the Jury, awarded by *Montres Passions* the following year in Geneva. Its clever complication is its method of displaying the hour, with a layout based on an old rotary-dial phone. The numbers rotate instantaneously as their turn is called.

But Ballouard has created a mechanism in which every numeral for every hour is upside down, except for the numeral showing the correct time. A center-mounted hand shows the minutes and the seconds are displayed conventionally in a subdial, but the wearer has to have his or her eyes trained on each of the 12 rotating numerals to detect which is right-side up.

Born in platinum, this sensational timepiece is now available in 5N red gold, set with diamonds, with a black PVD titanium dial, a black gold movement or other variations.

Cellini is one of only three retailers in the U.S. with Ballouard's exceptional timepieces and the only source on the East Coast. The fun, then, starts here. ☉