

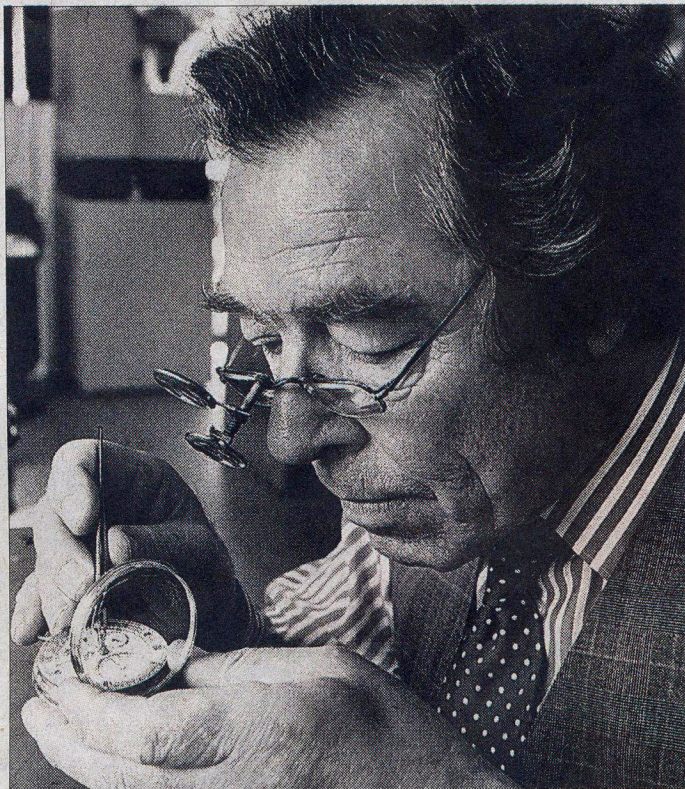
The great British master

Tracey Llewellyn meets George Daniels, Britain's greatest living watchmaker

George Daniels is a bona fide living national treasure, as declared by *Country Life* magazine. But to those who appreciate watches, the 84-year-old is simply known as the greatest living watchmaker.

Representing the now rarest of breeds, the English watchmaker, Dr George Daniels CBE, MBE is a reminder of the contribution that Great Britain has made to horology through the inventions of men such as Tompion, Mudge, Arnold and Earnshaw. Each watch created by Daniels is unique, every component having been made in his Isle of Man workshop.

At the workbench for more than 63 years now, Daniels' interest in horology began as a curious five-year-old fascinated by the inner workings of a mechanical watch. As he grew up, his love of timekeepers flourished and, with his developing understanding of the theories of dynamics, he realised watchmaking's



National treasure: Daniels invented the co-axial escapement

“fundamental problem” – one that took him 30 years to solve with the invention of the co-axial escapement.

The co-axial escapement can function with virtually no

lubrication, is immune to deterioration of the lubricant and is now hailed as one of the greatest horological developments of the past 300 years. But when Daniels first

unveiled the concept in 1976, he faced scepticism from the industry, before the Swatch Group's late Nicolas Hayek eventually adopted the idea.

“At this stage, it was still a long way from being finished,” says Daniels. “But Mr Hayek believed in it. He took on the project for Omega and, 15 years and millions of Francs later, it was ready for commercial use.”

Now, to celebrate 35 years of the co-axial escapement, Daniels and his protégé Roger Smith are creating a 35-piece limited edition anniversary watch. Eight will be made throughout 2011 and 10 per year after, each watch carrying a £142,000 price tag.

To many, Daniels is the man responsible for the revival of the mechanical handmade watch, beginning with Watch No.1 in 1969. And when it comes to his legacy, it is fair to say that, among other things, he will be remembered as a leading protagonist in the battle to prevent a quartz takeover by striving to show that a mechanical watch can perform as well as an electronic one.

“To have real value, a watch must be hand-finished and, when completed, should look as though it was created rather than made,” he says.

Tracey Llewellyn is Deputy Editor of QP watch magazine