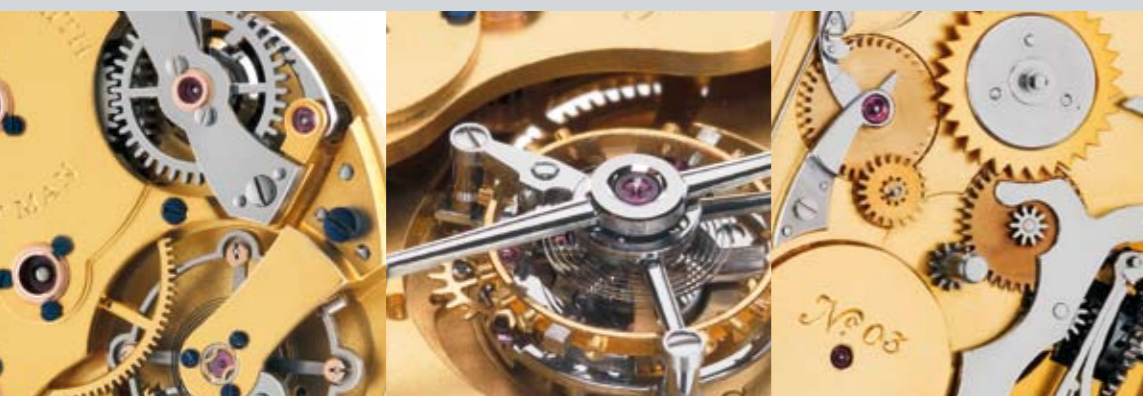


# ROGER SMITH,

WHEN WE FIRST MET ROGER SMITH IN 2004 ON THE ISLE OF MAN, HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM THE FIRST TEMPUS WATCH SHOW HELD IN SINGAPORE, AN EVENT ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO HIM PERSONALLY. "IT WAS MY FIRST DIRECT CONTACT WITH COLLECTORS FROM THE FAR EAST AND A PLATFORM WHERE I WAS ABLE TO PRESENT MY NEW SERIES 2 WATCH. THE INITIAL INTEREST WAS INTENSE, THE FIRST WATCHES WERE SOLD, AND NOW IN 2006 I AM PREPARING FOR THE SECOND TEMPUS EVENT SCHEDULED FOR 2007, WITH NEW MODELS AND SPECIAL PIECES ALREADY BEING PREPARED. THE INTEREST AND APPRECIATION FOR FINE WATCHMAKING IN THE FAR EAST HAS CONTINUED UNABATED EVERY YEAR".



# WATCH- MAKER EXTRAORDINAIRE



## ROGER SMITH,

The young, blushing Smith (36 years old from Bolton, England), is part of a very small and select company of young watchmakers who dazzle and delight aficionados of hand-made watches with their stunning creations. "When I had finished school in Bolton, I was only sixteen but had to choose between attending the cabinet making course or the watchmaker course. Deft and skilled with my hands, I had always known I wanted a very hands-on profession and horology was ideal. After attending a three-year course and receiving a medal from the British Horological Institute for Best Student, I started working for the importer Duval, who dealt with brands such as Girard-Perregaux and TAG Heuer. However, after a while, it became clear that after sales service held no challenges for me. There was an intense desire to create something myself. But my only experience at that time was with antique clocks and movements. After having bought and read George Daniels book 'Watchmaking' a total of four times, I took the decision to ask Daniels to adopt me as his student and even went to the Isle of Man to go and talk with him personally. He told me he did not hire any staff, ever. But he did tell me 'if you are really committed, you can do it'. Well, my commitment was clear and I returned to England and got started. Aiming high, my first project was to be a pocket watch with a tourbillon movement. With just Daniels' book as my guide, I had to learn everything myself, step by step, and it took me more than 18 months to complete that watch.

## GOOD ENOUGH

Roger Smith returned to the famous man in 1992. "That was quite something! I had no idea what to expect and after showing my first creation to George, he bluntly told me it was no good: you could tell it was hand-made, the finishing had to be much better. So this first watch got put on the shelf and a new beginning was made to create Nr. 2, again completely from scratch. Raising the bar on this one, my goal was to create a movement with double spring barrels, again with a tourbillon, but in addition with a perpetual calendar. I made and re-made that watch four times, and it became better every time. You know, in the 17th century, they needed 36 specialists in order to make just a single movement. I had to master each of these specialist skills alone. It took me five whole years, and in 1997, I was finally ready to return to Daniels in order to show him the end result. His reaction was much more positive than my first attempt, but this time he told me that it was artistically lacklustre. But he did not seem to think that was a problem, he said that would come with the years."

Six months down the line, Roger Smith unexpectedly received a unique offer from his great mentor, when Daniels asked Roger to come and work with him on a series of 50 Millennium Watches with co-axial escapements.

"Daniels had been given 50 base Omega movements, and my task was to refine them to perfection. In addition, I had to make all sorts of other parts myself, including the rotor, the





crown, the case, the dial and the hands. It was kind of like a long master class, now also including design questions. The work was scheduled to take a single year, but I ended up staying for 3 years in order to finish all 50 watches. After that, I took the jump and started my own business, also here on the Isle of Man and even found a home within seven miles from Daniels' house. That was six years ago. Initially, I had intended to concentrate on pocket watches (Smith already made a pocket watch in commission during his years of working with Daniels), but pocket watch collectors are the smallest group of collectors in the world. So I decided on wristwatches, creating everything myself, even such typically mass produced items such as the case, dial and hands, with the exception of only a few parts.

### LIVE AND LEARN

Roger Smith managed to sell his first 12 watches quite quickly, mainly thanks to the Internet, which even today is an important part of communicating with watch collectors. Smith: "Collectors can find you so much faster



this way, ask questions and get personal answers at a speed which was unheard only 10 years ago. For this reason my new website will go online in October 2006 and will contain much new information and details. In 2006, production equipment has been set up in order to manufacture the complete Daniels co-axial escapement in house. Although I was initially sceptical about the escapement, not then fully understanding all details of how it functioned, my work with Daniels, allowed me insights and intimate knowledge so that I am now fully convinced that this escapement is a great step forward. The workshop plans to produce about 25 watches each year, and I have been lucky to find two people, in addition to my current assistant, to make that possible. In addition to these pieces, there is also the possibility to create unique or commissioned pieces as well as clocks. However, I draw the line at restoration work, as the workshop's goal is the creation of new timepieces.

It is quite natural that Roger Smith shares quite a few key concepts with George Daniels:



"I try to bring back the old qualities of the traditional watchmakers' work without the negative sides of the past. I would like to be one of those people to shape the British tradition in the future. That Swiss companies are using the names of our great horological heroes like Graham, Arnold and Tompion, for mass-produced Swiss watches is a farcical adventure, nothing more than a clever marketing trick. These days, the workshop regularly receives orders, especially from high echelon collectors from the USA and England. I would like to go back to the days when you did not buy a watch from the shelf, but rather ordered a tailor-made timepiece, the same way some people still do with tailor-made suits and shirts. I would love for people to come visit here to discuss their wishes and ask me to design a watch based on those requirements. That would really make me happy!"