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BY ANGUS DAVIES

Dubois et fils DBF009 Watch Review

The Dubois et fils DBF009 is a modern-retro watch that features a charming twist. Designed by the highly talented Stephan Messmer, this latest timepiece features a new, completely overhauled and revised Calibre Fabio 001 automatic movement. The mesh-wooden dial from every angle courtesy of its inserted dial and pointed hands. Thomas Dove reveals to the Board's new watch review, the ins and outs of this unique, limited edition quarter-mark, it an easy, discovery a mind blowing treasure trove of horological artefacts.

Pilots' watches

In 1916, Louis Cartier created the first men's wristwatch for his friend, the Brazilian aviator, Alberto Santos-Dumont. While performance of this era usually carried a pocket watch in a waistcoat pocket, they proved impractical. Indeed, trying to simultaneously fly a plane while timing a flight must have been near-impossible. The solution came in the form of a wristworn pilots' watch.

During the 1930s, pilots' watches were used as navigation tools and became very popular. Famously, several brands produced 'B-Uhr' watches for the German military. These typically measured 55 mm in diameter and were worn over the sleeve. Later, the B-Uhr watches inspired various firms to create smaller versions of the military-inspired wristwatch. These latter watches gained popularity during the 80s and continue to enjoy a loyal following.

Over the years, Swiss watch brands have worked with various airlines, creating watches for commercial pilots, sometimes incorporating the colours or insignia of a particular carrier. Originally conceived as an alternative to the pocket watch, the wristworn pilots' watch became a complement to cockpit instruments. Thus, the watch needed to be legible, robust, and resistant to electromagnetic interference. Some are enriched with delightful variety, while the finest of a vintage movement adds an additional dose of charm.

Recently, I visited the company's new facility at Wallenrf, just on the outskirts of Basel. In this factory, I saw closely at the Dubois et fils DBF009, pointing out some of its characteristics. In addition, I also make reference to the firm's and inventory of vintage movements and historical movement parts. Without further ado, let's begin by discussing dials.

Dubois et fils DBF009 – introduction

Dubois et fils, a brand that has always been attentive to the desires of watch collectors, has created the DBF009, a series of models that inhabit the pilots' watch space, delivering cool benefits. However, these watches are not just functional tools, they are also, in the spirit of the contemporary, fun. Some are enriched with delightful variety, while the finest of a vintage movement adds an additional dose of charm.

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Dubois et fils DBF009 – Stephan Messmer

A prerequisite for a pilots' watch is premium legibility. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons many watch aficionados are attracted to this genre of watch. However, some pilots' watches can appear a tad austere, albeit this is not the case with the DBF009.

Thomas Steinemann, CEO of Dubois et fils, a son of Basel blessed with a near-obsessive attention to detail, commissioned Stephan Messmer to design the DBF009. Steinemann wanted a watch that is open, honest, and pure. Indeed, over the years, Messmer has been entrusted with designing four watches for the Swatchgroup, Tissot, Longines, Hamilton and Certina. Messmer has also been responsible for several brands within the watch industry, including a stint as Product Design Manager at Omega.

Dubois et fils DBF009 – dial

Dubois et fils DBF009 – case

Dubois et fils DBF009 – case

The watch industry is not immune to changing tastes. In recent years, case sizes have become smaller, with many so-called experts dismissing anything that is not 38 mm or 40 mm in diameter. In my opinion, a more important consideration than mere diameter is how the watch looks, fits and wrist-wrap incline the wrist.

While Dubois et fils does offer a 39 mm option in the form of the DBF004, it has not been afraid to look at the past and produce a watch that is 44 mm in diameter. Indeed, this is a size that is very common in the history of pilots' watches, seems appropriate. Moreover, the lugs are from the case middle and are comparatively short. Having worn the watch, I found it confirmed a cosseting wrist fit.

The case is formed of Grade 5 titanium, an alloy comprising 90% titanium, 6% aluminium, 4% vanadium and minuscule traces of iron and oxygen. Grade 5 titanium is very strong, light, not liable to corrosion, biocompatible, and hypoallergenic. Titanium is also a good material for watch cases (and watch bracelets). Nonetheless, Dubois et fils has enriched the appearance of the watch by partnerships with Swiss brushed surfaces. While most models present the titanium in its customary silver grey tones, the Swiss brand offers some references with a stealthy black DLC coating.

If you were in any doubt about the models aviation themed inspiration, look no further than the crown. Indeed, Steinemann commissioned Messmer to design a crown that resembles a propeller blade. Indeed, I have blades, (aren't every they?) in my casual pose simply to manipulate. I could not help but smile when adjusting the hour and minute hands. Ask yourself, how often do you smile when winding your watch?

To the now, the watch is equipped with an exhibition caseback, allowing wearers to admire the automatic movement within.

Dubois et fils DBF009 – vintage

For those ESCAPEMENT readers who are unfamiliar with the Dubois et fils story, the company has chosen to use vintage movements in a world now accustomed to recycling. It seems very sensible to unpack old calibres languishing on a shelf and restore, service and rinse them with a new lease of life.

There is a widespread belief among many watchmakers that the various grades of steel used in the past were superior to those of today. Indeed, a while ago, I discussed this point with Thomas Dreisvogt of Dubois et fils. Dreisvogt pointed out that the gear train wheels were generally bigger and the bearings were also larger in scope. It is not to remembered that many mechanical watches made in the 60s, 70s and 80s, featuring Felica or Incabloc anti-shock components were intended for manual workers where industrious wear an important consideration.

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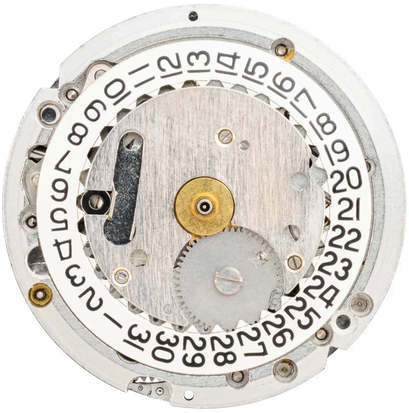
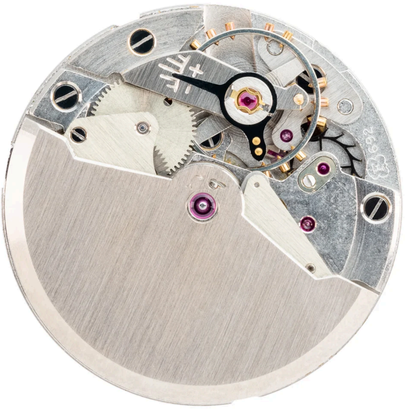
While DuBois et fils used modern-day movements in its early references, it made a strategic decision to 'go vintage' a few years ago. Indeed, in 2017, the company acquired 230,000 vintage movements. Since then, this figure has increased with further acquisitions. Moreover, its inventory now includes dials, movements, etc for a myriad of brands, including Omega, Rolex, Tissot, etc. Chatting to Thomas Steinemann, the company has the means not just to service its own timepieces but those of several other brands should it wish.

DuBois et fils DBF009 – Calibre Felsa 692 automatic

The DuBois et fils DBF009 is equipped with a Calibre Felsa 692 automatic movement from 1948. This movement belonged to the now-famous 'Bidynator' family, a series of calibres created by the Grenchen-based movement specialist. Conceived in 1942, the Bidynator is a bi-directional winding system that energises the mainspring, a mechanism that has since been emulated by other brands.





'New, completely overhauled and revised', the Calibre Felsa 692 automatic features an Incabloc shock protection system and contains 17 jewels. The watch has a screwed balance and is fitted with a traditional curb adjuster to alter the rate. DuBois et fils has chosen to embellish the automatic device bridge and rotor with a grained finish, an approach befitting the honest character of this period movement.

Closing remarks

If we consider pilots' watches or divers' watches, they were originally intended for professional use. However, their design, legibility and robustness have seen both genres of watch resonating with a broad, civilian audience. DuBois et fils has recognised the potential mass appeal of these timepieces, releasing divers' models (DBF007) and, more recently, pilots' watches (DBF009).

The DuBois et fils DBF009 proffers an abundance of eye-appeal with handsome dials and cases, rich in considered detail. The addition of a tried and tested Felsa movement augments the allure of the model and differentiates the watch from most of its rivals. Moreover, considering the company's fondness for Swiss-made components, the watches are priced competitively.

As I surveyed the brand's pristine workshop, I marvelled at the many boxes of vintage movements and watch components, all neatly arranged on shelving. I couldn't help wonder what other delights were shrouded in protective wrapping, waiting to be discovered, destined for a future powering new yet to be released DBF references. DBF010, DBF011… where will Thomas Steinemann find his next source of inspiration?

Further reading

https://duboisfils.ch/

Technical specification

- **Model: DuBois et fils DBF009**
- **Case: Grade 5 titanium or Grade 5 titanium with black DLC coating, diameter 44 mm, height 12.38 mm (with glass), water resistance 2 ATM (20 metres), sapphire crystal to the front and rear**
- **Functions: hours, minutes, centre seconds, date**
- **Movement: Calibre Felsa 692, self-winding movement, frequency 18,800 vph (2.5 Hz), 17 jewels; power reserve 44 hours.**
- **Strap: rubber with top side textile polyester and fitted with a polished and brushed Grade 5 titanium clasp**
- **Price: starting from CHF 8,250 including VAT (RRP as of 15.7.2025)**
- **Limited Edition: all models are limited to 22 pieces each (176 watches in total)**

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