



MAURICE LACROIX
Switzerland

*The Movements
of the Masterpiece Collection*

MASTERPIECES



Editorial

„... from the veil of oblivion
to the glow of desire ...“



René Baumann, Designer of Time

This is how a journalist referred to a Maurice Lacroix limited edition when writing about the *Masterpiece* collection. With great devotion to detail, René Baumann, the spiritual father of these masterpieces, has aroused a number of these acclaimed movements from their extended slumber to make them into desirable timekeeping classics. They epitomize a short past already considered venerable for a watch brand with just 25 years of history.

„Do not disdain the Master,“ admonishes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his „Faust“. Indeed, there is something that cannot be overlooked: when you want to be called „master“, you must be intimately familiar with your trade and be ahead of those you're teaching.

While the premier watches of the *Masterpiece* collection are mechanical timepieces with a contemporary design, technical know-how has afforded them greater functionality. What's more, they deliver foremost authenticity and appeal since the availability of original movements is limited.

Many timepieces of the *Masterpiece* collection harbor preciously rare gems: movements from the heydays of mechanical watchmaking now available only in limited numbers; lovingly ticking treasures whose production ceased a long time ago. They underscore the stringent aspiration of *Masterpiece* watches to combine the best of fine craftsmanship with masterful finishing. This portrait depicts those watches which derive from movements that are discontinued for the most part. It is intended for those who are fortunate enough to call one of them their own, and for those who, until now, have perhaps not been so lucky.

Maurice Lacroix chose to publish this brochure because a long and sometimes turbulent history surrounds many of its movements. It aims to provide the kind of background information which many aficionados of mechanical watches may find most valuable or even indispensable.

Peseux

Scaling time –
hour by hour.



Original Peseux 7046 movement.



ML 28 movement based on the Peseux 7046.

Peseux 7046 movement

In 1923 Charles Berner started a small manufacture in the community of Peseux (canton of Neuchâtel) for the production of movement blanks with pallet escapement. These movements were primarily intended for the watch industry's new rising star, the wristwatch. By late 1933 output by the young ébauche maker had reached 215,980 units.

In 1935 the company's product line comprised some 15 different basic movements, all handwind. Products ranged from the 4 ¼-ligne baguette movement with the designation 90 (9.8 x 24.3 mm) to the oval 50 (13 x 22 mm) and the tonneau-shaped 110 (18.8 x 26.35 mm). Among the „jewels“ of this small movement maker is the much sought-after Peseux 260.

In 1968 Peseux introduced its 7046 handwind movement. It crowned the successful 7040 movement family with small second (23.30 mm diameter). Unlike its basic 7040 counterpart, the 7046 movement included a push-piece-activated date window. Balance frequency was a moderate 21,600 A/h.



Masterpiece hallmarks: intricate dials and cases.

In response to a growing demand for thin watches, the different movements became available with beveled edges. Not only did the sides remain low but they also gave the impression of relatively flat cases despite a movement thickness of 3.1 mm.

1985 marked the end of 60 years of movement making. It involved the 7001 available from ETA today but launched in 1971. While the Peseux name has been history since 1985, the 60 movements developed and produced by the movement maker live on among collectors everywhere.



Ref. 28.762-1101



Valjoux

A chronograph classic wound by hand.



Original Valjoux 23 movement.



ML 83/72 movement based on Valjoux 23/72C.

Even though this number may appear high at first, output was infinitely small when considering it spanned 60 years of production. Outstanding quality commanded relatively high prices and therefore low output. In addition, almost all renowned watchmakers (e.g. Audemars Piguet, Patek Philippe, Rolex, Vacheron Constantin) used the classic Valjoux 23 movement in their chronographs. A pivoting ratchet wheel controls the movement's start, stop and reset functions. But watch aficionados recognize the premier Valjoux movements not only on the basis of their characteristic levers, sliding gears, springs and wheels but also because of the ratchet wheel itself with no less than nine columns, more than any other similar competitor product.



Ratchet wheel with nine columns.



Only 65 (!) ratchet wheel chronographs were ever crafted in yellow gold.

Valjoux 23 movement

When the military demanded reliable wrist chronographs at the onset of World War One, even Switzerland's mechanical watch wizards were unable to deliver. Movements that were sufficiently small but dependable were virtually unavailable. Of course, it did not take long for expert movement makers – including Valjoux – to meet the demand. By 1916 the 13-ligne 23 chronograph movement (29.33 mm diameter, 5.85 mm thick) had become a production model and was chosen by a multitude of wristwatch manufacturers for many years to come. Some 125,000 movement blanks of this type were produced until 1974.

Valjoux 72C movement

At the time, chronographs had no calendar features. To remedy the situation, watchmakers had recourse to a proven predecessor, the Valjoux 72 VZH, a variation of the legendary 23 movement. Launched in 1938, the movement

featured an additional 12-hour counter for longer time intervals. Located underneath the dial, the corresponding mechanism offered sufficient room to accommodate a simple but complete calendar. In 1946 Valjoux came out with its new 72C caliber – also 6.95 mm thick – with day and month displayed through small apertures in the dial. A central hand points to the date.

Months with fewer than 31 days require manual correction. The 72C movement is a typical Valjoux product with a horizontal wheel clutch connecting movement and gears, and functions controlled by a nine-column ratchet wheel. The 72 caliber and its derivatives were made until 1974. That year marked the end of an important chapter in Swiss watchmaking history. But the legend lives on through an inventory of the premier watch movements finished with tender-loving care by Maurice Lacroix.



Original Valjoux 7736 movement.



ML 46 movement based on Valjoux 7736. The limited quantities of original parts for the screwed balance were earmarked for 700 watches in gold/steel.

Valjoux 7736 movement

But there were also watchmakers who wanted to supply their customers with more economical chronographs. The answer came in 1946 by the name of 77 ECO, a 13-ligne ratchet wheel movement in which the customary clutch is replaced by a so-called oscillating gear. Introduced in 1967 and produced until 1973, the 7730 movement with its intelligent guideway – to replace the intricate column wheel – and customary wheel clutch, became the basis for the 7733 series introduced in 1969. With 30 or 45-minute counters included in the basic models, the 7734 added a date display, the 7736 (31.0 mm diameter and 7.4 mm thick) a 12-hour counter. With its automatic 7750 movements gaining momentum, Valjoux ended the production of these handwind movements in 1978.



Made just 220 times and no longer available: Valjoux 23 chronograph in yellow gold.

199 aficionados of mechanical watches are the proud owners of a steel chronograph with 7736 movement.

Venus

*Venus 188 movement –
an eloquent name for a masterpiece.*



Original Venus 188 movement.

Venus SA was founded by P. Berret, J.-B. Berret and O. Schmitz in the year 1924. Home to the movement maker was the community of Moutier in the canton of Berne. One year later, Gasser & Co. of Biel acquired the estate of J.-B. Berret, who had withdrawn from the business. But lagging sales is not what caused the company's demise. No less than 38,000 blanks were made each year by a workforce of 25. With 44 watchmakers and other employees on the payroll, production of pallet movements for men's and women's wristwatches soared to 146,000 in 1927.

Such handwind pallet movements featured a round, tonneau-shaped or rectangular design, the latter with beveled or rounded edges. Economic difficulties forced Venus SA to join fast-growing Ebauches SA in 1928. A patent for a first chronograph was awarded to Venus SA in 1933. The movements it made as early as 1935 allowed to measure times of short duration without jeopardizing timekeeping precision. The movement's intricate gears could be admired through a see-through back.

By 1950 five basic movement models had evolved: 150, 170, 175, 179 (with dragging hand) and 188. They were to form the basis for another 15 movements. Towards the mid-'60s, however, the entire mechanical chronograph sector suffered a massive decline due to the growing demand for automatic hand-wind stopwatches. While not immediately available on the market, they spelled the end for Venus SA. In 1966 it closed its doors after 40 years of illustrious performance on Switzerland's watchmaking stage.



Venus movement by Maurice Lacroix. Screwed balance included.



But when Venus SA folded in 1966, it did not mean a final end. Some of the rare movements were found elsewhere under a different name. The Venus 188 movement, for example, met with renewed success one year later at Valjoux, its bigger competitor. Under the name 7730, no less than 175,000 units were produced until 1973, proof positive that the Venus movement launched in 1948 did have a great deal of merit.

Admittedly, it did not have a ratchet wheel. But that alone is not necessarily the measure of all things. A revolving cam activated at the push of a button delivers the same reliability. Considered in the late '40s to be a precursor for things to come, the Venus 188 movement integrated all of the features of a classic chronograph: horizontal clutch, large balance with a frequency of 18,000 A/h or 2.5 Hz. It allowed to stop the time 1/5 of a second and to measure time intervals up to thirty minutes.



The edition was limited worldwide to 425 pieces in pink gold and just 125 pieces with platinum case.

A. Schild

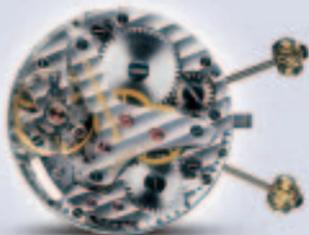
Each movement marked AS:
the handwind AS 1931.

In 1896 Anton Schild – brother of Urs Schild, founder of Eterna and of movement giant ETA – began to make his own movements known by his initials. The AS movement was born.

Anton Schild recognized the advantages of mechanized watch production at an early stage. It would deliver the precision needed to be able to readily exchange all parts. When he joined forces with British watchmaker John Harwood in 1926, the business of automatic movements was born. Following long negotiations, powerful A. Schild SA with a workforce of 2,000 merged in 1926 with the Fabrique d'Horlogerie de Fontainemelon (FHF) and Ad. Michel SA to become Ebauches AG. With 330,000 units sold between 1970 and 1974, the AS 1931 handwind movement is a truly rare



Original AS 1475 movement.



A new lease on life: the ML 63.

commodity. Blinded by the undeniable success of its mechanical movements, the rather conservative movement maker missed the necessary transition from mechanical to electronic watch. In 1978 AS saw no other alternative but to merge with ETA, a sister company of Ebauches SA. In its wake the range of available movements was narrowed down.

In 1983 when the demand for mechanical watches hit bottom, AS completely disappeared from the scene. Left behind are hundreds of movements and the legacy of the role played by a true pioneer in the field of automatic movements and wrist alarms.

Believed to be the most successful alarm movement of all times, the 11 ¼ ligne 1475 with two barrels was launched by Grenchener ASSA in 1954. More than 781,000 units were sold to a variety of watchmakers until 1970. The alarm sounded for ten seconds, the balance rotated every hour at a conventional 18,000 A/h. In 1970 AS increased vibrations to 21,600 A/h to improve precision. In the process, AS 1930 superseded AS 1475 while AS 1568 became AS 1931.

Even though AS ceased production of its wrist alarm movement in 1974, the sound lives on at Maurice Lacroix in a limited number of original 1931 movements with date display known as ML 63.

AS 5008 movement with automatic wind mechanism.

AS did not develop its automatic alarm overnight. When it was finally introduced to the marketplace in 1973, industry analysts believed it was already too late. Mercilessly, market forces put a stronghold on production. What went wrong? When quartz mania began to hit western consumers, alarm timepieces were sold for nearly nothing. The opportunity to make a profit by selling mechanical alarm movements vanished almost overnight, a bitter pill to swallow for AS. Machines ran for almost four years until the Grenchen movement maker reluctantly ceased production in 1977 of its fine Brain-matic 5008

(30.0 diameter x 7.6 mm thick with push-piece-activated date and day displays). With 180 parts a piece, some 175,000 movements were made during this time period.

The movement's breakthrough in mechanical watches came around 1990 when ML introduced a gold-plated version of an automatic wrist alarm with 17 jewels. Destined to become a much sought-after collectors' item, it was followed by pink gold and platinum models. The AS movement is the only movement in which a rotor winds both the watch and alarm. In later years, ball bearings were added to the conventional shaft rotor while the number of jewels rose from 17 to 31.



Original AS 5008 movement.



ML 22 movement with rotor removed.



The pink gold version was limited to 999 pieces. Just 199 were available with platinum case.



Early Maurice Lacroix wrist alarm, not limited and pink gold-plated. Later, pink-colored cases with lower copper content were used predominantly.

Current version in stainless steel.



Ref. 20.779-6705

Unitas

Unitas 6376 movement.



Original Unitas 6376 movement.

The origins of the 13-ligne 6376 hand-wind movement go back to the '30s. Among its particular features are a relatively large balance, a leisurely rate of 21,600 A/h and a small second at 6 o'clock. While not particularly thin, it is very reliable, rugged and accurate.

These features in particular caused the 17-jewel Unitas 6376 to be preferred by the military. Nicknamed „army movement“, it became the movement of choice for military wristwatches. While production of the popular blank continued between 1978 and 1985, sales were suspended as early as 1984. Since then, the 6376 has become a much sought-after movement especially when refined and decorated for ML 50, ML 53 and ML 56 movements from Maurice Lacroix.



The ML 50 movement version.

The steel version was limited to 400 pieces. Worldwide only 350 were available in yellow gold.



Masterpiece power reserve with ML 50 movement. The convenient indicator is positioned between 9 and 12 o'clock.



A matter of seconds.

This extraordinary way of keeping time derives from precision pendulum clocks, the so-called regulators. Until the middle of the twentieth century, these most accurate of timekeepers were located underground in observatories everywhere to protect them from the effects of vibration. They were also used by watchmakers to verify the rate of their watches.

When it came to timekeeping for scientific or technical purposes, seconds and minutes proved more important than hours. Equally indispensable was the capability to read time promptly and unmistakably. Guided by these prerequisites, watchmakers created a special dial with large central minute hand and two auxiliary dials, one in the upper half for showing the hours, the other in the lower half for indicating seconds.

By adding a central date hand, the regulator from Maurice Lacroix integrates four different timekeeping elements into one movement.

Hours, minutes and seconds go their own separate ways in the **Masterpiece** regulator with date display.



A brilliant white dial made of precious enamel hides the intricately decorated ML 56 movement based on the Unitas 6376. Limited editions of 400 in stainless steel (Ref. 56.785-1101) and just 100 in pink gold were temporarily available.

An individually numbered card certifies the limited edition of the regulator model.



Unitas

*Size is everything –
when movements measure up.*



Original Unitas 6497 movement.



The Maurice Lacroix version.

Unitas 6497 and 6498 movements.

1984 or 1985 would mark the end of Unitas. But by that time production by the Tramelan-based movement maker was limited to just three different blanks. They included the 16 ½-ligne 6497 and 6498 pocketwatch movements (diameter 36.5 mm) manufactured as early as 1967. While they managed to survive relatively unscathed the turmoil unleashed by the quartz revolution, rationalization called for their integration into the product line of movement maker ETA. The 6497 is a so-called Lépine or open-face movement, i.e. the small seconds hand is fitted in the axis of the winding stem. Its 6498 sister movement embraces the so-called savonette design in which the winding stem is perpendicular to the line joining 12 o'clock on the dial and the seconds pivot. Irrespective of their design differences, both movements are 4.5 mm thick. Their mainspring stores enough energy for two full days while the large balance completes 18,000 vibrations per hour. Faithful to its origins, the former 6497 Unitas was integrated into the pocketwatch models of the Maurice Lacroix Les Mécaniques collection.



When less is more – the Masterpiece skeleton.

Most aficionados of mechanical watches are very much interested in what is inside their favorite timepieces. The sapphire crystal back common to all *Masterpiece* models has come a long way towards satisfying such aspiration. What often remains invisible, however, is the rotation of wheels and gears as well as the transfer of force from barrel to balance. Winding and setting mechanisms are hidden from view by silver dials. This *Masterpiece* is different. While obstructive material used to be removed, high-precision machines make the dreams of today's mechanics enthusiasts come true and visible.



Ref. 16.807-1101

Left: This early Maurice Lacroix pocketwatch played one of the leading roles in Wim Wenders' „In weiter Ferne so nah“ with Otto Sander, Nastassja Kinski and Heinz Rühmann.



Ref. 76.840-1702
(available as of autumn 2000)

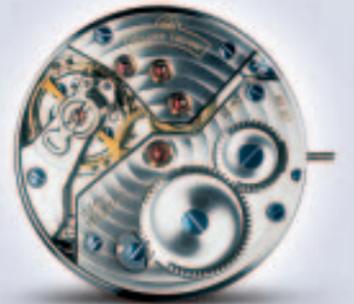
Back to the first – Calendrier Rétrograde.

Of course, the primary function of most watches is to keep track of hours and minutes. In this model, for example, central hands were chosen deliberately to optimize readability under any circumstances. A power reserve indicator at 2 o'clock shows the movement's power reserve in hours. A fine tribute to watchmaking tradition is the small seconds hand at 6 o'clock. Finally, the tip of an elegant hand positioned at 10 o'clock travels 130 degrees in one

month's time to indicate the date. On the 31st of the month, the date hands returns to its initial position, a feature referred to by professionals as „rétrograde“. Like all models with similar calendar, the Calendrier Rétrograde requires manual correction in months with fewer than 31 days – by pressing a small push-piece on the side of the dial.



Original Unitas 6498 movement.



ML 07 movement.

Jour et Nuit.

A two-legged hour hand – with sun and moon symbol at either end – rotates once a day around the small seconds hand and travels a semicircle of 180 degrees.



Ref. 07.769-1602

*Form follows function:
the FHF 29 tonneau movement.*



Original FHF 29 movement.



FHF 29 by Maurice Lacroix.

Just ten years after it was relegated to the annals of watchmaking history, the **F**abrique d'**H**orlogerie de **F**ontaine-melon received proper recognition when Maurice Lacroix adopted some of its legendary movements.

The 8 3/4 x 12-ligne FHF 29 movement (19.85 x 26.35 mm, 3.3 mm thick) made its debut around 1933 when rectangular wristwatch cases were about to reach their zenith. However, today's revival of this fine movement obliges Maurice Lacroix to allocate considerable resources. At the time, many of the movement's parts (main plate, barrel bridge, dial train bridge, pallet cock) were made in lots of one or several gross (12 x 12, i.e. 144 units).

Naturally, these parts were uniformly accurate because they came from the same lot and could be mounted without difficulty. But when machines were reset to make other movements, the components of different series were no longer readily interchangeable due to differences in size. +In other words, the „new“ FHF 29 movement required a great deal of intuition to select the right parts and to perform the necessary finishing work.

Of course, the movement depicted here reflects the high standard of finishing operations by Maurice Lacroix watchmakers: rhodium-plated surfaces with „côtes de Genève“ decoration, beveled bridges as well as pallet and pallet wheel of polished steel. A fine Glucydur balance wheel and self-compensating balance spring vibrate at 2.5 Hz for a rate of 18,000 vibrations per hour.



Ref. 35.816-1101

FHF 29 Masterpiece Limited.



Ref. 35.816-1101

The limited-edition *Masterpiece* FHF 29 is much sought-after by watch connoisseurs around the world. Only 440 were made in stainless steel, 260 in stainless steel/750/pink gold and just 100 in the exclusive 750/pink gold version. As for all Masterpiece models, a certificate testifies to the watch's authenticity.

This Masterpiece stands out in particular because of its extraordinary design. Its fine optical details and technical features are legion: hand-decorated, tonneau-shaped FHF 29 movement, 18,000 A/h/2.5 Hz, 16 jewels (15 jewels for the stainless steel model), pallet and pallet wheel of polished steel, Glucydur balance wheel, Nivarox 1 balance spring, Nivaflex main spring, sapphire crystal, case back with sapphire crystal, 925/silver dial, Louisiana crocodile leather strap.



Ref. 35.830-7401

Maurice Lacroix. Tomorrow's Classics.

Masterpiece Calendrier Rétrograde Ref. 76.840-1101



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