



TRIPLE FORMULA

*Simple, smart, sexy. That's A. Lange
& Söhne's philosophy behind this
year's Saxonia offering*

BY NEHA S. BAJPAI



The most coveted novelty from A. Lange & Söhne at last year's Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie was the Zeitwerk Minute Repeater. Piqued by an unconventional twist in the time-piece—a decimal chiming system that complements the watch's digital time display—collectors and watch enthusiasts hailed it as one of the best show-stoppers of the year.

Conceptualised and developed over five years, the complex Zeitwerk Minute Repeater, priced at ₹3 crore, was lauded for all the right reasons. However, if one takes a closer look at Lange's star lineup for 2015, it was actually the year of the simple, sober Saxonia.

Unveiled in 1994, the Saxonia got a facelift last year with the relaunch of the hand-wound, automatic and dual time models. Introduced with a discreet dial makeover and in a smaller size for the dual time and hand-wound models, the Saxonia family is all set to have a new member this year. The Saxonia Moonphase with an outsize date display is A. Lange & Söhne's latest offering for those pining for an affordable complication from the German watchmaker.

"We are not looking at surprising anyone with this launch. It is just a more useful extension of the product family," says Anthony De Haas, director, product development, A. Lange & Söhne. "It has nothing to do with the complexity of the watch, as we already know how to do a moonphase and an outsize date. We thought it was important to come back with a Saxonia with an additional function like a moonphase indication. The model is brilliant, and we decided to relaunch it with a combination that is smart and sexy."

While the base model (35mm) and the dual time (38.5mm) from Saxonia got smaller last year, the new Saxonia Moonphase has been introduced on a

SPECS

A. LANGE & SÖHNE SAXONIA MOONPHASE

Movement : Lange manufacture Calibre L086.5; self-winding; decorated and assembled by hand; precision-adjusted in five positions; plates made of untreated German silver; hand engraved balance cock

Movement parts: 325

Jewels: 40

Escapement: Lever escapement

Oscillator: Shock-resistant screw balance; balance spring manufactured in-house with a frequency of 21,600 semi-oscillations per hour, precision beat adjustment system with lateral setscrew and whiplash spring

Power reserve: 72 hours when fully wound

Functions: Time indicated in hours, minutes and subsidiary seconds with stop seconds; outsize date; moonphase display

Operating elements: Crown for winding the watch and setting the time, button for quick outsize date corrections, recessed push piece for correcting the moonphase display

Case : Diameter: 40mm; height: 9 mm; white/pink gold

Dial: Solid silver

Movement dimensions: Diameter: 30.4 mm; height: 5.2 mm

Strap: Hand-stitched alligator leather strap in black/ red brown



40mm dial made of silver. Equipped with the self-winding Calibre L086.5, the brand's 16th movement with this popular astronomical complication, the watch has a 72-hour power reserve. Available in pink or white gold, the watch comes on a hand-stitched alligator leather strap in brown or black.

One of the first four watches that marked the triumphant return of the company after a 50-year hiatus two decades ago, the Saxonja has stayed true to its roots. A classic, three-hand watch with a clean, crisp and beautifully balanced design, the Saxonja has been adapted to complications like the dual time and the annual calendar in the past.

However, it has always been a challenge for the manufacture to introduce innovation in an icon, without disturbing its aesthetics. "I believe sometimes it is easier to do a complication than redesign

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Anthony De Haas, director, product development

a simple watch," says Haas. "It is challenging to push up the Saxonja and give it a stronger identity with every model. There are not many options, as one has to stick to the limitations of design and the brand's character. We are not one of those brands who would experiment with colours and materials. We are often called boring, as we stick to classical watches but that is what we do best."

Haas says the latest launch in the Saxonja family is a great strategic move. "There are many people who want to buy the Saxonja annual calendar for the moonphase display and the outsize date, but the watch is too expensive (₹38 lakh approximately)," he explains. "For those who want to own a conventional Lange timepiece, with a magical movement and a beautiful moonphase, the

A. Lange & Söhne Saxonia Moonphase

new Saxonia is our answer. This launch is more to do with the price segmentation than complications.” Lange had not set a final price, as of *WatchTime India*’s deadline; the firm said it would announce the price at the SIHH exhibition in Geneva in January.

Lange has never run after numbers or dramatic launches. The brand has a limited production of less than 8,000 watches (priced between ₹10 lakh and ₹14 crore) a year, and it likes to keep it that way.

Over the past five years, A. Lange & Söhne has been one of those few companies that have maintained the fine balance between making critically acclaimed million-dollar timepieces and simple, sensible, classical watches.

In 2013, when the world economy took a huge dip, and watch companies were rolling out cheaper, smaller and simpler watches, Lange brought out its jaw-dropping Grand Complication

*THE SAXONIA HAS BEEN ADAPTED
TO COMPLICATIONS LIKE
THE DUAL TIME AND THE
ANNUAL CALENDAR IN THE PAST.*



The Zeitwerk Minute Repeater



priced at about ₹13 crore. Equipped with petite and grande sonneries, a minute repeater, a mono-pusher flyback chronograph with flying seconds, a perpetual calendar, and a moonphase, the Grand Complication took seven years of development. And, like all Lange watches, the timepiece spoke for itself. There was no histrionics around the launch; it was presented with a sobriety typical to the manufacture. "It was my dream to make a grand complication and we realised it," recalls Haas. "No one here in the manufacture had experienced the making of a grand sonnerie. It was a real, real bumpy road, but we did it."

As mentioned earlier, the Zeitwerk Minute Repeater launched last year was yet another exceptional complication. It marked the 200th birth anniversary of its founder, Ferdinand Adolph Lange. Based on the Zeitwerk Striking Time (Lange's first chiming watch unveiled in 2011), this minute repeater combined traditional high-watchmaking with a contemporary display.

"To integrate the minute repeater in the already complicated Zeitwerk was ridiculously crazy," says Haas. "The technical details required a lot of hard work. In most minute repeaters, you have no chance to count [the strikes], as they are far too quick. One must not



The Grand Complication launched in 2013 took seven years of development

A. Lange & Söhne's relaunch in 1994



Anthony De Haas, director, product development, A. Lange & Söhne





The new manufacture, spread over 5,400 sq.ft promises a better work environment and streamlined production



BUILT OVER THREE YEARS, THE MANUFACTURE FITTED WITH A GEOTHERMAL ENERGY PLANT, IS REPORTEDLY THE BIGGEST INVESTMENT EVER MADE BY A.LANGE & SÖHNE.

forget that the real purpose of a minute repeater is that one can count and note the time. Some would use 'louder the better' as a yardstick, but I am totally against measuring decibels to decide the quality of a minute repeater. It is like trying to define poetry in a math-

ematical way."

One would wonder why the Grand Complication was not reserved for a big occasion, like the founder's 200th birth anniversary. Haas has a simple explanation: "Once the prototypes are ready, there are two possibilities. You

launch it then or you wait to launch later on a big occasion. You can't sit on such things. We have enough ideas, but not all of them can be realised at once. We segment them as per a plan. We are very happy with how we have planned our launches and we have a lot of exciting things coming up."

Famous for its fanatic attention to details, A.Lange & Söhne works at a more relaxed pace than most of its competitors. From designing to movement production to testing and finishing, each watch takes 6 to 14 months of manufacturing.

In August last year, the company opened its new building in Glashütte. Built over three years, the manufacture is reportedly the biggest investment ever made by A.Lange & Söhne. Spread over 5,400sq.ft, the eco-friendly building, fitted with a geothermal energy plant, promises not only a better work environment but also a streamlined production.

"When you see the new buildings here, you may feel we have a big plan to increase our production numbers. But this is not really about expansion," says Haas. "The idea is not to make 10,000 watches a year. If you look at the kind of watches we have made in the past five years, we have more complicated watches in our collections. So we need more skilled watchmakers and train them, which is going to take a lot of time. The old buildings were not fit for watchmakers. The production was scattered over six buildings, which was quite unmanageable. But now we will have everything under one roof."

Tucked deep inside a serene valley in eastern Germany, Glashütte was historically known for silver mines. In the 1840s, when the mining industry was on the decline, Ferdinand Adolph Lange introduced the art of watchmaking to a bunch of youngsters, who had

keen eyes for detail and craftsmanship.

Today, the tiny town is home to 16 watch brands, which provide employment to more than 3,500 people, almost half the population of Glashütte. At A.Lange & Söhne, almost 10 per cent of the work force is employed with the product development department. “We have 55 people working in product development, which is quite a lot. It includes product and movement design, and also the technology department, where highly experienced people decide which machines or handcrafting techniques would be used to finish a particular part of the watch. Then there are prototypists and technicians in the testing department,” says Haas. “I think we have a very good team. We work as per a five year plan and we exactly know what we are going to bring out till 2019.”

While the broader expansion strategy at A. Lange & Söhne is to maintain a steady growth with its key collections and introduction of a few clever pieces year on year, there is a dedicated effort put into perfecting older models and icons from the various families.

Last year, the manufacture relaunched its flagship watch, the Lange

1, with a new movement. “The main reason why we introduced a new movement in the Lange 1 was that we were using a hairspring not produced by us. The construction was 24 years old and had been in production for 20 years. Back then, we didn’t have our own hairspring; it only came in 2001,” says Haas. “Over the past two decades, we have developed 51 movements. So we had the know-how to come up with something better for the Lange 1. We are glad to see that some people who already have the old Lange 1, have

bought the new model as well.”

So what is in store for the coming years? “Nothing outrageous for sure,” says Haas. “We don’t jump on trends. We don’t look at just commercial goals and making high complications to do well in the market. The idea of development is more philosophical at A. Lange & Söhne. It is our goal to surprise once in a while, but we don’t introduce a design thinking, ‘Okay, let us now do an iconic product.’ It has to fit in the product family. We have some exciting ideas, and you will hear about them soon.” ○



A. Lange & Söhne has 55 people working in the product development department

The historic headquarter of A. Lange & Söhne in Glashütte

