

Watches & Jewellery

Time to buy a piece of horological history

George Daniels sale

Simon de Burton
reports on the one-off auction of a great master's collection

Sotheby's is to sell the personal collection of clocks and watches amassed by the late George Daniels in a one-off, 134-lot auction which is set to realise in excess of £5m.

It could prove to be the most significant single-owner sale of its type since the \$28.2m Time Museum sale held by the house in 1999.

Mr Daniels, who died last year aged 85, was widely regarded as the greatest watchmaker of the 20th century.

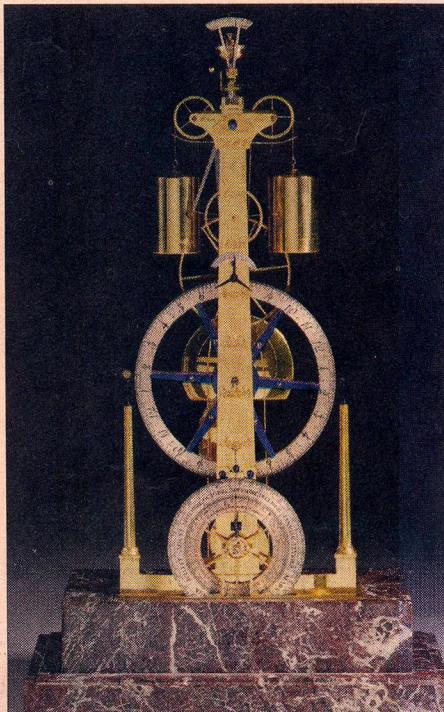
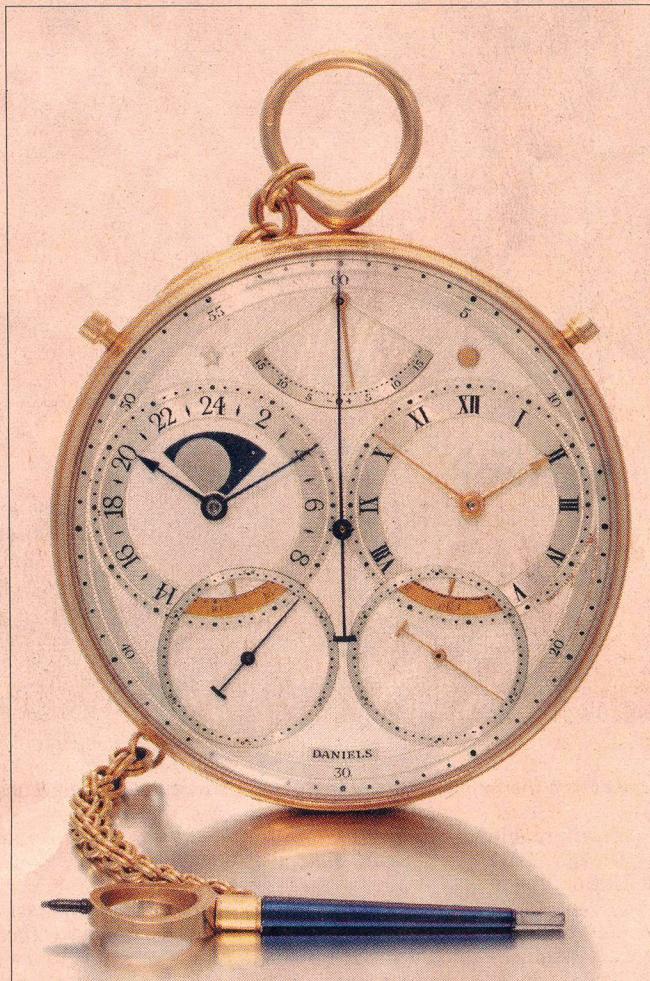
Not only did he become the only person in history to master 32 of the 34 skills required to make a watch from scratch, he also invented the coaxial escapement which is seen as the greatest development in horology for more than 200 years.

The sale, which is scheduled to take place in London in November, will include many of the 23 pocket watches he made entirely by hand and which took him up to 2,500 hours to complete.

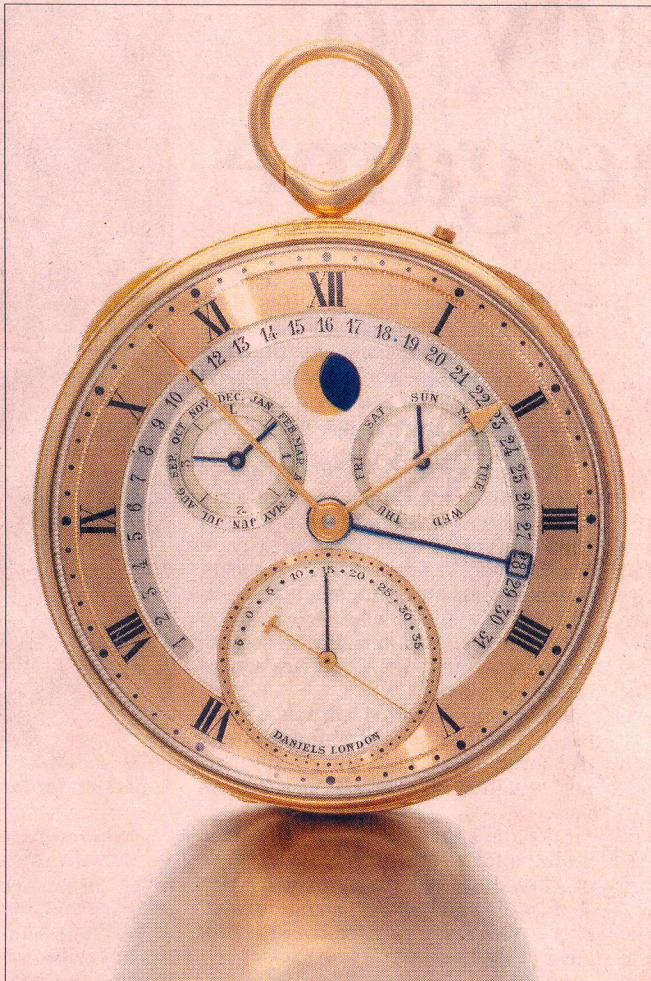
Among the highlights will be his Grand Complication watch of 1987, which features a one-minute tourbillon, minute repeater, instantaneous perpetual calendar, equation of time, moon phases, thermometer and power reserve indicator in a heavy, yellow gold case. It is estimated to fetch up to £800,000.

Another piece for which he was acclaimed, his 1982 Space Traveller watch, boasts a chronograph with Daniels independent double-wheel escapement, mean solar and sidereal time displays, ages and phases of the moon and equation of time indication. It is likely to fetch more than £600,000, while considerable interest is also expected for four of his Millennium wristwatches made in 1999.

Mr Daniels and his protege, Roger Smith (see Page 10) cre-



Clockwise from top left:
yellow gold chronograph;
three-wheel skeleton
timepiece; one minute
tourbillon; and the great
man himself (below right)



ated 50 examples of the Millennium wristwatch using the first, full production versions of the coaxial movement. When originally released, Mr Daniels sold the watches for between £25,000 and £35,000 but they now command about £80,000 at auction.

The Sotheby's sale will include two versions in yellow gold, one in white gold and a prototype (which has a solid case back instead of the sapphire crystal back of the "standard" models) as well as other wristwatches by brands such as Rolex, Omega and Patek Philippe which were adapted by fitting experimental versions of the coaxial escapement.

Also on offer will be a remarkable replica of an early 19th century weight-drive, three wheel "skeleton" clock which was

made by Mr Daniels to such a high standard that it was granted an official certificate of authenticity by Maison Breguet.

It is modestly estimated to fetch between £60,000 and £90,000, while the one and only marine chronometer he made is tipped to fetch a mere £2,500 to £3,500.

Although Mr Daniels did not have a middle name, the piece is signed "G.W. Daniels" as it was made during a phase when he thought it appropriate to have an extra initial.

The most valuable item in the sale is likely to be a £900,000, silver-mounted, ebony-cased striking table clock made in 1677 by Joseph Knibb, possibly the finest of all the early English clockmakers.

Other offerings will include

clockmaking tools, scientific instruments, the actual pantograph used by Abraham-Louis Breguet to inscribe his pieces with a "secret" signature, and a bust of Mr Daniels by the celebrated sculptor Sir Eduardo Paolozzi.

"George Daniels can legitimately be described as the father of modern horology," says Daryn Schnipper, Sotheby's international watch division chairman, who knew Mr Daniels for more than 30 years.

"He is the person who led the way for today's great independent makers and he can certainly be credited with helping the Swiss watch industry redefine itself. Very few of his watches have appeared at auction in the past, and those that have done have not been especially

complicated examples," she says.

"For that reason, I think we could see some really extraordinary results from this sale. George was the person who proved that the truly handmade, mechanical watch still had a place in the world and I think we will see lots of buyers, both old and new, who will want to own one of his genuinely historical pieces."

At the Goodwood Festival of Speed in June, meanwhile, auction house Bonhams will offer Mr Daniels' equally remarkable collection of veteran, vintage and classic vehicles which are expected to realise up to £8m between them.

The seven cars and two motorcycles include the 1929/32 supercharged Bentley four-and-a-half litre single-seat race car in which Sir Henry "Tim" Birkin set the outer circuit lap record at Brooklands at a speed of more than 137 mph in 1931. Owned by Mr Daniels since the 1970s, the car is tipped to sell for between £3m and £5m.

A 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C-2300 long chassis touring spider which Sir Henry raced at Le Mans is estimated to make up to £2.5m, while a 1908, 12-litre Itala grand prix car could realise a similar amount.

The remaining cars comprise a 1929 four-and-a-half litre Bentley that originally belonged to the Maharaja of Bhavnagar (£300,000-£400,000); a 1907 Daimler Roi de Belges tourer built for the Earl of Craven (£350,000); a 1954 Bentley R-Type Continental (£300,000-£400,000) and a Jaguar E-Type V12 (£20,000).

The two 1950 Sunbeam motorcycles from the collection are estimated at between £4,000 and £5,000 apiece.

Selected items from the Sotheby's sale will go on show in a travelling exhibition opening in London at the end of April before moving to Geneva, New York and Asia.

All proceeds from the sale of clocks and watches will be donated to the George Daniels Educational Trust to make funds available for students of horology, medicine, engineering, building or construction.

He was the only person in history to master 32 of the 34 skills required to make a watch from scratch

