

Time for a Citytamer or a Bobby Finder?

An Interview with Simon J. Critchell, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alfred Dunhill, Ltd., London

EDITORS' NOTE *Simon Critchell obtained a B.A. from Kings College London and an M.B.A. at INSEAD in France. After working for L'Oréal in several countries, Critchell joined the Richemont Group in 1990 as president and CEO of Cartier, Inc. In 2001 he was invited to take up his current post.*



Simon J. Critchell

COMPANY BRIEF *Founded in 1893 by gentleman-inventor Alfred Dunhill, Alfred Dunhill, Ltd., is now Britain's leading luxury-goods house and a world famous supplier and distributor of luxury goods, including leather goods, timepieces, writing instruments, gentleman's accessories, and high-quality menswear. The company is owned by Compagnie Financiere Richemont, a luxury-goods conglomerate based in Switzerland.*

Alfred Dunhill has just made a major impact in the watch market. Why have you gone into that area?

Dunhill has been involved in timepieces since 1903, when Alfred Dunhill first made a dashboard clock for automobiles. In fact, the signature "A. Dunhill Ltd." was featured on that dashboard clock and it's the signature we've adopted for our timepieces from now on.

But what will be different about the new collection of Alfred Dunhill watches?

The big difference, I think, is that the watch cognoscenti will begin to respect us. The watches we unveiled at the SIHH (Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie) last year are now being delivered to the finest watch retailers around the world. That collection is very different from anything we've done before. Firstly, all of our gents' watches have now automatic mechanical movements with the exception of one, the Facet 1936, which has a manual mechanical movement. There has been a significant upgrade in all the elements of our watches, with great attention to detail and a story to tell about each of them. So there's a genuine

creativity and invention that expresses the spirit of Alfred Dunhill.

Just two years ago, Dunhill produced a very beautiful, specially designed watch, called the X-Centric. It sold very well and is now a collector's item.

That's right, and today's X-Centric has been enhanced in a very interesting way. It

has the same basic shape, with an off-center dial, but the bottom half of the bezel is now adorned with a functioning gear-stick crown.

What is that?

The crown sits on top of the watch and once it is unscrewed and clicked into gear, you can turn the hands of the watch to set the time. It has never been done before; it's a completely unique piece. It comes in three dial finishes – a white dial, a black dial, and what we call a "vintage dashboard" dial. The watch is also available in both white and pink gold together.

What inspired the new Dunhill watch collection?

The collection has two basic inspirations. First, in 1936, Alfred Dunhill introduced the Facet watch, which was inspired by the interior lamps he had designed for Rolls Royce motorcars. Those watches had a faceted rectangular glass which has become associated with Dunhill, and

The Bobby Finder SP30



around which half the new collection is designed. The other inspiration for the collection is Alfred Dunhill's motoring heritage. This half of the collection shows some quite intricate case engineering – in particular the Bobby Finder SP30, a chronograph equipped with a turning bezel which tucks in and covers the pushers. That has never been done before, it's patented.

Dunhill is now focused on watches, clothing, sportswear, motoring gear, and leather goods. Why such a broad product offering?

Men are looking for things that are distinctive and different, and I think this watch collection fulfills that market niche. Every product is unique and very Dunhill: unexpected, practical and English in spirit.

Who came up with the idea for the watches?

Two years ago, I met a young gentleman named Tom Bolt. Tom has been a vintage-watch specialist for 15 years. I was looking at the possibility of bringing a vintage-watch counter into a handful of the flagship stores around the world, and I was chatting to him about it, and he said to me, "I think that Alfred Dunhill, with its wonderful heritage, has the potential to make real watches, as opposed to designer watches." So from that conversation began a whole new idea. He came back with a proposal a couple of months later that was perfect. I saw it and said, "I think this is the future right here." Dunhill is, after all, a brand for men who want something different. The watches we have made with Tom are going to be a major departure for us. The collection is quite remarkable.

How many watches are there in the collection?

The collection itself has nine basic designs, three of them built around the Facet shape. One of these, the Citytamer, has a very interesting construction; it's like a block of steel, cut through the middle in a curved shape so it sits very nicely on the wrist with a visible gasket. The two halves of the case are bolted together with off-center positioned screws. The Citytamer is an elegant sports watch and it comes in three versions – steel with a black dial, steel with a white dial, and a pink and white gold version.

Then we have the Citytamer's big brother, the Cityfighter, also featuring the split-case construction. It has a geared inner bezel that allows you to take time measurements. It also comes with a pro-

TECTIVE shield, which snaps on while you're doing work around the house or washing the car.

In addition to the X-Centric, which I mentioned before, we have the A-Centric, which has a more elegant and simplified dial.

It has the A. Dunhill Ltd. signature, but beneath the central post, rather like a dashboard odometer. It has another interesting feature – a central date hand operated by a pusher on the side of the case. The A-Centric is more elegant or a more classic watch for customers who prefer something just a little bit more mainstream. In fact, I've been wearing it since last April.

The Bobby Finder is another of our watches, I mentioned its SP30 version earlier. In 1904, Alfred Dunhill was caught speeding in his motorcar outside London and was fined by a policeman. He was completely outraged by the whole thing and wrote letters to all the newspapers and the automobile maga-

zines, and his ultimate revenge was to design driving goggles incorporating binoculars called Bobby Finders. In the advertisement, he wrote: "Dunhill's Bobby Finders will spot a policeman at half a mile, even if disguised as a respectable man." The Bobby Finder watch is interesting because it has a slightly scooped out bezel at 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock, and two subsidiary dials that echo a pair of goggles. It comes in two versions: the SP20 and the SP30. SP30 is the English code that police use for speeding in a 30 MPH zone.

There is one other watch of interest, the Carwatch. It's a homage to the drivers' watches of the '50s. It's a rectangular watch with a domed crystal, so the numbers are magnified and you can see them clearly if your hands are on the steering wheel. This particular watch comes with three strap options and a kit to change them easily, and is also available in three different versions.

We also have two ladies' watches; the Baby Facet and the Parody

Rose. The Parody Rose line offers mother-of-pearl dials in three different colors with the image of a rose showing through.

Even though we're not advertising them as such, all of our watches are limited editions. None of them has been produced in bigger editions than 1,500.



Two faces of the CityTamer (below and left). A bulldog graces the back of this elegant sports watch.

We've unveiled a couple of new models at this year's SIHH, and will introduce more in 2006.

So the idea of these limited editions is actually to make them more valuable as time goes on.

Exactly. ●

