

Engine-uity

Ariel Adams takes a close look at MB&F's Horological Machine No. 4 "Thunderbolt", one of the most visually stunning watches in existence

Is it a plane? Gadget from the future (or past)? Or perhaps a watch? According to MB&F, the new Thunderbolt, along with the rest of MB&F's products are 'none of the above.' In fact, if you ask MB&F founder Max Busser (pictured right), he doesn't even claim that his brand really makes "watches." Although his various luxury instruments do tell the time (among other things), he considers them each to be celebrations of the "machine", designed as works of art, imbued with his collective passion for mechanical devices and the items which have influenced his creativity over the course of his life. A bold claim, but one that has obviously resounded well with his clients. For the fourth major time, MB&F has wowed its legion of timepiece lifestyle-loving fans with a brand new Horological Machine.

As a boy, Busser was fascinated by planes – they even hung from his childhood room ceiling. A favorite fighter of his was the A-10 Thunderbolt. With its heavy armour and ordnance, the A-10 still sees heavy duty, and is universally recognized by its large top-mounted dual jet engine turbine pods. These pods now make duty on the new HM4 watch – being the first thing you notice when looking at the wrist contraption. Oddly enough, this Horological Machine No. 4 feels the most like an instrument when compared with the first three MB&F watches. There is a sweet synergy between function and design. The pods are mounted to face the wearer, allowing for inspection without having to angle the watch towards oneself – perfect to see easily while driving or manning an aircraft.

Functionally, the Thunderbolt is simple and straightforward. One pod has a dial which indicates the time, while another is a power reserve indicator for the manually wound movement. The power reserve indicator has a hand shaped with the iconic MB&F battleaxe motif in mind. It is easy to confuse the theme of the HM4 watch if all you have is the design to go off. However, nowhere is its aviation DNA more apparent than on the watch face itself. MB&F's rendition of the classic pilot watch style dial is a refreshing allusion to the multitude of pilot watches out there – a brief connection by MB&F to the rest of the watch world, though rendered in MB&F's signature style.

The HM4 has an incredible relationship between case and movement. Each made to work exclusively together; they are still separable in their beauty. Like Ferrari with an open window over its engine, the Thunderbolt's engine window is comprised of five custom cut sapphire crystals, three of which are solely dedicated to showing off the movement within the case. An incredibly hard-to-manufacture tubular sapphire crystal is positioned in the middle of the watch, inside both of the pods. This feature



demonstrates the apex of MB&F's education in sapphire crystals, offering an amazing cross-section view of the inner workings of a luxury timepiece machine. There are also sapphire crystals over the top and bottom of the case, as well as over each dial. Nothing about the HM4 seems hidden. From all angles there is both a view of the case and the movement inside of it – as they are meant to be appreciated together.

Can it be worn? Most certainly. At 54mm wide and 52mm long, you wouldn't think the HM4 was fit for the wrist. However, MB&F crafted the watch entirely in high-grade light titanium. Note the complex lug structure for the forward facing strap – which allows for a better fit on the wrist. The tapered alligator strap assists with comfort, and like all MB&F watches, they feel daintier on the wrist than they actually are. Visually this watch is set apart from its rivals on many levels. The case is made from almost 65 highly detailed pieces, working together to form visual mass having contrasting polished and brushed finishes.

Operationally the watch features two crowns for easy adjustment and winding. The crown on the power reserve indicator pod winds the movement which has a life of about 72 hours, while the other crown adjusts the time.

Amazingly the HM4 Thunderbolt will not be a limited edition piece, merely a limited production that MB&F expects to produce in numbers of about 25-35 pieces each year. It is a very satisfying watch from the wonder brand who has redefined the image of the independent watch maker. Priced at \$158,000 (approximately HK\$1.27 million).

Ariel Adams is a world renowned timepiece journalist and the most popular watch writer on the Internet. In addition to being the Watch Editor of HK Golfer, he publishes the luxury watch review website aBlogtoRead.com



Aeronautical DNA: Max Busser's love of planes, particularly the A-10 Thunderbolt fighter, inspired MB&F's Horological Machine No. 4



SCORECARD

Engine:
 Three-dimensional horological engine developed 100% by MB&F
 Manual winding with two mainspring barrels in parallel
 Power reserve: 72 hours
 Balance frequency: 21,600bph/3Hz
 Number of components: 311
 Number of jewels: 50

Functions:
 Hours, minutes and power reserve indicator
 Hours and minutes on right dial, power reserve indicator on left dial
 Separate crowns for time setting and winding

Case:
 Grade 5 titanium and sapphire
 Dimensions: 54mm wide x 52mm long x 24mm high
 Number of components: 65
 Articulation of lugs: 3°

Sapphire crystals:
 Five sapphire crystals: 2 x dials, 1 x central case section, 2 x display panels (top and bottom)

Strap & Buckle:
 Black hand-stitched calfskin strap with titanium/white gold custom designed deployment buckle attached to articulated lugs