

CASINO ROYALE?

HOW IS THE SLOT MACHINE
FEATURED IN THE VINTAGE 1945
JACKPOT TOURBILLON LINKED TO TIME?

BY TAY KOK CHOON



When I first came across the specification sheet and the computer-simulated drawing of Girard-Perregaux's Vintage 1945 Jackpot Tourbillon, I was bewildered. Why incorporate a non-horological feature like a slot machine into a watch? For many watch collectors, wouldn't this function be deemed 'useless' as it is totally unrelated to time?

Well, the opportunity to clarify my doubts arose when I had the good fortune to visit the Girard-Perregaux Manufacture in March 2007 (for the very first time, I must add). Along the road to the Manufacture, I was totally taken in by the mountain scenery and the snow. I must admit that my initial thoughts were that such natural beauty would probably be the main highlight of my visit.

However, such reservations were totally unfounded once I sighted the prototype of the Vintage 1945 Jackpot Tourbillon. It had taken two long years of development time and I was among the first to view the prototype, even before the management of Girard-Perregaux, so I was told.

At the moment the piece was unveiled to me, I was totally awed and speechless! It is an impressive piece of work and the very fact that I could not stop 'playing' with it

GIRARD-PERREGAUX
VINTAGE 1945 JACKPOT TOURBILLON
INTRODUCED IN 2007

FEATURES:

- GPFAY08 MANUAL WINDING MOVEMENT
- 21,600 VIBRATIONS PER HOUR
- MINIMUM 96 HOURS POWER RESERVE (4 DAYS)
- TOURBILLON
- SLOT MACHINE WITH STRIKING MECHANISM
- 43MM BY 43.95MM CASE IN PINK GOLD, 17.3MM THICK
- WATER RESISTANT TO 30M

provided proof of my deep fascination and amazement. All these despite the fact that another feature, the chiming after the reel stops spinning (following the activation of the jackpot lever), was not even in place at that point in time.

At the annual watch fair in Geneva, Switzerland in April 2007, I became re-acquainted with the Jackpot Tourbillon and what was even more exciting this time was that the chiming mechanism was now in place and functioning.



Two working pieces had been completed within a short space of one month. I was impressed and amazed.

For those not in the know, this particular timepiece pays tribute to the first slot machine made – known as the ‘Liberty Bell’ invented by car mechanic Charles A. Fey (1862 to 1944) of San Francisco in 1895.

Fey developed a machine with three spinning reels and each had five symbols painted on it: a horseshoe, a diamond, a spade, a heart and a cracked Liberty Bell (the Liberty Bell was how this slot machine got its name). The machine was in a sense, an alternative to the game of poker, replacing cards with five symbols and three reels (rather than five drums). A win was declared when three of the same painted symbols appeared on the same row in this ‘random’ game of chance after the reels are spun. The largest payout – 10 nickels in those days, is when three bells appear in a row. What is truly noteworthy is how this invention spawned the mechanical gaming industry.

The slot machine, it seems, became highly popular especially during the 1940s when Bugsy Siegel placed them in his Flamingo Hotel along the Las Vegas strip. The main reason: to entertain the wives and girlfriends of the high rollers. This is interesting as some say



The road to the Girard-Perregaux Manufacture was scenic
Photography: Tay Kok Choon

60% of a casino's profits today are derived from such one-armed bandits or fruit machines, as they are so-called.

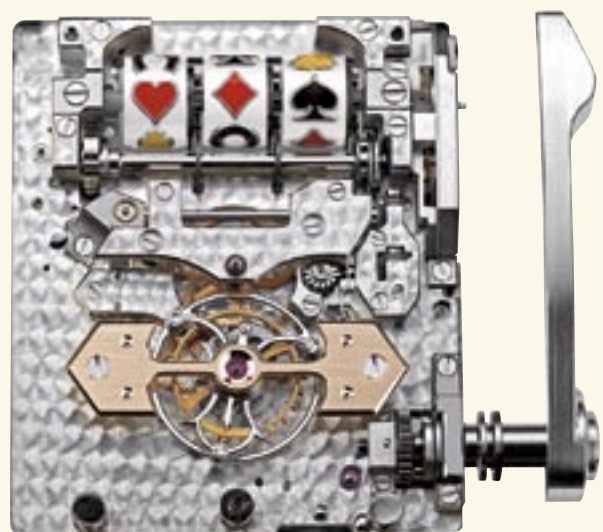
In the Vintage 1945 Jackpot Tourbillon, the five symbols are replicated on the three reels. This particular piece was made to reinforce Girard-Perregaux's positioning as an innovative and creative brand, according to the company. It was to be a 'talking piece' based on the playful concept.

I gather that such a timepiece has brought about mixed feelings in many 'purists' mainly because of the non-horological 'complication'. However, such a 'complication' to me is what differentiates this Manufacture from the rest. On the horological front, the brand's DNA is retained because of the inclusion of the trademark Girard-Perregaux Gold Bridge Tourbillon. Secondly, the mechanical jackpot with its repeater-style striking mechanism deserves mention.

Before concluding that the jackpot feature is 'useless', we must all remember that mechanical watches can, in a certain sense, be 'useless' too, especially when compared to quartz watches or even the time displayed on your mobile phones.

So why do people still prefer to spend their hard-earned money on mechanical watches? It is all about it being a work of art. We will always consider the artistic or aesthetical aspects of a watch when contemplating a purchase. As for the Vintage 1945 Jackpot Tourbillon,

the watch is unique as its 'special complication' is not about telling time but allowing the owner to spend time playing the slot machine. That by itself, makes the watch 'useful'. Do not forget that the idea for slot machines at the Flamingo Hotel in the early days was meant to entertain the wives and girlfriends while their high-rolling partners played their high-stakes poker games. **I**



Upon activation of the lever (the arm), the three reels will spin and stop randomly, displaying one of the five possible symbols. Once the reel stops, a hammer strikes a gong and a chime reminiscent of the real gaming machines sounds. Out of the 125 possible combinations, there is only one jackpot – when three bells appear in a row