

A very English affair

The story of watchmaker Bremont is one of skill, human endeavour, tragedy and fate. **Martin Puddifer** speaks to Bremont co-founder and keen shot Giles English about his company's vision.

Norfolk-born Giles English has led a fascinating life. Before co-founding his own watchmakers he had ambitions to become a yacht designer after graduating from Southampton University with a degree in engineering. It was a natural progression from a boyhood spent, amongst other things, navigating the globe with brother Nick in a boat built and captained by their late father, Euan.

Euan English was a Cambridge graduate with a passion for horology. His

workshop on the family farm included everything from clocks to guitars built by his own hand. Articles such as these, along with a broad selection of hammer and Damascus barrelled shotguns, nurtured a wider appreciation for build quality within his two sons who spent hours watching him work.

From death comes life

Euan's influence still bears heavily on Nick and Giles, not least the event that set them on course to establish Bremont. Euan was killed in 1995 when ▶

Bremont founders Nick and Giles English share a passion for engineering.

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The limited edition EP120 contains metal taken from the wing of an original Spitfire.

What's in a name?

THE STORY of how Bremont got its name is the stuff of providence. The English brothers could have bought an old name but “didn't want somebody else's DNA on their watches”, and copyrighting “English” was a non-starter.

The answer came unexpectedly in 1997 following an eventful flight over France in a 1930s bi-plane. Caught in bad weather and low on fuel, the brothers landed in a pea field.

French law dictates that any crash-landed plane be stripped and impounded before being shipped back to its country of origin. Help came in the form of the farm's owner, Antoine Bremont, who, along with his daughter, helped to push the bi-plane into a barn. Not only was M. Bremont a former pilot, he was also a keen horologist. Thanks to his generosity he had also just given his name to a new watchmaker. ■



the Harvard he and Nick were flying in crashed during a practice session of formation acrobatics. Nick survived but spent months in intensive care. The tragedy changed the brothers' outlook on their future.

"Nick and I came across a tipping point in our lives," explained Giles. "We thought let's go and do something we really enjoy doing. We thought we could do watches differently and it was always going to be about finding the right people and the right processes to make them. We wanted to push the boundaries of innovation."

"With watches, you're creating something that is going to last forever, something that needs to work. It's a slow creation process even when you are pushing yourselves. We wanted a watch you could wear in the boardroom and/or up Mount Everest, traditional in its appeal and approach, clear to read and classical in design, a watch you could really go and put through its paces."

The brothers set up a five-man workshop in Switzerland - the perceived home of watchmaking - and had hoped to launch something within two years. The first challenges were tough ones however and, despite input from the likes of technical director Peter Roberts, a 30-year veteran at Rolex, there was a five-year gap between the completion and release of their first watch, the ALT1-C, in 2007.

Bremont now manufacture between 2,500-3,000 watches a year, the production cycle of each one taking two years to complete.

From under the sea to scraping the sky

Bremont watches undergo vigorous tests. Cases are subjected to 2,000 Vickers, over five times greater than the



The production cycle of each Bremont watch takes two years to complete.

Right: The Bremont U-2 is currently used by the United States Air Force.

average test. 'Tested beyond endurance' is the mantra Bremont prides itself upon and its small collection of ambassadors can testify to the watches being able to withstand severe atmospheric conditions.

Explorer Bear Grylls wore a Bremont while climbing the Seven Summits; world champion free diver Sara Campbell tested the Supermarine 500 at depths of almost 100 metres; Charlie Boorman and Ewan McGregor wore Bremonts while biking down the globe

together; and ejector seat manufacturer Martin-Baker subjected the MBII range to pressures of 30g during one of their own testing programmes.

The Bremont U-2 watch is currently used by the United States Air Force, an association which would have pleased Euan English, although possibly not as much as the creation of the EP120, a limited edition watch manufactured using metal from the wing of an original Spitfire.

Bremont has also established a relationship with E.J. Churchill, and Giles hinted that he could turn to gamekeepers to test future collections in the field.

Revitalising the British watchmaking industry

"The British watchmaking industry was once the best in the world," explained Giles. "The great makers like

Harrison, March and Graham were heralded as world leaders but the problem came with industrialising - the British weren't good at making large numbers, partly because they wanted to remain small and exclusive. The Swiss were the China of today in terms of watchmaking because they automated a lot of the

manufacturing process. The two world wars knocked the stuffing out of British industry, but if you look at gunmakers like Holland & Holland and Purdey they've kept going and are still seen as the best in their field. It is sad that watchmaking has largely died out in this country, especially since we've got George Daniels, the world's greatest living watchmaker in my eyes, living right here. Bremont wants to be part of the revitalisation of the British watchmaking industry." 🦋

For further information on Bremont visit www.bremont.com. A selection of Bremont watches are available at the E.J. Churchill Shooting Ground. For further information visit www.ejchurchill.com/shop