



JEAN-CLAUDE BIVER

CEO OF

TAG HEUER!

This is breaking news for the friends of sport watches, which will probably change the watchmaking landscape. In case you have forgotten, allow me to remind you: Horology was never the same after Blancpain, or after (JC Biver's) Omega, or after Hublot! The first interview of Jean-Claude Biver, as CEO of TAG Heuer, is here to give you a first idea of the changes and many answers...

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CONSTANTIN STIKAS: *Whenever you become the head of a watchmaking house, one always feels you will be going all the way to the end – to the full achievement of your creative, industrial and economic goals. Is it the same thing at TAG Heuer, as a CEO, or are you there until Stéphane Linder's replacement?*

JEAN-CLAUDE BIVER: I have analysed, listened to, watched and studied TAG Heuer for 9 months. During these 9 months, I have been able to form an idea both of the extraordinary and exceptional past and of the brilliant future lying ahead for the brand. This led me to further work on the brand's culture, spirit and concept, in order to better guarantee the continuity of its extraordinary growth in today's watchmaking landscape. In the framework of the cultural evolution, we were sorry to lose some people, like Stéphane Linder. Yet, this will not prevent us from pursuing our objectives and from implementing our policy. I shall keep this interim as long as necessary, the time necessary to name a new CEO. In the meantime, I have the support, help, advice and guidance of an Administrative Committee composed of the General Manager, Mr Guy Semon, the Financial Manager, Mr Michel Mousselon, the HR Manager, Mr Philippe Rudolf, and the Marketing Manager, Mrs Valérie Servageon. These people and I are going to

: ensure, as long as necessary, the transition of TAG Heuer to the conquest of the future.

Has anything changed since December 11, 2014, as far as your role in the LVMH Group is concerned?

: To be honest, the only change will be in my work-load. It is already colossal and I can thank my lucky stars I still have all this passion, this capacity for work and, most of all, such a competent and devoted team at my side. My 40 years of experience and pragmatism, as well as my sharp instincts, allow me to...easily... take on a huge load of work!

We were accustomed to seeing you take over a house –even a historical name– and make it flourish, leaving everybody speechless as you forged new paths for everyone to follow. Now, you are at the head of a house in full evolution for more than ten years –and, what is more, at the top of the watchmaking industry– perhaps also in order to move it towards more affordable products? Is it necessary to restrain TAG Heuer's watchmaking folly and, if so, what would the expected benefits be?

: Oh, my God, what an error it would be to restrain the ascending trend in which the brand has been successfully engaged for almost 20 years! No, this is not my aim. Yet, I absolutely



*Jean-Claude Biver
with Patrick Dempsey
at the 2014 Le Mans race*

insist on confirming what the brand claims in its logo: “Swiss Avant-Garde since 1860”. It is the reason why “Haute Horlogerie” will focus, on one hand, on the iconic invention of the brand, the V4 that is, and, on the other hand (and this is new), on new technologies (such as connected watches, for instance, or other revolutionary watch mechanisms). So, I simply make a distinction between “Haute Horlogerie” and “Haute Technologie”. But, both research sources remain under the same roof, that is, the one of Professor Guy Semon. You will see that it is not about demobilizing Haute Horlogerie. It is simply about dividing the department into two activities, which does not necessarily bring us to lower average prices. On the contrary, while we are making these enormous R&D efforts in new technologies and in further developing the V4 concept, we have for the rest to be focused on the heart of our business, that is, the luxury watches of 1,200 to 4,000 Euros.

TAG Heuer's entry into the world of Haute Horlogerie which we have all witnessed during the last years, was it not, in your opinion, the best path to take, or has the market changed in these few years to the point that you have to change direction and once more place at the heart of TAG Heuer the watch that is easily accessible to a larger audience?

To my mind, entry into the world of Haute Horlogerie was not the only path for us. It is the reason why I have added new technologies to R&D. I am happy and proud to see TAG Heuer adding Haute Technologie to Haute Horlogerie. In this, we are probably the only ones to develop our research simultaneously and in the same department in both directions! This will certainly be a huge advantage and a distinguishing feature for TAG Heuer in the near future.

Of course, you have a long and very rich past in the world of watchmaking, yet your passion for Hublot had made us believe, these past years, that you would be “Monsieur Hublot” forever. Even while not being a CEO of Hublot for quite some time, you have always been part of Hublot's big decisions. Has anything changed since 11th December 2014 as far as your roles and responsibilities are concerned towards Hublot?

Nobody is eternal, yet sometimes the spirit may perpetuate itself. Just as at Ferrari, where, though Enzo Ferrari passed away, his spirit and culture are still alive and kicking. This is what I will try to do at Hublot. Because Hublot is certainly the brand that best reflects my own vision of the contemporary Art of Watchmaking. This being said, it does not prevent me at all from giving a boost to TAG Heuer, which, after all, is a brand whose message is very different from that of Hublot.

Quite some time ago, Grégory Pons wrote that, if watchmaking houses did not find a product that would replace the wristwatch, just as this had replaced the pocket watch

about a century ago, the Swiss watchmaking industry would be dead. What do you think of this?

Swiss watchmaking of entry-level and mid-range quartz watches might be threatened by the connected watch. On the other hand, the other end of the range, where the element of eternity comes into play (I, sometimes, say that a luxury mechanical watch is a piece of eternity enclosed in a case), will definitely not be threatened by the connected watch.

During your career you proved you were able to relaunch a watchmaking house by creating totally new products, always respecting the brand's DNA (e.g., Hublot – Big Bang, Blancpain – Villeret, etc). You have also been able to make a historical house evolve by developing, with great imagination and boldness, collections that had already existed for decades (Omega Seamaster, etc). At TAG Heuer's, even the greatest watchmaking follies were presented, in recent years, inside its classic collection cases. Should we expect brand new collections or, rather, updates of those already existing for quite some time now?

One cannot expect me to change the brand's DNA. It would be criminal! No, I will strictly respect TAG's DNA while making it evolve towards the future.

There is no future without innovation, but there is also no future without tradition. So, we will innovate while respecting our past and our DNA. It is a delicate and sensitive exercise. I think that this is where my experience will be most useful and influential.

A few months ago we heard rumors about you progressively closing down the Chevenez manufacture. Would you be aiming for a TAG Heuer manufacturing less than it does now?

No, I actually dream of expanding the Chevenez manufacture. And I am going to work on that. Nevertheless, in a first step and in order to reach interesting and profitable sales figures, we have decided to concentrate on one single movement (the 1887, which we will rename as CH-01) and, thus, we have abandoned the second movement. This decision, added to lower sales figures, has made some personnel redundant. But, we hope that, in the near future, we will announce the increase of the Chevenez staff. Believe me, we are all going to work in this direction and make all necessary efforts so that, one day, we make 100,000 CH-01 movements in Chevenez.

A few months ago, you announced the presentation of a Smartwatch for 2015. Would you like to speak to us about it?

Thanks to reorganizing our R&D and the division into Haute Horlogerie and Haute Technologie 6 months ago, we have been working on the connected watch and have reasonable hopes that we will be able to present such a product with TAG Heuer's signature at BaselWorld in 2016.

You have also announced the end of TAG Heuer accessories. Is this a financial decision or does it concern the brand's image?

We have lots of work and I always prefer to concentrate on my business. Accessories, except for glasses, have never been big contributors of prestige and profit margins. So, it was only reasonable we decided to keep glasses as the only accessories. I consider this is a wise decision and this is why I have fully supported it

TAG Heuer is among the watchmaking houses that have worked hard (some even say too hard) with ambassadors, creating historical advertising campaigns that will remain forever in the memory of sport watch friends. Are you thinking of following in the same path or not?

This partnership with ambassadors has been part of the brand's DNA since its very beginning. I will never change that, because a brand's DNA is sacred and nobody has the right to touch it. But one has to make it evolve. So, you can expect us to continue with the ambassadors but maybe not always in the same way!

You have undoubtedly provided exceptional results to all the watchmaking houses that have been lucky enough to be under your management, thanks to your creativity, your philosophy, your boldness and, most of all, thanks to your uncommon spirit. In his personal lexicon at veryimportant-watches.com, Laurent Picciotto wrote next to your name: "A Genius that works harder than everyone else". What are you, after all? A genius, a watchmaking magician or a tireless worker?

More than anything else, I would like to remain a modest and humble person. This is why, if I had to define myself, I would say that, first of all, I am a hugely privileged guy. God, my parents, my wife, my family and friends have given me everything. Much more than I would ever have dreamed of receiving. And, today, past the age of 65, I have this extraordinary and unique privilege of continuing my career embracing three beautiful and exceptional brands such as Hublot, Zenith and TAG Heuer. I simply have to thank God, thank Life and thank my bosses. On the other hand, I would not hesitate to define myself as a passionate guy and, for a passionate guy, there are no limits in passion or in working capacity.