

Embargo until April 7, 12:00 PM Geneva time

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Flamingo, a flaming balance watch by Anton Suhanov

Independent watchmaker Anton Suhanov, a member of the prestigious AHCI Academy, creator of three-axis tourbillon clocks and inventor of the Flaming Balance, is applying this concept to a wristwatch for the first time, which he has named the Flamingo.

World premiere

In 2016, Anton Suhanov made a striking entry into the world of haute horlogerie with the completion of his ambitious masterpiece, the Black Clock, for which he designed an impressively large three-axis tourbillon. The international community of independent watchmakers highly praised this debut, and Anton Suhanov entered the clock in the Young Talent Competition, organised by the Académie Horlogère des Créateurs Indépendants (AHCI) with the support of François-Paul Journe, founder of the F. P. Journe Invenit et Fecit brand, and won. He regards this event the founding moment of the Anton Suhanov watch manufacture, whose 10-year history is marked by the production of captivatingly extraordinary timepieces and spectacular inventions. These include the flaming balance, which, thanks to luminescent inserts, literally begins to glow as soon as it is placed in the dark. Suhanov's flaming balance first appeared in the Pharos and Lotus clocks, both featuring a three-axis tourbillon. The watchmaker also equipped the St Petersburg Easter Egg Tourbillon Clock with the same balance, which won the Horological Revelation Prize at the 2025 Geneva Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève (GPHG).

Four years ago, Anton began developing his own fully in-house wristwatch calibre — the first of his career. The debut of this new movement, and the Flamingo watch created around it, coincides with the tenth anniversary of the manufacture he founded. According to the watchmaker's vision, this movement features a flaming balance — one of his most impressive inventions — mounted on the dial side. This introduces a new dimension to the balance, traditionally seen as a purely technical component responsible for watch accuracy, by making it aesthetic, design-focused, and emotional. The Flamingo is the world's first wristwatch equipped with a balance featuring luminescent inserts, mounted on the dial side and thus permanently visible. Furthermore, the Flamingo is the first wristwatch designed and manufactured in Russia with a balance on the dial side.

It is natural to wonder whether the name Flamingo has any connection to ornithology. In fact, it does not: Anton Suhanov chose this name to emphasise, through its expressive sound, the direct link between the new watch and the flaming balance he invented. However, the flamingo and the watch named after the flaming balance are connected not only by their unusually exotic appearance but also by the immediate interest they arouse at first glance. Also noteworthy is the similarity between the balance bridge's curved, slender shape and a flamingo's neck, as well as the pinkish-red accents of the ruby jewels on the dial and the contrasting stitching on the strap, which clearly allude to the colour of a flamingo's plumage.

The spectacular dynamics of the flaming balance

After considering various possible implementations of the flaming balance concept in a wristwatch, Anton Suhanov chose to focus on a rarely used design that places the balance on the dial. This technical solution, even without dedicated luminescent backlighting, gives the balance a central role in the design, while the luminescent inserts, which dramatically reveal themselves as soon as the watch is placed in the dark, make the flaming balance the star.

Anton Suhanov aimed to make the balance wheel as visible as possible, increasing its diameter to 15.7 mm. He believes this is a record for a wristwatch with a balance frequency of at least 18,000 vibrations per hour, excluding models with a so-called slow balance wheel, which operates at a much lower frequency. In a collector-grade mechanical watch, references to both the watchmaker's previous work and the history and traditions of watchmaking are essential, he believes. That is why the frequency of 18,000 vibrations per hour is regarded a direct reference to pocket watches of the classical period, for which this frequency was standard.

One of the rules for designing a beautiful watch movement is directly related to the size of the balance: it must be large. Taking this principle into account, Anton Suhanov went further by developing a flat balance with three large round adjustment cams and three luminescent inserts of equal size. When the balance oscillates in the dark, these inserts merge into a single luminous ring, clearly visible even from several metres away, giving the watch an unexpectedly striking appearance. This design had two consequences. The first is obvious: the large cams and luminescent inserts draw attention to the balance even in daylight, when the luminescent glow is barely noticeable. The second consequence can be described as a pleasant bonus: in the dark, when the luminescence becomes visible, a complex dynamic pattern forms as the balance oscillates, creating a moving play of light reflections. Anton explains: *"There is a dual effect at work here. First, the unique geometry of the balance with luminescent inserts creates a luminous ring as it oscillates. Second, additional glare arises from the internal polished chamfers in the six holes for the eccentrics and luminescent inserts. These glare patterns are quite complex, effectively forming something like a sine wave. As a result, the luminous ring appears to shift visually, becoming misaligned with the balance axis. When you change the viewing angle, tilting the watch slightly in different directions to better observe the balance, the glare ring shifts noticeably. I observed that the shift occurs in the direction of the tilt, creating the illusion of glare on the surface of water at the bottom of a vessel."*

Unique style

What makes the Flamingo watch even more special is a design innovation first introduced by Anton in the Chronotope wristwatch, launched in 2024: the use of technical ruby jewels as design elements. The Flamingo watch dial features five such jewels, complemented by two large functional jewels on the balance shaft and the power reserve indicator hand axis, which emphasise the dial's axially symmetrical structure. The notable feature of the dial is the observatory-style hour and minute hands, a style that originated in the 1930s. By installing a cap jewel on the annular tip of the hour hand and a ruby pallet on the tip of the minute hand, Anton Suhanov creates his own version of observatory-style hands. The power reserve indicator hand is also adorned with a cap ruby jewel, while the small seconds and 24-hour hands, fitted with ruby pallets, are executed in the "tweezers" style originally developed by Suhanov for the Chronotope watch.

The Flamingo watch dial design, although regarded by its creator as avant-garde, nonetheless references the remarkable traditions of watchmaking. The overall composition of the dial, with its off-centre hour and minute hands and distinctively small round subdials, evokes the dials of Abraham-Louis Breguet's thin pocket watches, which also lack central symmetry. Anton Suhanov finds a different, philosophical meaning here: *"The symmetry and complete identity of the day and small seconds scales and hands are intended to illustrate the idea of the transience of time."*

The watchmaker also experimented with the design of the winding crown for the Flamingo watch, inlaying two ruby jewels. He intended this design to be more than decorative; it also had a technical basis: *"With jewels on the winding crown, it is easier to count its revolutions while winding the watch. This gives the crown a kind of limb — a ring with graduations for measuring angles."*

A new vision for the power reserve indicator

According to Suhanov, the power reserve indicator is one of the most valuable and useful complications in hand-wound watches. For the Flamingo, he developed an unusual and extremely rare variation of this complication with a non-linear display system. When the indicator hand reaches the red sector of the scale, which corresponds to the final 12 hours of the power reserve, it begins to move twice as fast. This enables the owner to assess the remaining power reserve more clearly

and easily, and decide whether to wind the watch. Despite the practical value of this indicator, the master also believes that this system reflects the perception of time as an unevenly changing entity: *“The less of it remains, the faster it runs out.”*

A fully in-house calibre

The development of the new Su26.1L hand-wound calibre took approximately four years. This movement, designed entirely from scratch, is a first for Anton Suhanov, who had previously used modular movements with Swiss-made base calibres in his wristwatches.

When developing the Su26.1L calibre, Anton chose a hand-wound design, and fitted the movement with two barrels to provide an extended power reserve of half a week—3.5 days, or 84 hours. He considers this duration optimal for a hand-wound watch. A greater power reserve would have required significant technical effort to address the inevitable issue of insufficient isochronism. However, needing to wind the watch only twice a week makes it very comfortable to use. The extended power reserve also easily covers the weekend, allowing the watch, when fully wound, to be left unworn from Friday evening until Monday morning, when it can be worn and still function accurately.

Ultimately, in an era dominated by quartz and automatic watches, a collector’s timepiece with a hand-wound movement offers a rare opportunity for a connoisseur of fine watchmaking to experience direct contact with the watch’s mechanics during winding. *“When you wind a watch, it’s as if you’re breathing life into it — for me, it’s a kind of meditation,”* says the watchmaker.

Movement design and finishing

The exceptional design, featuring the balance wheel mounted on the dial side and the bridge structure visible through the sapphire caseback, confirms the high in-house status of the Flamingo movement. The Y-shaped bridge for the second and third wheels, rising from the centre of the movement, is an Easter egg created by Anton Suhanov. It evokes St. Petersburg, his hometown, where this watch was made. The shape of this bridge suggests the stylised outline of the district where the Neva River divides into the Bolshaya Neva and Malaya Neva at the Peter and Paul Fortress.

This reference is no coincidence: *“At one time, I was deeply impressed by the scale of granite work in St. Petersburg in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the embankments were being lined, and by the emergence of the finest craftsmen, such as Samson Suhanov, who managed to create incredible granite works like the Alexander Column — the world’s largest column made from a single piece of granite.”* Thus, the movement becomes a kind of miniature map of central St. Petersburg, with the Anton Suhanov logo on the winding wheel cover roughly indicating the factory’s location on the map, and a large ruby jewel on the Y-shaped bridge marking the location of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Another reference to the characteristic features of St. Petersburg is the balance bridge on the dial side, designed as a drawbridge, for which the city is famous.

The movement is decorated in a traditional style, using classic finishing techniques typical of collectors’ watches. Of particular note are the polished chamfers display meticulous finishing of the sharp internal corners — this work is considered among the most time-consuming and difficult, and is therefore highly prized. In total, the Flamingo movement features 73 internal corners: 13 on the bridges and 60 on the second, third, and fourth wheels.

Flamingo

Limited edition of 38 pieces.

Technical specifications

Movement: Calibre Su26.1L, hand-wound, with a balance wheel mounted on the dial side; 37 mm diameter, 9 mm thick (6.9 mm without the balance bridge); balance wheel with three adjustable eccentrics and three luminescent inserts; balance wheel diameter 15.7 mm, frequency 18,000 vibrations per hour; two barrels, power reserve 84 hours (3.5 days).

Movement finish: rhodium-plated mainplate with perlage, Côtes de Genève on bridges, bevelled and polished chamfers.

Functions: hours and minutes on an eccentric dial; small seconds at 2 o'clock; 24-hour hand at 10 o'clock; power reserve indicator at 6 o'clock.

Jewels: 47 movement jewels; 7 additional ruby jewels used for decoration of the dial and crown.

Case: 316L stainless steel, 42 mm diameter, 11.5 mm thick; convex (spherical) sapphire crystal with anti-reflective coating; water-resistant to 30 m; crown decorated with two ruby pallets; caseback with flat sapphire window with anti-reflective coating, secured by six special three-point screws.

Dial: brass with rhodium and dark ruthenium coatings, sandblasting, straight brushing, bevelled and polished chamfers, pad printing; observatory-style hands — hour hand with cap ruby jewel, minute hand with ruby pallet tip; observatory-style power reserve indicator hand with cap ruby jewel; small seconds and 24-hour hands in tweezer style with ruby pallet tip.

Strap: high-quality grey alligator leather. The stainless steel pin buckle designed specifically for this model and crafted by the Anton Suhanov manufacture. The buckle is shaped like the balance wheel bridge and is adorned with the Manufacture's secret emblem, a stylised T, engraved inside the tongue groove.