

# Watch Journal

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# A Tour de France—Worthy Timepiece

How a former Formula One champ turned cyclist helped Richard Mille design his latest ne plus ultra watch.

By James Jung

Richard Mille may be one of the world's most preeminent watchmakers, but he's almost as famous for his obsession with race cars. Ever since bursting onto the scene in 2001 with his radical and highly technical take on the classic, barrel-shaped tonneau, the charismatic Frenchman has drawn inspiration from the high performance machines of Formula One.

In the stone-and-timber garage of his 18th-century château in Brittany, you'll find one of the world's most coveted vintage-car collections (replete with iconic open-wheel McLarens and Ferraris), while his eponymous brand name can be spotted scrawled across racing grids the world over. But it's in Mille's unmistakable skeleton-dial watches that his obsession truly

manifests itself. From aluminum-and-carbon fiber casings to shock-resistant movements as precise as a four-stroke turbocharged V6 engine, the similarities between Mille's sleek, ultra-luxe watches and the world's most bleeding-edge racing cars are striking.

And yet, for his latest limited edition timepiece, the bearded, rakishly stylish 66-year-old turned to an unexpected inspiration: cycling. It's a sport that Mille—like any self-respecting Frenchman—grew up with, and one that has recently joined his ever-growing list of passions.

"I am stunned by the power cyclists churn out," says Mille, who can be found logging serious miles on his local country lanes when he's not bombing around those

same roads behind the wheel of his Lancia Stratos rally car. He has also been following the Tour de France in person, often in the backseat of a commissioner's car embedded in the fast-moving peloton. In 2016, after Mille struck up a friendship with professional cyclist Mark Cavendish, he gifted the Welshman his personal Felipe Massa Flyback Chronograph. The decorated sprinter won his 29th Tour de France stage the following day, the timepiece strapped firmly on his wrist.

Such are the fortunes of a man who has built a business based as much on spontaneity as on rigorous devotion to detail. But, as befitting any true gear head, it was the technical innovations of modern racing bikes that most intrigued Mille.





PHOTOS: DIDIER GOURDON.

OPENING: Formula One legend Alain Prost with British pro cyclist Mark Cavendish. THIS SPREAD: Worn on the right wrist, the RM 70-01 is designed for ultimate legibility while cycling.



“The introduction of composites, the lighter materials, the performance gains in gear assemblies, these were revolutionary,” Mille says. “As a tech fanatic, I appreciate the many subtleties involved.”

To create a Tour de France-worthy timepiece, Mille knew he needed a collaborator. But rather than looking toward any number of world-class cycling companies for this venture, the watchmaker returned to his first love—Formula One. As it turned out, Mille’s long-time friend, four-time F1 champ Alain Prost, had been bitten by the biking bug as well.

“Richard is the one who had the idea for this watch,” recalls Prost, who at the height of his career was known as “The Professor,” due to his cerebral approach to car racing. “He wanted to blend automobiles

and bicycles.” Prost himself began cycling at the behest of his trainer more than two decades ago. (The idea was that the sport would help better condition him for the demands of F1 driving—a sport where heart rates consistently exceed 160 bpm.) Today, Prost rides upwards of 200 kilometers a week, and regularly competes in races like the vertiginous L’Étape du Tour and the prestigious Masters World Cycling Championships.

The RM 70-01 Tourbillon Alain Prost—which is limited to 30 collectors’ pieces—is the result of Mille and Prost’s three-year collaboration. On it, you’ll find numerous nods to cycling. Take, for instance, aesthetic details such as a barrel ratchet resembling a spoked wheel and a dynamometric crown evoking a pedal. For those more concerned



with engineering, there's the Grade 5 titanium used for both the baseplate and the Allen screws, which provides a stiffness capable of withstanding the roughest of road conditions, whether the local tarmac or the cobblestones of Paris-Roubaix.

Of course, this being a Richard Mille creation, form always follows function. So, much like he's done before for athletes including tennis star Rafael Nadal, golfer Bubba Watson and Jamaican runner Yohan Blake, he's created a watch perfectly optimized for the day-to-day demands of sport. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tonneau's rectangular and asymmetrical carbon cage, which molds to the wrist without ever digging into the skin no matter where you grip the drop bars on a road bike.

The biggest innovation, however, belongs to the titanium odometer,

a five-digit roller readout that allows riders to easily add the day's distance to their ongoing tally. Cyclists live and die by their metrics. But while most will rattle off figures like their maximum heart rate or the average amount of watts they can generate in an hour, Prost found that few can recall the total mileage they've logged at the end of the season. The RM 70-01 solves that problem. By pressing the pusher at 2 o'clock, a cyclist can activate any of the odometer's five rollers, while the pusher at 10 o'clock allows the rider to increase the number by increments of one. And there's no danger of slipping up, thanks to a spring-lock neutral position that protects you from accidentally moving the wrong roller.

Sure, most cycling computers offer an odometer—one that automatically calculates total miles—at

ten-thousandths of the cost, but anyone who's resorting to basic bean counting clearly isn't in the Richard Mille demographic.

For those who are, the RM 70-01, which is priced at a cool \$815,000, comes with an added bonus: a hand-built Colnago carbon racing bike with an electronic Campagnolo drive train and thoroughbred Italian pedigree that evokes the spirit of Formula One.

ABOVE : Four time Formula One World Champ Alan Prost, admiring the finished product.  
OPPOSITE: The Richard Mille RM 70-01.

