

S I M P L E · M O D E R N C L A S S I C



It's often been said that the only item of jewellery a man should wear is a good watch. If this is true, then it's truer still if that watch is of the diving variety. A divers' watch - thickset, reliable, and above all virile - is the man's man of watches, the time-keeping equivalent of parking a Hummer on your drive and carrying a John Le Carré novel in your hand luggage. We look at some fine examples available for under £1,500.

Robin Swithinbank

Of course, a divers' watch has the added benefit of being more than simply an aesthetic choice; it's also a tool and a potential lifesaver in a submarine world. To qualify as worthy of the 'divers' label, a watch has to possess certain qualities, first among which is, as you would imagine, exceptional water-resistance. Note watches are always 'water-resistant' rather than 'water-proof' - the Federal Trade Commission having banned the use of the word 'proof' for legal reasons.

Technically, a watch described as having 50m water-resistance is just suitable for swimming, while you're advised not to wear a watch bearing the words '100m' any deeper than you can go with a snorkel. Today, a watch must be deemed water-resistant to 200m before it's used in recreational scuba diving and is, therefore, a 'divers' watch'. From there, the figures soar, or plummet, as you will. Although extreme depth watches (those with water resistance of 1,000m plus) have been around for many years, Baselworld 2009 saw the unveiling of CX Swiss Military Watch's 20,000 FEET, making it the world's first



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watch officially capable of surviving conditions at 6,000m below the surface of the sea. Why anyone would actually need a watch with this facility is one for the marketeers to debate, but it's an achievement nonetheless.

Back in the real world, the next most important element in the design of a divers' watch is a uni-directional turning bezel, to measure elapsed time and allow for safe dive timing. Because the bezel only turns in an anti-clockwise direction, the actual dive time can only become shorter if the bezel and reading are adjusted inadvertently. Other standard divers' watch features include a screw-down or lockable crown and a combination of high luminosity and an anti-reflective finish, both to maximise underwater legibility.

With well-known diving watch icons such as Omega's SeaMaster and the Rolex Submariner all beyond our target budget, it's time to find some watches that are earning their laurels, not charging you for them. So, if you're thinking of purchasing a divers' watch but can only dip your toes in the shallower end of the market, there's no need to despair - there are more quality, automatic sub-£1,500 divers' watches than you might think. Three examples spring immediately to mind. The Longines Legend Diver (itself a reissue of a classic), Rado's retro-inspired Original Automatic Diver and the less familiar, but mightily impressive Ball Engineer Hydrocarbon Classic II. All three are water-resistant to a useful 300m and combine a sophisticated masculine aesthetic with the gruff efficiency you'd expect of equipment normally stored on a garage wall.

Longines Legend Diver

Longines' past is punctuated by associations with some of the 20th century's most daring types - among them the topical Amelia Earhart - and the company's Sports Legends collection celebrates the brand's time-keeping achievements of the epoch. The Legend Diver brings back to life a 1960 original first issued to mark Longines' 1953 participation in the depth record of the bathyscaphe *Trieste*. The 2009 edition reflects the design of the original with

blink-and-you'll miss it honesty; the only significant design tweak is the addition of a date aperture at 3 o'clock. The watch features two screw-in crowns, one of which operates an internal diving bezel that can be set to measure the elapsed dive time.

The Legend Diver has got 1960s style sewn into its DNA, now with a contemporary mechanical movement, and it's good value at just £1,280.



Capturing the spirit and design typical of the 1960s, Longines has maintained the classic look of the Legend Diver while updating its technical features.

Rado's Original Automatic Diver

Next up, Rado, a company that doesn't need a huge amount in introduction. Pioneers of scratch-proof watches and setters of the now prevalent trend to include a dollop of high-tech ceramic in every collection, the Lengnau-based company produces watches that fail gloriously to conform to the look-a-like design templates adopted by so many of its competitors.

The Original Automatic Diver is a case in point. It's instantly Rado - there's nothing else like it, making it an appealing

proposition to the consumer with a similar distaste for conformity. On paper, it features a scratch-proof stainless steel case, an automatic movement, luminous hands and red hour markers and, like the Longines, its diving credentials are based on an inner rotating bezel operated by a second screw-in crown. The addition of red and blue quarters to the bezel brings additional legibility, but perhaps the most distinctive quality is the pleasingly retro feel they have given to the watch. Yours on a bracelet for £1,050.



The Rado Original is the way divers' watches used to be - simple. It represents the unique combination of design and technology that defines the brand.



Ball Engineer Hydrocarbon Classic II

In contrast to the other watches selected here, Ball might need a little fanfare - British watch buyers have not long been acquainted with the American brand, whose origins lie in the late 19th century and the then nascent US railroad industry. Ambitious, Swiss-made and not nearly as brash as you might expect, when it comes to divers' watches, they're a revelation. Take the Engineer Hydrocarbon Classic II, which retails for £1,240. At first glance, it's clear it's no ordinary watch. The patented device protecting the crown is the clue - from there the catalogue of features includes 7,500G shock-resistance, anti-magnetic

protection and cold temperature endurance to -40°C.

But it gets really interesting when you turn the lights out. Ball watches come equipped with 'Self-Powered Micro Gas Lights', which is a bewildering way of saying they feature luminescent tubes that glow 100 times more brightly than conventional luminous paints, last for 25 years and needs no charging from outside light. The Classic II has 16 of these lights built into the hour markers and hands, which means you'll still be able to read the dial when plunging into an abyss - with your eyes shut. Now that's a proper man's watch. ☺

Known as one of the most 'bulletproof' of watches, the Ball Engineer Hydrocarbon Classic II has an easy to read dial, double screwed bracelet attachment system and one of the thickest clasps ever built.