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High Seas



At one time the regatta attracted 19 international teams, its fifty-year history has clocked up an alarming death-count and it was once won by British Prime Minister, Edward Heath. The Admirals Cup has struggled in recent years; the last staging of the event was in 2003, but now talks are underway for a 2011 revival - news that could not be more welcome for Swiss brand Corum.

Emma Field

...for centuries sailors have been dependant on reliable timekeeping

Of Corum's 'Four Pillars', it is the Admiral's Cup that gives the brand its most alluring character; a half-century love-affair with the sea has helped shape Corum's identity a lot more successfully than the Romulus, the Golden Bridges and the Artisan.

The first Admiral's Cup watch was made to mark the 1960 competition and the line has continued, in varying forms, ever since. It was not until the early 1980s, however, that Corum took a more active role in the event, when they began presenting their new 12-sided watches to the winners of the Champagne Mumm Admiral's Cup. Later, in 1985, the Corum Trophy Cup appeared and a further two years after that the brand, not content with a sideline position, entered their own "Corum I" yacht into the race, sailed by the French team.

Over the following decade or so of Admiral's Cup competitions the Corum Sailing Team would evolve and enjoy several victories, under the guidance of various Skippers. More importantly for the brand though, was that the name would achieve one of those chance marriages, where it became intrinsically associated with the sport.


The early Admiral's Cup watches had a slim, elegant square case, a far cry from today's distinctive, chunky, 12-sided bezels, with their totemic nautical pennants. A robust dodecagon that has seen an endless trickle of variations and upgrades. At this year's Baselworld, talk at the Corum booth was all about the GMT 44 and the Black Challenge 44; two new additions to the collection which, although lacking the race-day practicality, help maintain the brands maritime zeal.

Producing a themed watch is one thing, but during this extended hiatus between Admiral's Cup regattas, Corum have needed to look elsewhere for a means of actually channelling their nautical enthusiasm.


Olympian

Cue Ben Ainslie. The 31-year-old Brit, is no less than a seven-time World Champion, four-time Olympic Medalist (three consecutive Golds) and three-time ISAF World Sailor of the Year; with few signs of slowing up. (It is a peculiar trait of the English sportsperson that achieving a medal at the Olympics generally requires the crossing of a body of water.)

Following what was a sensational Beijing Olympics for British sailing, Ainslie has become something like the blue-eyed boy of our 2012 hopefuls and with watch PR departments rarely missing a trick nowadays, it seemed only a matter of time before he was snapped up by the likes of Audemars Piguet or Parmigiani or Panerai. That Corum came out on top probably has a lot to do with the fact that brand CEO Michael Wunderman and the team have been following Ainslie's career for the past 15 years.



Admiral's Cup Tides 48 in a 48 mm titanium case with vulcanised rubber bezel. The self-winding CO-277 movement provides hours, minutes, seconds and date, plus three sub-dials indicating tidal patterns. £4,750.



Ben Ainslie at the helm.

And so it was at Lymington Yacht Club that I managed to catch up with Ben, tousle haired and somewhat fatigued, but in high good spirits.

"I first came across Corum when I was sixteen", begins Ben Ainslie. "I had just managed to clinch the Laser Radial World Championship and they presented me with a watch. It was great to have them support me back then and obviously the success of the Olympics meant I provided Corum with a useful way to get back into sailing."

Ben was reintroduced to Corum last year and, given the shared interests, the pairing seems quite apt. "I am a fan of the watches", he says, looking down at his wrist. "I really am and I rarely take it off", and then in a hushed tone, as if concerned that these sounded too much like the rehearsed lines of any dutiful ambassador, "even off the record!"

"Timing is of course vitally important in sailing, especially for the starts of races. For that, though, I need to use an onboard digital clock".

It is, of course, sometimes easy to forget that there was life before modern satellite navigation, but for centuries sailors have been dependant on reliable timekeeping.

"My father, Roderick Ainslie, skippered Second Life in the 1973 Whitbread Round the World Race and as recently as then, his crew relied on marine chronometers and sextons, to get them around the globe."

Shipping forecast

Corum has provided their sailor who, incidentally, has very recently been made Sir Ainslie, with the Admiral's Cup Tides 48. This particular incarnation uses the CO277; a movement developed for Corum courtesy of Dubois Dépraz which, as well as showing the standard hours, minutes, seconds and date, also offers a function that could prove particularly useful when navigating coastal waters.

The lacquered matt-black dial includes three counters; at 12 o'clock there is a moon-phase display, with the corresponding tidal cycles (the tides are expressed by the coefficients 95-120 and 20-45. When the Moon, the Earth and the Sun are aligned the tides are at their strongest); at 9 o'clock is a register indicating high and low tide patterns; and then at 6 o'clock the daily tide times, of which there are two high and two low. And although tidal times differ greatly and the variants affecting the high and low watermark extend well past lunar and Earthly rotations, the watch presents a useful additional preventative to running aground. ☹

From top: The Original Admiral's Tide created to celebrate the 1960 competition. Admiral's Cup Tides 48 with a case made from rose gold and a dial of lacquered caramel. £4,750. The late Severin Wunderman, who died in 2008, with his son Michael Wunderman, Corum President.

