



# Omega:

## A Journey Through Time



Four-and-a-half kilos. Roll that one around in your mind. Or, if you prefer, nearly 10lb., that's the weight of *Omega - A Journey Through Time*. If the sheer presence of a book - the size, the weight, the obvious gravitas - attests to its worth, then this mighty tome is the new standard for single-make volumes.

You do not curl up in bed with this one.

Ken Kessler

To approach the latest in the Swatch Group's run of overwhelming watch books, following last year's title on Longines movements and one on the history of St. Imier, I needed to put this 'bible' into context: It is not the first work on the brand, but it is the first to be 1) wholly authorised, and 2) produced with utterly unlimited access to the Omega archives and museum. After all, its author is the curator. And a decade ago, he just happened to write the most highly regarded 'proper' history of the brand, *Omega Saga*.

### A tome like no other

What makes *Omega - A Journey Through Time* unique is that this is not a history per se. It falls somewhere in-between that and a catalogue raisonné, a massive reference book that you could, if your lap can handle it, read from cover to cover. But neither is it exactly a catalogue raisonné: that's a book which purports to show, for example, every model of car made by a specific manufacturer, or, more commonly, every painting by a particular artist. As Richon points out in the introduction, Omega has produced over 15,000 models. This book deals with a mere 1001 of them.

Where the schizophrenia really sets in is in the book's actual role. As a reference work, the above-cited sensible and voluntary limitation of the number of models covered precludes it from that description. Equally, there is the curious omission of an index. So, if you want to find models in a lesser series, for example, the Dynamic, you need to scan down the Table of Contents, where you'll find it in Chapter 10, 'Specialities'. Major lines, though, such as the Seamaster, the Constellation and the like have their own chapters. While the lack of an index is far from terminal, it does compromise the ease with which you can zoom in on a particular model.

### The epic tale

As a conventional history, the book lacks the complete narrative that tells the tale. However, anyone actually reading this from

cover to cover would leave it with a fairly comprehensive picture of the entire Omega story. Because there's a chronological order to the chapters that precede those broken down by model, you learn the story through detailed captions attached to images, ranging from portraits of key personnel, to aerial views of the factory to advertising materials. This is the story told in anecdotal form, and it's simply delightful if you are a watch fanatic. And you don't even have to be partial to Omega to appreciate it.



So, instead of either a conventional history or a pure model guide, what we have here is a celebration of the marque. Appropriately issued in the year that Antiquorum's *Omegamania* auction elevated the brand to the top levels of collectible watches, it more than vindicates Nicolas Hayek's drive to have Omega - truly one of his 'pet' brands - acknowledged as one of horology's genuinely great houses. The sense of achievement is palpable. The scale of accomplishment is overwhelming.



## Colossal catalogue

Even as a devotee of the brand, I was staggered to learn of the depth and breadth of the Omega catalogue since its inception. Pocket watches, for example occupy the first 100 pages alone. Desk clocks, travel clocks, clip watches, militaria, sport timers: the presentation for all of these consists of absolutely perfect product shots, augmented by poster art, ads, reportage photography (especially for the astronaut watches, sporting events and the like) and – for me, the most intriguing element – images of the various personalities, celebrated and obscure, associated with Omega over the years.

Everywhere you look, there are sidebars telling amazing stories, including ones on the birth of the automatic, Omega's 'Art Collection' of 1986 (along with portrait shots of each artist who contributed to the range), the James Bond connection, ad infinitum. Far more important, though, are the aforementioned captions accompanying every one of the many thousands of images. At the very least, the details include the model specifics down to the catalogue number. And if the watch is out of the ordinary, the caption goes on to tell why, with no spatial concern for the intrinsic censorship of having to fit the wordage into a template. When necessary, some captions run to the equivalent of a quarter page.

There are so many other treasures within. The Speedmaster chapter is augmented by a massive, 14-page section devoted solely to identifying every case, dial, bracelet and squadron logo ever applied to the watch. If there was a comprehensive advertisements series, each ad is reproduced. Omega produced an orrery – a one-off – in 1989; it has two pages to itself. And as for the military watches....

## Stats and figures

For some, that's simply not enough. So, as if to add exceptional, indisputable value for true anoraks, there's a section at the back for those who live for statistics, catalogue numbers, tables and

"Ultra Thin" Omega wristwatch that was given to John F. Kennedy by Grant Stockdale in 1960. Inscribed with "President of the United States John F. Kennedy from his friend Grant".

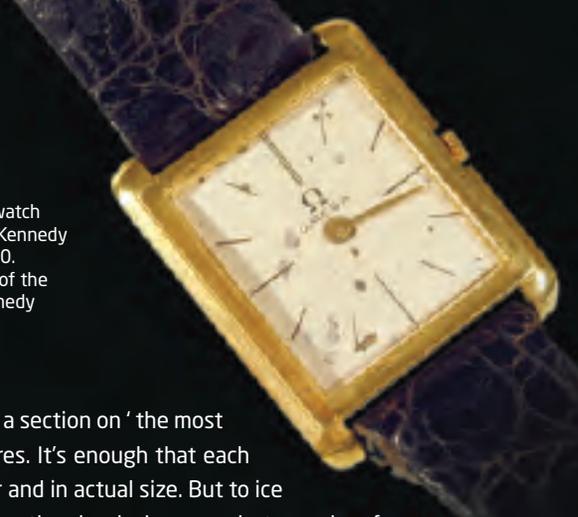
the like. It starts with a section on 'the most famous' Omega calibres. It's enough that each is shown in full colour and in actual size. But to ice this particular cake, the book has a photograph of the calibre's designer next to each entry. A nice touch, honouring the watch world's unsung heroes.

From there we enter a full-on, who-needs-Google? info overload. A page showing the diameters of 'former Omega calibres', the nomenclature of the calibres from 1894-2007 (including internal reference numbers, vibration frequency, year of creation and any special remarks), and photos of each movement. So, as if to disarm the muttering rotters, there is enough in the way of lists and tables to keep even the most punctilious of collectors solidly tumescent for months.

## What its worth

If, like far too many people, you are horrified by the realistic pricing of special-interest books such as this one, then take this on board. In addition to production values worthy of the finest art books, and along with the frightening levels of scholarship and sheer sweat-of-the-brow labour in compiling this masterpiece, it represents astonishing value for money if you assess it by the pleasure it delivers. And since this is about watches, let's talk about time. In particular: How long does it last?

So, if a DVD costs £12 and amuses you for 90 or 120 minutes, or a good Tignanello for £80 keeps you grinning and sipping for an evening, what value do you place on a book that would take months to peruse, years to absorb, and a lifetime to exhaust? ☹



Omega Seamaster worn by Daniel Craig in the 2006 James Bond film, Casino Royale.

## **Omega - A Journey Through Time** by Marco Richon, translated from French by Myriam and David Lea

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