

Technical Specs

Model: Ref. 4644.30.32

Movement: Co-Axial Escapement

Functions: Hours, minutes, sweep seconds, date

Power reserve: 42 hours

Case: Rose gold

**Longines Conquest Replica**

So poorly has the truly majestic Longines been regarded for the past few decades that it's easy to forget that it was once held as equal or even superior to brands such as Rolex, Omega and IWC. This venerable house produced, for many decades, some of the best 'manufacture' movements available - especially its chronographs in the 1950s. The defining Longines through the 1950s and 1960s - a genuine rival to the Constellation - was the Conquest. At last, The Swatch Group is realising just what a gem it has neglected since. Now the Conquest Replica joins the Lindbergh pilot-watch reissues that kept Longines from falling below the collectors' radar in the 1990s. The new offering is the spitting image of its ancestor. We're particularly fond of ref. L1.611.6.78.9 (£1,455), in 35 mm pink-gold case, with silvered dial, sweep-seconds hand, crocodile strap and date at 12 o'clock. Inside is an L633, 28,800 vph automatic movement with 38 hours of power reserve.

Eterna 1948 Automatic

Like Longines, Eterna is a marque waiting to be rediscovered. Fortunately, its current overseers realised that they were sitting on an admirable heritage, so they re-released a cluster of classics, including a spot-on replica of the 1948 Automatic. Eterna had produced automatics before World War II, but the 1948 Automatic boasted a calibre of far more modern and lasting topology. The re-issue is a dead ringer for its 58-year-old grandparent, updated to include chronometer certification for its hand-decorated ETA 2824-2 self-winding mechanical movement with special Eterna rotor and blued steel screws. We would go for ref. 8423.69.11.1118D (£2,200), with a silver dial almost as domed as the Omega's 'pie-pan', sweep seconds, and a date window at 3 o'clock, housed in an 36.75 mm 18-ct rose-gold case with sapphire-crystal back. Like the Longines, it will stay dry down to 30 m. Finished off with a brown crocodile leather strap with folding clasp, it is elegance personified.



Modern Classics: Omega De Ville

It is a situation that's probably unique in the world of contemporary classic watches: a milestone timepiece that had a name change... and for no discernible reason. It's as if McDonald's decided to rename the Quarter Pounder the 'Big Mac', and *vice versa*. The name that started out on Omega's definitive round chronometer - the original 'Constellation' - was later appended to an early example of bling at the dawn of quartz. To bring it full circle, the elegant watch launched in 1999 to mark the advent of George Daniels' Co-Axial Escapement closely resembled the 1952 Constellation yet gave birth to the new De Ville range. Confused? You won't be.

Ken Kessler

To launch the Co-Axial Escapement seven years ago, Omega chose a handsome, vintage-style case for its limited editions, with the Constellation's definitive domed 'pie-pan' dial (so-called by collectors because it looks like an upside-down pie tin). When the movement had been developed for large-scale production, Omega retained the dial and the distinctive hour markers. Unfortunately, the 'Constellation' name, which would have been perfect for the Co-Axials, had been co-opted for those modernist Omega watches best-known for the 'claws' that grip the bezels. Thus, Omega found itself with a new line that revived an enduring house style... but without a suitable name. So they graced the dials with 'De Ville' - a label better known over the years for a range of rather fey dress watches.

If you think the current epoch is feverish for watch manufacturers each trying to outdo the other with ridiculous complications, the decade after World War II involved battles between the brands for far more worthy spoils; not least chronometer certification.

Nowadays, many watches actually exceed the accuracy required for such certification, but back then, 'COSC' was a badge of honour... especially for Rolex and Omega. Rolex ruled the roost until the 1950s, but Omega presented its challenge in 1952 when it unveiled the Constellation Chronometer. By 1963, Omega's

chronometer production exceeded Rolex's by 103,041 to 44,305, peaking in 1969 at 194,580, versus 179,169 for Rolex.

It didn't last, though. It flip-flopped the following year, and Rolex has increased its chronometer registrations every year, while Omega's output diminished due to a "manufacturing crisis," according to Omega authority Anton Kreuzer. But during the Constellation's heyday, that watch was enough to provide the house with chronometer supremacy.

Omega was into emblems then, and naturally the Constellation had an astronomical theme - a beautifully engraved observatory under a night sky. It was the Constellation's first, ornate dial that clearly has reappeared on three of the current limited-edition Co-Axials, and it's only the 'De Ville' label that upsets the illusion of backward time travel.

The dials were as luxurious as anything you'd find, with applied, near-triangular, sculpted indices to mark the hours, an applied Omega logo and - in keeping with the watch's name - an applied five-pointed star above the 6 o'clock position. This, of course, has disappeared on the current incarnation, as 'De Ville' and stars have no connection. But the seasoned historian or collector will undoubtedly still see a star in his or her mind's eye... ○

Further information: Omega UK, Tel: 0230 80646 915, www.omega.ch