



Hidden Depths

Omega's new Planet Ocean Seamaster finally adopts the Co-Axial escapement, not to mention a natty new colour scheme

Although widely trailed, Omega's introduction of the Co-Axial escapement in 1999 created real waves in the watch industry. Not only was the Co-Axial the first fundamental change to the essential mechanics of timekeeping for nearly two centuries, it was also a highly risky move, since the new escapement – although developed and tested by its inventor George Daniels for over two decades – had never been exposed to the rigours of volume production and usage. There were more than a few who thought that the extra complexity of the escapement would prove to be a fatal flaw and there were, inevitably, teething problems.

The first watches to have the new escapement were naturally enough from the de Ville collection. Despite the Co-Axial escapement's theoretical advantages of better stability and efficiency, questions remained over the long-term viability of the idea, particularly in terms of reliability; questions which were answered in part by the continued expansion of the concept, with chronograph movements following within two years.

(Left) The differently sized Planet Oceans are available with either a stainless-steel (left, on 45.5 mm version), alligator leather (right, on 42 mm model) or rubber strap. An orange alligator strap accompanies orange-bezel models; brown for black-bezel models.

Diving in

This year sees the launch of the first Seamaster to carry the Co-Axial movement. Not on first sight a momentous step, the new Seamaster is significant for two reasons. The original Seamasters were launched just over 40 years ago and were Omega's premium watches at the time – to the point where they were considered precision watches almost more than diving watches. Although the de Ville has now largely filled this niche for Omega, the company must still have hesitated to risk the reputation of their most iconic watch on an idea they did not entirely trust. By launching a Co-Axial Seamaster, Omega is making a statement of the faith in the technology and, no doubt, enjoying the success of a gamble that might have seriously undermined their reputation.

The calibre 2500 Co-Axial movement also gives the Seamaster collection an extra layer of horological credibility to add to the practical virtues of the watch; a vital extra in a competitive market. Omega clearly wants people to consider why anyone should pay more than the £1,675 for competition that offers less in a diving watch (no prizes for guessing who Omega has in its sights here).

The Seamaster Planet Ocean will be available in May in two different case sizes (45.5 mm and 42 mm), both designed in sympathy with the original Seamaster 300 models of 1957 – most notably through the combination of brushed and polished surfaces. The two have slightly different bezel designs, with finer grooves on the 42-mm model giving a more subtle finish. Omega seems to assume that this is required for the female audience being targeted by the smaller version – forgetting perhaps that at this size it dwarfs the original.

Both watches' subaquatic credibilities are intact, with all the usual details found on Seamasters, from unidirectional bezel to helium-escape valve, and water resistance to 600m. What really marks-out these watches however is the optional orange aluminium bezel, which, according to Omega, was chosen only for its exceptional visibility underwater. However, given the garish orange strap also available, one can be sure that Omega had style in mind too. ◯



The 45.5-mm Seamaster Planet Ocean, with orange unidirectional bezel, helium escape valve and high visibility SuperLuminova details on the dial (£1,725). (Below left) The helium escape valve is located at 10 o'clock and embossed with 'He' – the chemical symbol for helium. It allows any helium atoms that may penetrate the case during compression in a diving bell to escape during decompression. (Below right) The caseback of the Planet Ocean is embossed with the traditional Seamaster medallion – a seahorse.

Further information: Omega UK, Tel: 023 80646 915, www.omega.ch