

Time & Tide

The fruits of a unique collaboration between IWC and the Cousteau Society

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Most are familiar with diving legend Jacques-Yves Cousteau and his invaluable contribution to our understanding of life beneath the waves. Few realise that the Cousteau Society continues to ply the high seas, furthering the Frenchman's life work – now with IWC and its new range of Aquatimer watches on board. *QP* takes the plunge...

The entry-level Aquatimer Automatic 2000. Its 14.8 mm thick titanium case is resistant to 200 ATM of pressure. (A slightly slimmer steel version, the Aquatimer wAutomatic, is resistant to 100 ATM.) The inner, uni-directional dive bezel is operated using a self-sealing crown at four o'clock. Its design is based on the original 1960s Aquatimer system whereby the seals deform to a pre-defined extent as pressure increases. (Bracelet, £2,900; rubber strap, £2,300.)



Jacques-Yves Cousteau, aboard the Calypso.

It was in 1963 that French naval officer-turned-undersea explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau arrived at Shab Rumi off the Sudanese coast to embark on what could fairly be described as one of the most extraordinary happenings in the history of marine biology. Along with a small team of fellow scientists, his plan was to conduct the 'Conshelf II' experiment – an extensive underwater study which would involve living for a month in a 'village' built on the sea bed.

Meanwhile, approximately 7,000 miles away in the Swiss town of Schaffhausen, the first of IWC's calibre 8541 movements – with the automatic winding system developed by Technical Director Albert Pellaton – were being carefully fitted into their cases. Could the two pictures be any more different? Probably not, but this year, more than four decades later, the coincidental nature of these disparate occurrences has made itself apparent.

Two worlds collide

The 8541 was produced from 1963 to 1974 and it was 1967 when IWC made it the movement of choice for an entirely new wristwatch – a wristwatch that represented a radical departure from the antimagnetic pilot's watches for which the 8541 was well known. The new watch, which remained in production until 1975, was called the Aquatimer and, as with all IWC watches, it was as practical as it was good-looking, featuring a rotating dive-time bezel mounted beneath the crystal to protect it from accidental movement and a sealing system which became more, rather than less efficient as water pressure increased.

Fast-forward to 2004. Commander Cousteau has been dead for seven years, but his lifetime's work to understand and preserve the oceans is being continued by the Cousteau Society, under the leadership of his widow, Francine – the scriptwriter for 21 of Cousteau's celebrated films. Aboard the Society's expedition ship *Alcyone*, a 12-strong crew (including 74-year-old Claude Wesley, who took part in the Conshelf II experiment) has returned to re-explore the Red Sea where, exactly 50 years ago, Cousteau shot his first award-winning underwater films.

Alcyone's Red Sea expedition was backdrop to the launch of IWC's new Aquatimer range, in a new collaboration with the Cousteau Society.

Where IWC and Cousteau enter the same picture is this expedition – chosen for the announcement of an entirely new family of Aquatimer watches and a long-term collaboration between the watch firm and the not-for-profit Cousteau Society.

The new watches have been evaluated throughout their development by the Cousteau divers and have now become the official instruments of the team. However, the collaboration also extends to a significant donation by IWC (€1 million, according to Francine Cousteau) which will enable the *Alcyone* and her crew to continue to ply the seas, conducting vital research into the state of corals and other marine life; ultimately helping to evaluate the future of the planet.

Movie magic

As well as making an unrivalled contribution to our understanding of the undersea world, Jacques Cousteau's desire to take what he saw to the widest possible audience led to his development of not only the Aqualung but also the underwater movie camera. As well as the award-winning films *The Silent World* (1956) and *World Without Sun* (1963) Cousteau, who was born in 1910, made no fewer than a dozen, hour-long television films for the series *The Silent World* and *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. These are due to be joined by a new series currently being shot, called *The Silent World Revisited*.

Just as memorable as the moving footage from his expeditions are the masses of still photographs taken over the decades. An exhibition of these, entitled *Engineers of the Sea*, was launched at this year's SIHH in Geneva. It is now on a tour of the major museums in 10 countries throughout Europe, America, Hong Kong and Japan – entirely financed by IWC.



The partnership

Accepting such a deal is a radical departure for the Cousteau Society, which has hitherto survived on donations and support from anonymous private individuals or international charitable organisations such as UNESCO. As Francine Cousteau explained to QP: "We have never accepted money from any government or bank because that would result in a political

The Chrono-Automatic – the first IWC diver's watch with a stop function. The watch utilises the four o'clock crown to operate both the inner dive bezel and to reset the chronograph, the bezel transmission wheel being disengaged with a single touch. (Bracelet, £3,175; rubber strap, £2,575.)



(Above) The inner rotating bezel for reading the dive time – found in all Aquatimer models – is adjustable via the lower crown in exact minute steps.

(Left) The jewel in the crown of the range, the Minute Memory features an automatic chronograph movement with a secondary minute flyback hand. The lower of the two minute hands can be stopped and reset by operating a toggle on the left of the case. This enables accurate timing of decompression stops – the vital pauses during ascent that prevent nitrogen saturation in the blood. (Bracelet, £5,900; rubber strap, £5,300.)



These two diagrams show the world premiere 'Minute Memory' function, found exclusively in the eponymous Aquatimer model. (Left) In the 'off' position, the Minute Memory hand runs under the minute hand. (Right) In the 'on' position, the Minute Memory hand stops and the time is recorded.

involvement, when we are only interested in international politics. The Cousteau philosophy is that we study man and his environment. And that is a global concept.

“What we have undertaken with IWC is a very discreet sponsorship. We are very happy to use their products, both because they are of good, professional quality and also because we believe the firm is ethically sound. But that doesn't mean we are going to cover the ship with IWC badges and flags. The simple fact is that when Commander Cousteau was alive he was a one-man PR firm – since his death, we have had to look at other ways to build the Society's profile without him.”

And while most watch companies would expect co-operation with an advertising campaign or, at the very least, a generous spread of company logos upon all garments, vehicles and equipment used by their beneficiaries, IWC President Georges

Kern seems perfectly at ease with the fact that his €1 million (or “a seven-digit sum in a strong currency,” as he coyly describes it) seems likely to yield nothing more tangible than a fore-mounted flag on the *Alcyone's* deck.

“We have been approached by many organisations and individuals over the years and we had several options for sponsorship. I knew about the Cousteau society but I never really believed they would accept us, as they had never been involved with a commercial company before. But someone just picked up the phone and asked if they were interested and they agreed. It was as simple as that,” says Kern.

“From the outset, the agreement was not that of a hard-selling sponsorship with logos and contracts – it is, in effect, more ‘patronage’ than sponsorship. These people are idealists, scientists, searchers – not marketers. We can, however, bring

them exposure through our business, although we are all too aware that there is a higher risk of killing these things by overdoing them than their not gaining sufficient coverage. The last thing we want to do is damage something which has taken 50 years to build up.”

Shrewd move

Despite this deal appearing a little one-sided in favour of the Cousteau Society, the more one considers it, the more it reveals itself as a rather shrewd example of semi-subliminal marketing. It was suggested to Kern during the launch of the new Aquatimer that the Cousteau connection would be meaningless to people in their early twenties, because, by the early 1980s, his *Undersea World* television programme had dropped off the ratings scale. It is clear however that people in their

early twenties are unlikely to be the target market for these watches anyway. Those of a decade older and up – who quite decidedly *are* the target market – will remember Cousteau as an icon of discovery and adventure from their teenage years. As the IWC blurb puts it: “Nearly 40 years ago, when Jacques-Yves Cousteau began to fill people with enthusiasm for diving sport, countless young people dreamed of slipping into a black neoprene suit.”

Add to this slightly disturbing suggestion the fact that some of the most serious marine biologists in the world – routinely spending eight hours a day in the water – are staking their lives on the reliability of IWC watches (having helped to test and develop them) and that €1 million starts to look like money well spent. ◉

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To learn more about the Cousteau Society, see: www.cousteau.org