
'Sheer magnetism' – A brief history of James Bond's watches

07 October 2015 | Alex Easthope

"Rolex?" asks Vesper Lynd in Casino Royale, referring to 007's timepiece. "Omega" comes Bond's reply, uttered with a tinge of satisfaction. The Omega Seamaster has been James Bond's timepiece of choice since 1995, but that wasn't always the case...

As integral to Bond as a shaken Martini, tailored suits and fleeting flings with beautiful women, a fine wristwatch is a staple of 007's inventory, both in the novels and the screen adaptations. But before the film company's prop department got carried away with ever-crazier (and less believable) gizmos and gadgets, Bond used his trusty timepiece solely to, er, check the time.

A trusty timepiece



The first reference we see is to a “heavy Rolex Oyster Perpetual on an expanding bracelet”, in Ian Fleming’s novel *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, said to be modelled on the author’s own similar example. A discreet and durable timepiece (ideal for a secret agent in the field), it also proved effective as a knuckle-duster, successfully knocking out an intervening guard later in the novel, though unsuccessfully smashing its dial in the process.



It wasn’t until 1962 and *Dr. No* that we saw Bond sporting a Rolex in the films for the first time, albeit a Submariner (reference 6538) rather than the aforementioned Explorer, probably to capitalise on the popularity of the diver’s watch. The crownguard-less reference became affectionately known as the ‘James Bond Submariner’. Sean Connery wore that watch in the subsequent four films in which he starred, though it was never integral to the plotlines.

Sheer magnetism



Fast-forward 11 years, to Roger Moore's debut as 007 in *Live and Let Die*. He, too, sported a Submariner, but by then the film company had realised the commercial value of outlandish gadgets and secret weapons (in *Thunderball*, Bond's Breitling Top Time featured a Geiger counter), and it was equipped with both a buzzsaw in the bezel and an ultra-powerful magnet. The latter proved effective for many things: perhaps most usefully for a silver-tongued secret agent, unzipping his latest playmate's dress.



In fact, the very Rolex Submariner used in the film will be offered by [Phillips at its Geneva Watch Auction Two in November](#), estimated at CHF 150,000 to 300,000 - ideal for those sticky situations.

A new era of Bond



Over the years, Bond has been equipped with several different watches, including a Hamilton Pulsar (*Live and Let Die*), several digital Seikos (in *Octopussy* and *The Spy who Loved Me*, for example), and two Tag Heuer divers, until *Goldeneye* in 1995. Pierce Brosnan's arrival heralded a new era of Bond, and with it came the Omega Seamaster. Both Brosnan and Daniel Craig have had a plethora of Seamasters (both Professionals and Planet Oceans), not only concealing novel gadgets designed to get 007 out of trouble, but also boasting 'limited' spin-offs that Omega could shift to Bond-wannabes in the shops. Take the latest Seamaster 300 Master Co-Axial 'Spectre' edition, for example - 'limited' to 7,007 examples, naturally.



Several Rolexes made brief appearances in the years before *Goldeneye* (such as Timothy Dalton's Submariner or Pussy Galore's GMT Master), and it seems bizarre that the company never officially endorsed the use of its watches in the films, especially given Omega's commercial involvement

today. But it certainly adds to the allure and the mystery. Just *what* colour was that ill-fitting NATO strap in *Goldfinger*?

Photos: Getty Images, Phillips, Omega, Rex Features

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