

<vintage>

A CK2915-2 from Lot 200 in the Omegamania 2007 Auction. This Speedmaster sold for \$87,836.96 including the buyer's auction premium. [Photo courtesy Antiquorum].



UP to Speed

A detailed look at the changes Omega has made to the Speedmaster since its birth fifty years ago

BY CHUCK MADDOX

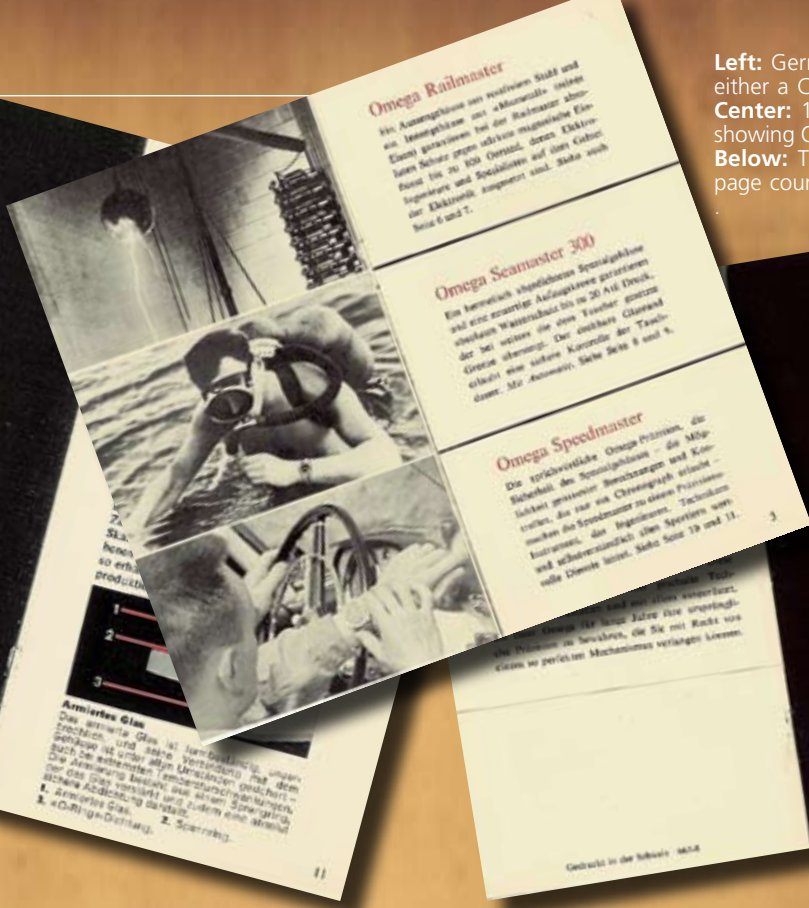
This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of the Omega Speedmaster. No other chronograph watch has been in continuous production for such a length of time. The vast depth and breadth of the models and variations of Speedmasters produced since the introduction of the first Speedmaster, in 1957, and the minute

distinctions between otherwise very similar models, is beyond the scope of single article or series to capture fully.

Instead, what this article hopes to accomplish is a reasonably detailed overview of the early years and the main variations one would see "in the wild" were one to start looking for vintage Speedmasters today. There is an established,

active and enthusiastic Internet community that provides a wide variety of additional information should one wish to seek it out.

Before we dive into the various models and evolutions of the brand, it's important to note that many things have changed in the fifty years since the Speedmaster was first produced. Instantaneous inexpensive communication via



Left: German Omega Catalog showing either a CK2915-3 or an early CK2998.
Center: 1963 German Omega Catalog showing Omega's intended market.
Below: The catalog cover. All ads this page courtesy of www.old-omegas.com



the Internet, electronic databases, modern inventory tracking, and the ease of recording, storing and accessing information differs vastly today from the late 1950s, when the Speedmaster was first produced.

Changes were often made quickly, with little or no distinction being noted, and with little consideration that a couple of decades down the road collectors would have any interest as to when a hand was changed, or if the firm made a subtle difference in the shape of a letter on a dial, or why some watches would seem to have attributes of either the previous or successor models.

The folks on the production line and the managers in their offices in the late 1950s likely weren't considering the interest or the monies their products would be fetching in auctions today. Just as dinosaurs lived their lives with little regard for today's paleontolo-

gists, Swiss craftsmen in this epoch did their work without much concern for our ability to make sense of it today. They were more concerned with quality, meeting demand, remaining profitable and viable against the competition.

As a result, the further one goes back into history, the more blurred the story gets.

Origins

The Speedmaster story begins with the CK2915, also known as "The original 1957 Speedmaster" and sometimes [inaccurately] as the "Broad Arrow." Pierre Moinat, the creative director of Omega, developed the main idea for the design. Among his goals: a rugged, more waterproof chronograph with a large, easily read dial. The intended market was professionals and enthusiasts in the aviation, automotive and sporting fields, where ease of reading and usage would be

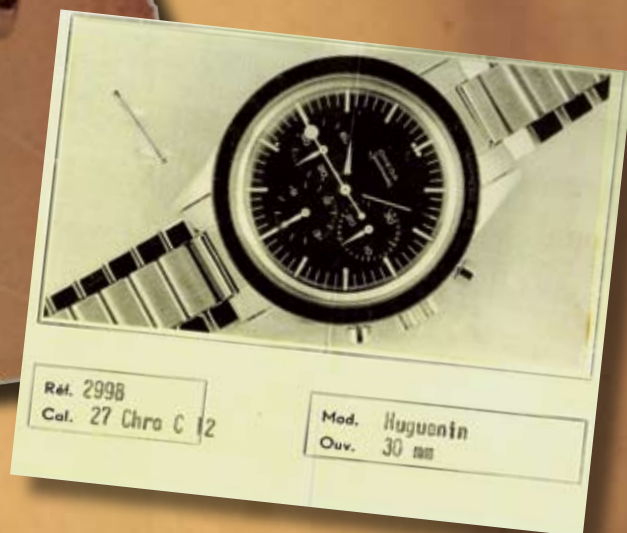
of utmost utility. The design was entrusted to Claude Baillad, while Georges Hartmann crafted the first prototype.

The CK2915 was produced in three different series from 1957 through 1958, as officially denoted by the caseback designations: CK2915-1, CK2915-2, CK2915-3 (which collectors often shortened to "dash one," etc.). The similar elements in these three sub-models are a Tritium-marked dial with an applied metal Omega "Ω" logo, "OMEGA" in all-cap block type, "Speedmaster" in title-case script, spearpoint subdial hands, a straight needle chronograph second hand, "Speedmaster" in an arc between two case tool notches, the hippocampus chemically engraved two angle caseback, 4 mm diameter pushers and 6 mm diameter crown.

However, each of these models differed in the following ways:



Left: The author's CK2915-3. Note the "Base 1000" bezel. Many CK2915-3's are configured like this with "alpha/dauphine" hands, even though they are CK2915 models.
Below: A CK2998 with a lollipop second hand. (Photo Omega Museum, Bienne)



- ▶ CK2915-1: Has natural colored stainless steel bezel embossed and inked with black painted text. The bezel black paint in the crevices of the embossed steel with "TACHYMÈTRE BASE 1000" is unique to this model. This model, along with the CK2915-2, has the so-called "broad arrow" hands, which are also known as "Balane," with the arrow on the hour hand.
- ▶ CK2915-2: Transition midway from the black on natural steel bezel to the more common silver on black paint bezel. The "TACHYMÈTRE BASE 1000" printing remains through the CK2998-1 model.
- ▶ CK2915-3: This is the transitional model to the CK2998. While a few early examples retain the Balane hands of the -1 and -2 models, many examples exist of this model

with the later CK2998 style hands, which are commonly known as "dauphine" or "alpha" hands. The rest of this model is essentially the same as the CK2915-2.

The CK2915 model Speedmaster, because it was the first produced, is among the most avidly sought, and as a result it is exceedingly pricey to obtain, with the exception of the CK2915-3, which is typically found priced similarly to the CK2998 models, which it more closely resembles.

Next generation

Considering the notable and substantial changes made between the CK2915-1 and CK2915-3, Omega soon noted these distinctions with a new case reference number, CK2998. The CK2998 was made

in at least seven different case reference numbers, CK2998-1 through 6, and also -62 as Omega started to transition to a new case reference standard in late 1962.

I've been studying the Speedmasters since 1998 and I have yet to find any person or document that lays out all of the subtle distinctions between these models. Starting from the basic features of the CK2915-3, one of the first distinctions was the chronograph second hand which, while remaining needle-shaped, was painted white to stand out in poor light from the dial. In addition, the location of the "Speedmaster" engraved text on the caseback is moved from between two of the wrench notches on the caseback to an arc on the flat part of the caseback, in an arc over the Hippocampus. →



The author's 105.003-65 is often called "The Quiet Speedmaster."

Above, top: 1967 Omega catalog with 105.003, a Seamaster and a "no-name" model. Below that, a rare French Omega catalog page from 1964 or 1965 showing 105.003 and 105.012 side-by-side. This is the only catalog I've ever seen that has both models side-by-side. Price for each model was 480 French francs, or roughly \$100 in 1964-5 U.S. dollars. (Top ad courtesy of www.old-omegas.com; lower ad from the author's archives.)

The 105.002 was only in production for a few short months in 1962 and possibly 1963 before Omega formalized the change to white stick hands for the 105.003 model. So this transition model between the CK2998 and the 105.003 was not produced in high numbers, is exceedingly rare, and hence commands formidable prices when offered.

1963: Splitting the Speedmaster

With the late production 105.002s, most of the unique differences between the original Speedmaster and the modern Speedmaster had been evolved

out of the Speedmaster line. The 105.003 incorporates most of these changes, though a few differences remain. The "quiet" Speedmaster, as the 105.003 is often called, has the most plain and elegant appearance when compared to models produced prior or after its production.

This '003 retains the plain lugs of the early model Speedmasters, the applied metal Omega logo, the now familiar black bezel with silver numerals, adds 5 mm diameter pushers (which would be the size used henceforth), but does not have "Professional" on the dial, nor the twisted lugs of a sister model introduced in the same time frame, the 105.012.

The 105.012 differs from the 105.003, at least initially, in the shape and style of its case. While it and all previous Speedmasters shared the same plain-lugged case with no crown or pusher guards and a lug width of 19 mm, the new 105.012 has an asymmetrical case with a 20 mm lug width, added protection for the crown and pushers and a sculpted twist to the lugs.

In French, this style is called *Bombé* and adds a layer of complication to the look of the Speedmaster. Until 1965, the other features and look of the 105.012 are identical to the 105.003. They share the same bezel, dial, hands and caseback—except for the case

This 1963 UK Omega catalog shows an ST 105002/2998 priced at £53.10, which would convert to \$150 in 1963.



reference number engraved on the inside caseback.

After Wally Schirra and Gordon Cooper wore the Speedmaster on their Mercury missions (Cooper wore both a Speedmaster and a Bulova Accutron Astronaut, because his mission lasted more than 24 hours), NASA decided that the utility of having its astronauts equipped with a standardized wrist chronograph was beneficial. It began testing candidate chronographs.

During the break between Mercury and Gemini, NASA tested chronographs for astronaut use. The eventual winner of the testing was the Speedmaster.

The majority of Speedmasters NASA acquired were 105.012s, but a number of 105.003s (like Ed White's) and—later—145.012s were obtained. The Omega community has not been able to assemble a full list of the chronographs obtained by NASA, but a partial list has been assembled by Omega and is in collectors' hands.

A few months after Ed White's Gemini 4 spacewalk, NASA photos

of the EVA were published in National Geographic. Omega has said that this was the first indication they had that NASA had been issuing the Speedmaster to astronauts.

To signify this, Omega decided to rename the model the Omega Speedmaster Professional. Soon, in the fall of 1965, 105.012s started being produced with dials bearing "PROFESSIONAL" in all caps below the script "Speedmaster" on the dial. The 105.003 was superseded by a new case reference (the 145.003) and the 105.012 was soon to be replaced by a new case reference (the 145.012).

Mysteries

There is a bit of uncertainty about the sequence of events with all four of these case reference numbers. We know that the 105.003 and 105.012 were produced simultaneously, and that the 105.003 was discontinued in favor of the 145.003 before the end of 1965. It seems that the 105.012 was in production with "Pro" dials at least through the end of 1965 and perhaps into 1966.

There is also uncertainty as to when Omega started the practice of printing "PROFESSIONAL" on the dial. More than a couple 105.012-63s have shown up for sale on the Web with "PROFESSIONAL" dials that appear to be correct, with aged luminosity that matches the aging of the hands. Omega swears that the Pro dials post-date the National Geographic pictorial, but these watches pose an interesting mystery.

Could these be watches that had their dials swapped far enough after original production to have been replaced with a later dial, but early enough so that the aging matches? Or is Omega mistaken about exactly when the Pro dials started appearing on 105.012s?

In summary, originally, 105.003's all have dials without "PROFESSIONAL," and the plain 19 mm lugged case. The 105.012 can have either dial and the twisted lug 20 mm asymmetrical case, but one should scrutinize the serial number and year of production on the caseback carefully when considering the purchase of

The men on the moon are wearing last year's Omega Speedmasters

Speedmaster spacecraft scorecard

Since 1961, 10,412 of the most reliable Omega Speedmaster (or "moon" watch) have been worn, with only one malfunction, in over 1.5 million hours flown in space. The watch is a special way to be around the belly button of the astronaut's space suit.

See table below for details.

Speedmaster 1: 145,003

Speedmaster 2: 145,004

Speedmaster 3: 145,005

Speedmaster 4: 145,006

Speedmaster 5: 145,007

Speedmaster 6: 145,008

Speedmaster 7: 145,009

Speedmaster 8: 145,010

Speedmaster 9: 145,011

Speedmaster 10: 145,012

Speedmaster 11: 145,013

Speedmaster 12: 145,014

Speedmaster 13: 145,015

Speedmaster 14: 145,016

Speedmaster 15: 145,017

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