



Technical Specs

Movement:

Omega calibre 1861;
rhodium-plated finish,
48-hour power reserve

Dial: Black

Crystal: Hesalite

Bracelet:

Stainless steel

Water resistance: 30m

Case: Stainless steel; 42 mm

Functions: Chronograph, tachymeter,
small seconds

Modern Classics: Speedmaster Pro



QP kicks off a new series chronicling those classic timepieces any self-respecting watch enthusiast should have in their collection, plus a couple of alternatives should you wish to look further afield. This issue, the spotlight falls on Omega's veteran astronaut, the Speedmaster Professional chronograph. If any watch embodies the ethos of the Modern Classics series, the so-called 'Moon Watch' is it, meeting every single criteria: longevity, quality, classic status and – not insignificantly – incredible value for money. For *bona fide* credentials and an affordable price tag, there is no better place to start.

Ken Kessler

Alternative #1:

Breguet Type XX

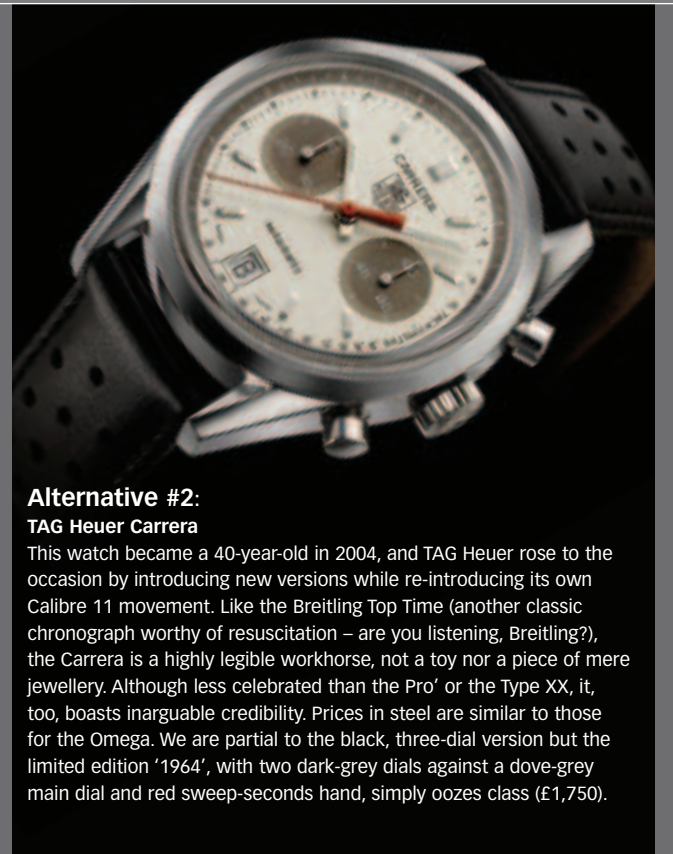
Like the Speedmaster Professional, Breguet's Type XX has an illustrious history, the watch first appearing around 1950 as a pilot's timepiece for the French Air Force. Although it has not enjoyed uninterrupted production like the Omega, it has been produced periodically and thus enjoys total credibility. Breguet revived it as a permanent line in the 1990s, with a number of variants available. Stick to steel for absolute understated refinement (£4,375); rose-gold cases or diamond bezels on a military watch are verging on bling 'chic'. Older, three times dearer but probably 10 times more prestigious than the Pro'.



Alternative #2:

TAG Heuer Carrera

This watch became a 40-year-old in 2004, and TAG Heuer rose to the occasion by introducing new versions while re-introducing its own Calibre 11 movement. Like the Breitling Top Time (another classic chronograph worthy of resuscitation – are you listening, Breitling?), the Carrera is a highly legible workhorse, not a toy nor a piece of mere jewellery. Although less celebrated than the Pro' or the Type XX, it, too, boasts inarguable credibility. Prices in steel are similar to those for the Omega. We are partial to the black, three-dial version but the limited edition '1964', with two dark-grey dials against a dove-grey main dial and red sweep-seconds hand, simply oozes class (£1,750).



Soon to celebrate its 50th anniversary, the Speedmaster Professional has its roots in the manual-wind Speedmaster chronograph launched in 1957, which used Omega's column-wheel calibre 321 – based on a fabulous manual-wind Lemania movement born in 1942. This was replaced in 1968 by the calibre 861 (now known as 1861) with 'cams' – the movement that still powers the Pro'. Simply called the 'Omega Speedmaster' at birth, the debut version featured a black dial with the 'broad arrow' hands that Omega revived for a number of models, including the Railmaster. The hands changed to the straight, slim ones seen on the astronaut model in 1964, while – crucially – the name 'Professional' was added in 1966.

In orbit

In an era bursting with stunners from Rolex, Universal Geneve, Breitling and others, what happened to transform the Pro' from yet another superb manual-wind chronograph into a genuine classic was the intervention of NASA. The Omega Speedmaster was the only chronograph from a dozen brands to pass the American aeronautical agency's impossibly strict tests for use in space missions. These included exposure to extreme temperatures, corrosion, shocks, vacuums, intense humidity, acceleration and deceleration, pressure extremes, zero gravity, vibration, noise

and various other warranty voiding acts. Chronometer testing? A doddle in comparison.

Despite some nasty politicking by certain American watch brands, the Omega's sheer, indisputable competence and indestructibility won through on 1st March, 1965. Thus the Speedmaster earned its Moon Watch nickname and the back of the case proudly identifies the timepiece as the only watch worn on the moon. Most famously, the Speedmaster Pro' helped save the lives of those on the Apollo 13 mission – used to time thruster bursts during re-entry. It remains the only watch flight-qualified for extra-vehicular use by NASA, as well as by the Russian space agency NPO Energija.

Inevitably, commercial demands have resulted in so many versions that a Japanese collector was able to fill a fat book with all the variants: assorted dial colours, straps and bracelets, horrible 'alternative' cases in the 1970s (The Decade That Taste Forgot), versions with special scales (including a pulsometer for doctors, and telemeters for artillerymen), gold cases and just about anything else that Omega thinks it can sell. But forget all that – just take £1,500 to your nearest Omega dealer and ask for a ref. 3570.50.00. Accept no substitute if you really want to wear what the astronauts used. ●

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