

# OMEGA EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES: MYTHS AND REALITIES

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For almost two years, extracts from Omega's archives have no longer been available, even though the brand was one of the first to offer this type of service to its customers. The discontinuation of this service has raised a number of questions among Omega aficionados, even to the point of dampening some people's interest in purchasing vintage Omega models. That's why we wanted to take a look at the characteristics and objectives of these famous documents.

For years, we had probably become too accustomed to Omega. Unlike many other competing brands - and comparable ones, particularly in terms of production volumes - Omega had, since the mid-2000s, been offering extracts from the archives for the watches produced in its workshops.

The principle was simple: given a few basic details - a reference number and a serial number - and a fairly simple observation of the watch, it was possible to receive an official document from the brand, signed and therefore validated, certifying that the model presented had indeed been produced by Omega, with a certain amount of information about it.

We are going to go into more detail on these various points, in an extremely factual and educational way, in order to better understand what is at stake with the extracts produced in the past, on the one hand, and the impact of their absence today, on the other.

We will therefore address the following questions:

1. The issuance of the extracts from the archives
2. The evolution of the extracts from the archives
3. The role of the extracts from the archives
4. The absence of the extracts from the archives

# THE ISSUANCE OF THE EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Until recently, the procedure for obtaining an extract from the archives for an Omega watch was simple.

All you had to do was fill in a form on the brand's official website, indicating:

- the name or description of the model,
- the model reference,
- the serial number of the movement.

It was also necessary to send at least 2 pictures of the watch (with the possibility of attaching additional ones):

- a front picture showing the dial,
- a picture of the back of the watch.

If everything was in order, an extract in PDF format was first sent to the customer by e-mail, before the original extract in paper format was sent.

Before the introduction of this centralized procedure on the brand's website, it was possible to communicate the same information by other means: by letter addressed directly to the Head Office, by visiting a boutique, by visiting the Museum in Bienne... In all cases, the objective was always the same: to provide Omega with the information indicated above.

## Issuance of the extracts from the archives

As part of the research work for our various books, we were lucky enough to be able to examine the different types of information supports available in the Omega archives, which enabled the brand to issue these documents for its customers.

This analysis is fundamental to understanding the way in which these documents are formalized, as well as the real meaning of the information they contain.

**The only entry point for a research in the archives is therefore the movement serial number.**

With this serial number, Omega's teams can search for the characteristics of the corresponding watch through several types of media:

- production microfilms,
- books referencing the customer (country or organisation) of destination and the delivery date; these very imposing books, filled in by hand, date back almost to the beginning of the company's history,
- accounting invoice binders,
- management information systems from the late 1980s onwards.

Today, a very large proportion of all these media have of course been digitalized.

### Content of the extracts from the archives

The only information linked to the serial number - when available, which is not always the case - is:

- the movement serial number (information provided by the customer, the starting point for the search),
- the watch reference,
- the type of watch (wristwatch, pocket watch...),
- the model name and certain versions (Constellation, Seamaster, Speedmaster...),
- the number, type and function of the movement,
- the metal of the case (or caseband),
- the bracelet and sometimes its reference (mainly available from the 1970s onwards),
- the case number (particularly relevant to older watches produced before the 1950s),
- the production date,
- the destination (usually a country, or sometimes organisations such as armed forces or diplomatic corps, or for internal use).

In addition, certain remarks are possible, such as a special status (prototype), or an individual number for certain limited series, or the name of the retailer (sometimes available, particularly when the watch has been delivered in Switzerland).

On the other hand, in the vast majority of cases, and especially for watches made before the 1980s (the start of computerization of data), the documents available in the archives make no mention of particular types of dials, hands, bezels or other special configurations.

# THE EVOLUTION OF THE EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

We have been studying and collecting Omega models for over 25 years. In the process, we have seen the form and content of the extracts produced by the brand evolve.

Although the first extracts issued by the brand date back to 2005, their popularity probably really took off with the Omegamania thematic auction sale organised jointly by Omega and Antiquorum in 2007. The watches sold at this auction were accompanied by a document signed by the President of Omega.

**OMEGAMANIA**

**CERTIFICATE**

This timepiece was part of the OMEGAMANIA THEMATIC AUCTION held in Geneva on 14 & 15 April 2007 and was registered under Lot # 211. We hereby certify that it is a genuine OMEGA product.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE WATCH**

Type:	OMEGA Speedmaster Professional Chronograph
Calibre:	861
Metal:	Stainless Steel
Bracelet:	Stainless Steel

**CHARACTERISTICS**

Movement no:	29116
Case no:	-
Watch reference:	ST 145.0022-69
Production date:	1970
Remarks:	One of a few prototypes made during « The Alaska Project » in order to protect this timepiece better against low temperatures

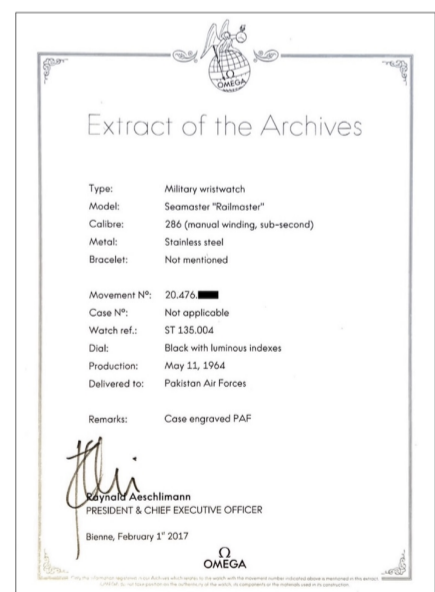
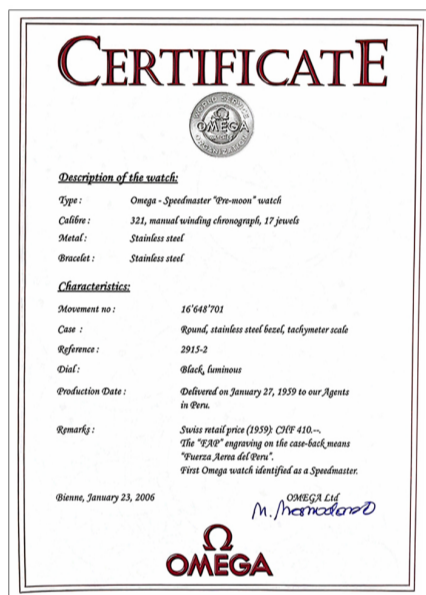
OMEGA SA  
  
Stephen Urquhart  
President

Example of a certificate from the Omegamania auction (2007)

And it was only logical that the following year, 2008, should see the development of extracts, particularly of watches sold by professional dealers (as private collectors were not yet really used to this procedure).

Following the Omegamania experience, which was a resounding success at the time, helping to raise Omega's profile in the market of collectors' watch enthusiasts on the one hand, and to significantly increase the prices of vintage models on the other, retailers immediately understood the benefits of such a document. For its part, it has to be said that Omega was one of the first brands to realize the value of this approach.

The form of the extracts has logically evolved since 2005. Below are the different types of documents issued by the brand. Other variants may have been observed, including different signatures: signature of the Museum Director, the Chairman, the Heritage Department, or even double signatures.



6 successive types of extract (from 2005 to 2019)

## Extract from the Archives

#OME00039354

This document, which has been prepared solely on the basis of the information submitted by the client but without professional examination of the timepiece by the OMEGA Heritage Department, is neither a Certificate of Authenticity nor does it, in any way, attest to the authenticity of the watch mentioned below or any of its components as it only contains information provided by our production Archives. Furthermore this document does not constitute proof of the client's or any other person's ownership of the watch described hereafter.

Type: Wristwatch  
Reference: ST 145.022  
Calibre: 861 (manual-winding chronograph with 30-minute and 12-hour recorders)  
Movement N°: 31.000  
Model: Speedmaster Professional Moonwatch  
Metal: Stainless steel  
Bracelet: Stainless steel  
Dial: Black with luminous indexes  
Production: December 9, 1970  
Delivered to: Germany

Bienne, November 6th 2020

  
Petros Protopapas  
HEAD OF BRAND HERITAGE

  
OMEGA

### Last type of extract (from 2019 to 2023)

In addition to the form, it is worth noting the information given on these extracts, which has more or less always been the same since the first documents were issued in 2005 (watch type, reference, calibre, movement serial number, model name, case metal, bracelet type, dial, production date, place of delivery).

As we shall see later, while some of this information is totally reliable and indisputable, others can raise a number of questions and/or issues.

# THE ROLE OF THE EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

An analysis of all of the above clearly shows the value, but also the limitations, of the extracts from the archives.

This document enables a link to be made between the movement's serial number and the characteristics of the watch on which the calibre was mounted when it left the factory.

The fundamental element of any reasoning concerning extracts from the archives, or even more generally concerning the appraisal of an Omega vintage watch, is that there is no way of tracing the link between a calibre, a caseband and the other constituent parts of the watch (and in particular the dial), since only the calibre bears a serial number (except from 1991 onwards, when this number will also be engraved on the caseband).

***” An extract from the archives cannot, by its very nature, be a certificate of conformity.***

## Example

Let's take a simple example: in 2023, a collector buys a Speedmaster Moonwatch presented by the seller as dating from the 1970s, and wishes to have his watch 'certified' by obtaining an extract from Omega's archives.

After following the appropriate procedure, he will receive his extract (see previous page) and will therefore be able to understand that:

- the serial number of the calibre fitted to the watch corresponds to a reference ST 145.022,
- the serial number corresponds to a type 861 manual-winding calibre,
- The dial of the watch originally fitted to this calibre was black with luminescent markers (no other specifications),
- the bracelet of the watch produced fitted to this calibre was in steel,
- the watch equipped with this calibre was produced in December 1970 and delivered in Germany.

However, he will not have any answers to the following questions:

- What is the exact sub-reference (e.g. ST 145.022-69) of his watch?
- Is it certain that the calibre of his watch has never been interchanged with the calibre of another watch of the same reference during a manipulation of some kind (servicing, for example)?
- The other components of the watch (in particular the dial, bezel, hands, crown, pushers and bracelet) original? At the very least, are they consistent with the watch's production period?

In short, is his watch conform?

***” The point is clear: the extract from the archives simply allows to link the serial number of a calibre to a reference, and to indicate when this calibre - and the watch on which it was installed when it left production - was delivered and to whom. Nothing more, nothing less.***

Extracts therefore have one very specific purpose:

- to make the link between the calibre serial number and a watch reference,
- to know the year of production and place of delivery of the calibre, and of the watch if it is assumed that its calibre has never been replaced.

#### **Special mentions of certain extracts**

It is clear that, from the various items of information available in the archives, it is generally not possible to identify certain unusual configurations, such as rare dials that would probably not be part of a standard production run.

If these special dials are indeed mentioned on the older extracts, this is probably due to the greater flexibility of the procedure in place a few years ago: the watch was presented in Bienne with the dial in question, and on the basis of this simple observation, it was common for the person in charge at the time to enter a description of the dial either in the remarks or directly on the line relating to the dial. But in fact he had no precise, certified information in the archives about this particular feature. The market for collector's watches, the habits of the various players, the inspection procedures and, above all, the prices of watches were very different at the time.

Unfortunately, these ‘old generation’ extracts were circulated and, it must be admitted, even continued to be issued for many years.

As a result, bona fide customers and collectors have become accustomed to seeing rare and important watches being exchanged, accompanied by extracts mentioning specific features that may not have been verified.

The effect was so counter-productive that some buyers were even reluctant to buy watches with special dials but whose extracts indicated a black dial. Or, conversely, some watches saw their value probably overestimated by an extract specifically mentioning the uniqueness of their dial.

**Neither of these situations has ever been substantiated by the information actually available in the archives.**

# THE LACK OF EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

At present, the Omega extracts from the archives are no longer available. We do not know if this situation is definitive, or if they will be issued again by the brand, or under what conditions.

We are often approached by collectors who do not know how to deal with such a situation.

Our first answer is therefore to reiterate, in a very factual manner, each of the explanations set out in this article, setting out the - ultimately rather limited - benefits and limitations of extracts as they existed until a few months ago.

***” Extracts are not and never have been a guarantee of the conformity of the watches observed.***

We are fortunate to have a very large proprietary database, the fruit of many years of research and observation, which enables us to:

- find out the possible configurations of a watch according to its serial number,
- generally give a fairly accurate indication of the year of production,
- generally be able to certify that the serial number corresponds to the model and/or reference of the watch.

However, without the extract, we are sometimes unable to certify these last two points, nor are we able to determine the place of delivery.

## The reference issue

This question can be illustrated as follows: several models (and therefore references) were equipped with the same types of calibre. For example, calibre 861 was installed on Speedmaster Moonwatches (reference ST 145.022) but also on Speedmaster Mark IIs (reference ST 145.014) in the 1970s.

Theoretically, an 861 movement could therefore have been dismantled from an ST 145.022 reference and reassembled in an ST 145.014 reference, an event that was probably not so unusual a few decades ago.

This situation would be clearly highlighted by an extract from the archives, which would state with certainty the correct reference, corresponding to the movement's original serial number: ST 145.022 or ST 145.014.

The question then arises as to the impact of this information on the value of the watch. This is a complex question, which we will try to answer using another example.

Let's now imagine that two 861 calibres have been exchanged, as in the previous case, between two watches, but this time with the same reference (two Speedmaster ST 145.022s).

It seems absolutely logical to consider that the two cases are based on exactly the same event, i.e. movements which are totally compliant (they are each calibres 861, of strictly identical design, and produced during the same period), but which do not correspond to the movement actually installed in the watch at the outset.

The two cases are therefore comparable. However, in the second example, the extract from the archives will in no way reveal the problem.

***” We therefore return to what is probably the only fundamental issue when it comes to appraising a vintage watch: the notion of conformity. Not to be confused, above all, with the notion of originality.***

Certifying the originality of a watch would mean certifying that each of its constituent parts has never been changed during the life of the watch, which is strictly impossible, except for a watch that has never changed owner and has never been serviced.

Certifying the conformity of a watch, on the other hand, means checking that all its constituent parts correspond to those originally fitted. This is certainly different, but it still means guaranteeing that the visual appearance of the watch is in every way consistent with the way it looked when it first left the brand's workshops.

#### **Production date and place of delivery**

This information can only be obtained with certainty from an extract from the archives.

Although they are not fundamental to the appraisal of the watch (except in a few rare cases), they may be of particular importance to some buyers: for example, someone wishing to buy a watch from its year of birth.

# CONCLUSION

For all the reasons explained throughout this article, we believe that the absence of an extract from the archives should in no way hinder the analysis or purchase of an Omega vintage watch.

And if we wanted to put it another way, we could even say that the existence of extracts in the past has never prevented watches that have been subject to risky rewinding, whether for commercial purposes or not, from being presented as 'certified'. The examples are numerous, and by their very nature, it was impossible to base questions of conformity on these simple extracts.

Furthermore, we can see that only three precise and reliable pieces of information, linked to the movement's serial number, would ultimately be useful to collectors:

- the reference,
- the date of production,
- the place of delivery.

Could we imagine a new, extremely simple procedure put in place by the brand, consisting of returning only these three items of information to the owner of an Omega watch, who would only have to enter the movement's serial number?

That might be a good idea...

