

Lawrence of Arabia's Watch

Lawrence of Arabia's Omega

The American public (*in general*) seems to spend a great deal of time following celebrities. I don't mean actually "following" or stalking them - at least not for most people - but rather tracking their activities and adventures. Now I have to admit to not being much interested in the latest movie, music or sports "stars" most recent romantic conquest. I also have to admit to paying more attention than is strictly "normal" to what celebrities wear on their wrists. Be fair: a recent email was made up of information about what watch a certain fictitious secret agent wears.



Let's take a quick look at "celebrity" inventors, explorers and adventurers, shall we? There is no shortage of timepiece associations with such people. Don't we all identify the Wright brothers with flight? Wouldn't they count as celebrities? While many watch brands have played a role in the history of aviation, only one was present with the Wright brothers on the beach of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina on that fateful December morning. It was a Vacheron & Constantin watch with a steel case, red hands and an extra-long leather strap so the watch could be worn on the thigh.

The "celebrity" featured in this email was a famous adventurer and certainly contributed to the status of the wristwatch as a symbol of rugged masculinity. As I have mentioned on several previous occasions, wristwatches were considered more than a bit feminine in their early days. It was really the period from World War I to World War II that saw the wristwatch become a "man's" status symbol. The adventurer in question was T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia.



A British officer whose specialty was map-making, Lawrence of Arabia went on to become a "celebrity" war hero. Dying relatively young in a motorcycle accident probably added to his mystique. Here was a real-life adventurer, a man of accomplishment

who wore (*and regularly used*) a wristwatch. In this case, a silver Omega single button chronograph. So! Not only did he wear a watch on his wrist – it was an identifiable brand and a rather complicated (*and expensive*) item in its day. After Lawrence’s death, the actual watch was purchased by the Omega Museum and is currently on display there.

Now I don’t know about you, but I think this watch is bit “cooler” than whatever some soap opera actor is wearing because his publicist cut a deal with a marketing company. This was the watch-of-choice, even the tool-of-choice, of an interesting historic figure whose actions gave him a place in history. Of course I never put on a vintage one-button chronograph and run around the Twin Cities on a motorcycle with thoughts of Lawrence of Arabia going through my head. I also never even think of James Bond when I strap a Submariner on my wrist.... And anything to the contrary, that my wife tells you, is a dirty fib!

Here we are at the end of this email and I just realized that I’ve broken a key marketing rule by not offering you anything to buy. So, I’ll just ask how long it’s been since you purchased a watch? Well? What are you waiting for?

Thanks again for your ongoing support.

David Harrington