

# Watches Under Water

## Greetings Watch Guys (and Gals).

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What is it about an underwater or "dive" watch that so appeals to most of us? As you are on this email list, you probably have one (*if not several*) watches that are considered divers. Why did you acquire these watches? I'm going to say that there are two principle reasons: functionality and association.

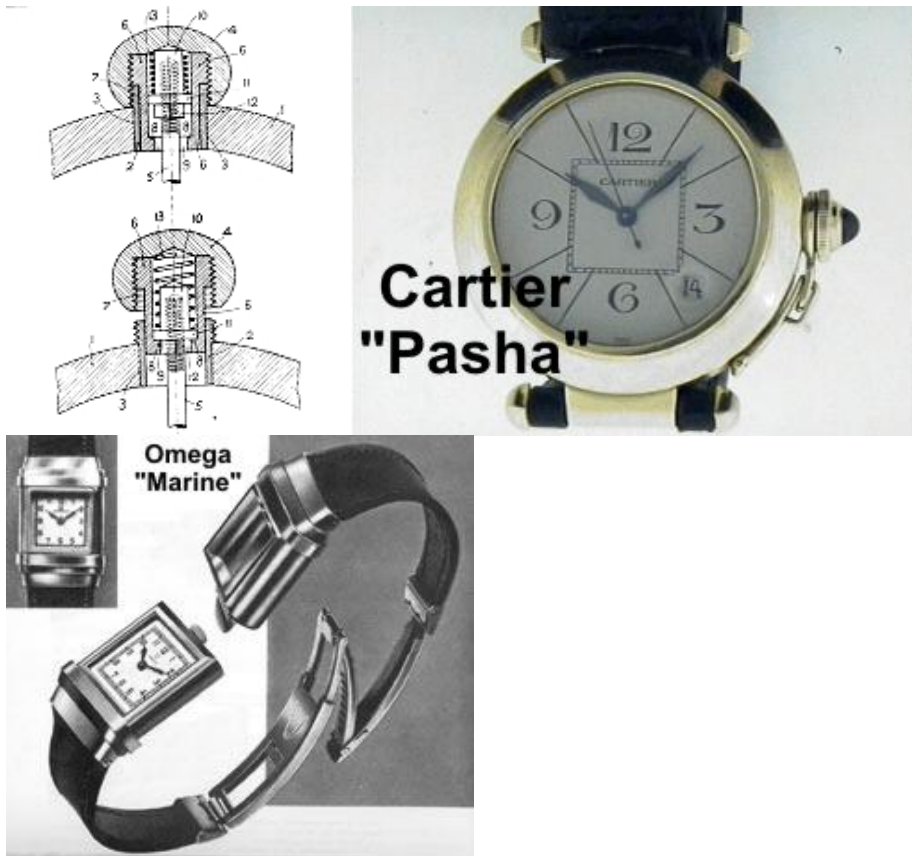
The functionality of a dive watch runs the full spectrum from actual use under water to washing the car, from counting down time remaining on your dive to seeing how long it takes to get home from the office. A dive watch has many features that make it an excellent timepiece on dry land.

Association is something that drives many purchase decisions, but few of us will admit to. In dive watches, names like "James Bond" and more recently "Dirk Pitt" bring specific watches to mind.

There's also the lifestyle association of wanting a watch designed for extreme use – call it the tough/rugged/adventuresome factor.

In this and coming emails, I will touch on the history of the underwater watch and **will ask you to contribute by sharing your water-related watch stories.** ([Please email me if you have any stories you'd like to share](#))

Firstly, we will be talking about water *resistance* as there's really no such thing as water *proof* when it comes to watches. While there were certainly some "well sealed" watches in the 1920s, it was Hans Wilsdorf of Rolex who brought us the first generally effective water resistant watch. The idea was to seal the watch case by putting threads on both halves and screwing them together. The movement and dial were mounted within a ring that screwed into the case. Several watch companies besides Rolex used this type of case including Omega and Longines. Even with this type of case, there was still a weak point at the stem/crown. In 1925, two Swiss watchmakers devised and patented a screw-down system to address this concern. Hans Wilsdorf understood that the combination of a sealed case, well-fitted crystal and screw-down stem would make for a better watch. He negotiated with the Swiss watchmakers to acquire the stem patent and so was born the Rolex Oyster.



In 1927, Mercedes Gleitze swam the English Channel with a Rolex Oyster on her wrist for the entire 15 hour, 15 minute swim (*the exact details of this "story" are in some dispute*) and the watch was running along just fine when she emerged from the water. This was HUGE news in 1927 and the publicity surrounding the event launched Rolex to a prominent place in the watch world. The basic element of the Oyster design are still in use today on Rolex, and MANY other, water resistant watches. In 1932, or so the story goes, the Pasha of Marrakesh asked Louis Cartier to produce a water resistant watch so he could "know the exact time while swimming in my swimming pool." So was born the Cartier Pasha watch which features a special protective crown that screws down over the watch crown. Also in 1932, Omega took a different tack completely when it introduces the Omega Marine which essentially had one case inside another. The Omega Marine was put to the test in 1936 when an underwater researcher named Charles William Beebe went to depth of over 40 feet wearing a huge helmet, weighted boots, tubes that lead up to the surface, and his Omega Marine watch. This was, of course, in the days before scuba gear. The underwater watch market was changed dramatically in 1946 when Jacques Cousteau's Aqua Lung system became commercially available (*in France, it wasn't until 1952 that it was available in the US*). From the 1950s to today, scuba diving has grown one of the most popular "adventure" sports on the planet. There is some debate as to who made the first civilian dive watch. The Omega Marine wasn't a great success and was really a conventional watch in a "second" case. The Blacpain 50 Fathoms model was first seen in a film with Jacques Cousteau that was made in late 1953. In September

of 1953, Rolex made the first “Submariner” watch and it is with that timepiece that we will continue this story in a future email.

Thanks again for your support of our sites. We truly appreciate your comments and feedback.

*David Harrington*

[www.TheWatchPlaceOnline.com](http://www.TheWatchPlaceOnline.com)

[www.InvictaGuys.com](http://www.InvictaGuys.com)

[david@harringtonbusinessgroup.com](mailto:david@harringtonbusinessgroup.com)

[dharrin302@aol.com](mailto:dharrin302@aol.com)

(651) 645-7041

(651) 286-2670 - FAX