A Case Study

Constellation
CALENDAR CHRONOMETER

OMEGA
FOR A LIFETIME OF PROUD POSSESSION
During the period of in-house manufacture of Omega Constellations – from the 300 series calibres through to and including some of the 1000 series calibres – more than 300 model numbers were released, of which about 200 are listed on the Omega database. Fortunately for the collector, while there were numerous models the case styles and designs remained relatively few. In this article I will cover cases from a design perspective, rather than repeat what is on the Omega database. Where possible I will introduce information that is not on the database.

This article covers men’s Constellations from inception to the end of in-house manufacture. True In-house manufacture ended, it is argued, when Nicholas Heyek first re-structured the SSIH Group, although it has been claimed that Omega has always maintained its ‘manufacture’ status because most of the watch components have always been produced within the Swatch corporate stable of which Omega is a part.

Case back Numbers

Case back numbers are very important because they allow you to match the case style and approximate period of manufacture with the serial number of the movement. They are a key to comprehensive information about particular Constellation models.

For example, if you were investigating the possibility of purchasing a hidden crown Constellation with a 35.5mm case, numbered 168.004, that featured a convex deluxe dial, a search of the Omega database http://www.omegawatches.com/cu_vintage/main.php will reveal information shown in the table opposite.

The information reveals the calibre number of the movement housed in this case, dial features, movement functions and other important information that is invaluable in determining authenticity or originality of the watch.

What this particular listing doesn’t tell you is the number of the case that superseded this model. For that you would have to dig deeper into the database to determine that, in this instance, the replacement cases were 168.0010 and later still, 168.016.
So, if you discovered a calibre 751 movement sitting in a case 168.004 instead of case 168.016 as in the example overleaf, you would be alerted immediately to the work of a rather perverted Doctor Frankenwatch!

**Crows**

The most famous of the Constellation crowns were the ‘ten-siders’ used in the 1950s and earlier 60s models. BF 1080 (2.00mm tube diameter) has now been discontinued while BF 1060 (2.5mm tube diameter) is still available as at 2007.

The standard for all Constellation watches until ref. 168.004 and the C-Shaped cases is the ten-sided crown with the reference numbers mentioned above. Omega has since substituted a round crown for the discontinued ten-sider, however, to repeat, all case numbers to 168.004 originally featured a ten-sided crown.

Correct crowns are determined by case back numbers. One way in which to establish if the crown on your Constellation meets specifications is to access the web pages of jeweller supplier Otto Frei: [http://www.ofrei.com/page_147.html](http://www.ofrei.com/page_147.html)

While, from some accounts, the people at the Otto Frei establishment are not the most pleasant of people to deal with, the web site is a mine of information. Use the search function (enter, for example, “2943 crown”) and you will be directed quickly to the part number that matches the case back number. In many instances there are photographs of the crown, which enable you to ascertain visually if a crown is correct.

**Case Condition**

The best measure of case condition is sharpness of lines. As mentioned later, the pre dog-leg cases made quite an aggressive design statement with strong definition and distinct lines. This statement is forever compromised when zealous or dim-witted restorers decide to give the case a “bit of a polish” and don’t know when to stop.

Earlier Constellations were highly polished. Any polishing out of marks and dings should maintain strictly the distinct symmetry of the case. Many dealers and watchmakers make the mistake of polishing the life out of cases, leaving them bereft of their original character. Later Constellations often featured satin or brushed finishes, and, once again, zealous polishers often eliminate the original finish in an attempt to remove signs of wear and tear, as per the example above top.

From a collecting point of view, a sharp case with a few surface scratches and minor dings is preferable to an overly polished one that has been transformed into a soulless shell devoid of its original charm. When examining a case with a view to purchase, either avoid cases that have lost their definition through wear or over-polishing or discount the price accordingly.
Contrary to popular belief, the stainless steel used for Omega watch cases, as with most other brands, will rust over time. Moisture enters a watch essentially in three places: through the crystal or bezel, through the crown stem and through the case back. When moisture enters, the affected parts may remain moist for days and the ultimate result is rust. Bad case back gaskets appear to be the major cause of rust in Omega cases, the hermetic crowns offering good protection. In the example appearing opposite, the gasket had almost completely degraded leaving a long-unserviced watch to rust over time.

Untreated rust, or watch cases pitted by rust can be a good indicator of a neglected watch. Often the rust spreads to the case clamps and movement, and, while rust can be treated, it cannot be removed. Collectors who do not repair their watches would do best to avoid rusty cases because they're often symptomatic of rusted movement parts.

There are comparatively few parts of a case, and for the sake of convenience they and other relevant terms are listed below:

**Case**: The metal housing of a watch’s parts that protects the watch-movement from dust, damp and shocks.

**Bezel**: The retaining ring in which the crystal or glass is mounted.

**Middle**: The middle of most 300 and 500 series Constellations is the circular part of the case that plumps out from the bezel. Later Constellations featured one-piece cases (monocoques) with a different water and moisture resisting system. The movement was accessed through the front of the case after removal of the crystal.

**Case back**: The reverse side of a watch case. Constellation case backs either have a solid gold observatory decal or a stainless steel observatory decal moulded into the case back. Case backs are mainly ‘screw-in’ (The case back and gasket/o ring screws into the middle case affording a watertight fit) or press-in (The case back snaps on to the middle case when pressure is applied, which, according to some, does not afford as good a seal).

**Beads of Rice**: Seven and nine row bracelets that featured smaller inner links that resembled beads of rice.

**Bevelling**: Chamfering of the edges of the bezel to create additional ‘lines’ to the watch case.

**Brushed Finish**: A non-gloss polished finish, akin to brushed metal finishes. Some horological vandals use a smooth polish on brushed finished surfaces to remove signs of wear from the watch. This devalues the watch considerably.

**Crown**: The knob on the pendant of a stem, turned to wind the watch and to set the hands and date.

**Crystal**: Also known as the ‘glass’ that covers the dial. Many earlier Constellations have acrylic crystals that mark and scratch with normal daily wear. Shallow scratches can be buffed out. Later Constellations featured a mineral crystal that is more resistant to scratching.

**Ébauche**: French term also used in English speaking countries to describe a movement blank: basically a collection of loose parts including the plate, bridges, the power train, winding and setting mechanism and the regulator. The timing system, the escapement and the mainspring, however, are not parts of an “ébauche”.

**Gold Top**: A term used to describe Omega cases with a solid gold bezel and 100 micron rolled gold/gold plaque lugs.

**Integrated bracelet**: A bracelet that is incorporated into the design of the case.

**Lugs**: Protrusions on the case of a watch to which the bracelet or strap is fitted. Various types of lugs can be found on Constellations, such as teardrop lugs, straight lugs, Bombay-type lugs and what are known as ‘dog leg’ lugs.

**Manufacture d’horlogerie**: French term for a company which produces most of the components (particularly the “ébauches”) needed for the manufacture of its models. Usually shortened to ‘manufacture’

**Monocoque**: French term that literally means single, or one, shell: in other words a one-piece case where the movement is accessed through removal of the crystal.

**O-Ring**: Also known as gasket. Used to seal the back of the watch both in press-in or screw-on models. Usually also used on the winding stem to protect against water and dust. Normally made from rubber or plastic

**Spring bar**: A small rod with a sprung pivot at either end to fix the strap or bracelet to the case.
Chapters of the Constellation Design Story

There were three distinct case design chapters in the history of true ‘manufacture’ Omega Constellations. The First Chapter began in 1952 and lasted until 1958 when the sturdy old cal 354 Bumper was finally phased out in favour of the Calibre 501 bi-directional rotor movement.

The first chapter is represented splendidly by case 2700 shown in the picture opposite, taken from the Omega website. The first ever cases to house a branded Omega Constellation were the 2648 series, however all of these were fitted with convex rather than pie pan dials. The series was released in 1952 and offered a choice of solid gold, gold cap or stainless steel cases. The 2700 was the first of the pie pan dials and featured arrow-head markers, a ten sided crown and a firm curve on the outer plane of the lugs. The lugs had open spring bar holes that allowed easy removal of bands and bracelets.

The cases were not water resistant and the 2652 was soon released to correct that shortcoming. For those wanting to collect models that were released from 1952, the cases to collect are: 2648, 2652, 2699 & 2700 (Deluxe). These cases were marketed for about two years in Europe, but longer internationally. The grand Luxe model 14355 was launched in 1953, and in 1954 upgrades of the earlier models offering better waterproofing and additional dial designs were represented by cases 2782 and 2799. Case 2652 was still being sold in 1957 as I have seen as original sales docket for the model dated so.

The cases were robust-looking with larger bezels that included a strongly bevelled rim. In the example above, the bezel is of solid rose gold and the heavy lugs are covered with a 100-micron layer of gold, known as “rolled gold” or “gold plaque”. The ten-sided crown was in gold plate and contrasted beautifully with the polished stainless steel body of the case. The stainless steel middle of the case plumped out from the bezel.

The examples on this page demonstrate how the pre dogs-leg cases offered quite an aggressive visual statement about the status of the watch, achieved through a rapport between the 12 facets of the pie pan dial, the heavy hour markers, a deeply chamfered bezel edge and strong Bombay-type lugs.

Case numbers for the Calibre 352 and 354 Constellations were in the 2xxx series. The Grand Luxe case back numbers however sported numbers in the 14xxx range, 14355 being the first Grand Luxe released. Deluxe versions in this calibre were 2699 (screw-in), 2700 (press-in) and 2799 (press-in).
Case numbers were few, and this is an important point to remember, as evidenced by the Frankenwatch calibre 354 Seamaster overleaf masquerading as a Constellation. The case housed only Seamasters, but also other models in the Omega range and is often seen bearing Constellation dials.
Between 1955 and 1957 the 501, 504 and 505 calibres were launched, and they can be seen as a bridge between the old and new design story.

Fashions change and case and dial designs reflect changing tastes, however the late fifties weren't notable for innovative case design. While a range of consumables including cars and furniture underwent a design revolution, initial 500 series case designs, and indeed some early calibre 551s, borrowed heavily from the earlier design slate, both in case style and dial appearance.

The chunkier 35mm cases remained, the lugs were similarly curved and earlier models featured the open spring bar holes. Case 2852, for example can be seen with and without spring bar holes, although 18k models do not appear to have had spring bar holes. The lugs on the model opposite also look as though they taper more closely into the case at the bezel end, but in fact they do not and are very similar to the OT 2700 illustrated previously.

Markers were still, generally, quite solid, and earlier 2xxx series cases, as with the earlier 300 series, some case backs were of the press-in, non waterproof variety.

The early 500 series movements also borrowed from earlier technology, having been an evolution of the calibre 490, with added jewels and swan neck regulation to achieve better functionality and chronometer status.

501, 504 and 505 case backs also generally sported case back numbers in the 2xxx range including: calibres 501/505 - cases 2852, 2853 and 2930 for the deluxe Pie pan, OG 2930 for the Grand Luxe, and in calibre 504: 2943, 2954, 2988 (Grand Luxe without bracelet) and 16995 for the Grand Luxe with bracelet.

Chapter Two of the Constellation design story really began with the later calibre 551 and 561 case designs. The variety of case styles available grew. Dial designs changed with markers becoming less heavy, but the distinctive twelve-facet pie pan dial continued.

The pie pan design has stood the test of time and appeared on a special Constellation model released in the mid-seventies, Seamaster models in the mid-seventies and resurfaced again in 2003 on some models of Geneve.
Ref. 2954 Constellation Calendar de Luxe, 18 kt Gold, automatischer Chronometer mit Kalender, mit amtlichem Gangeschein, wasserdicht, stoßgesichert, antimagnetisch. In die aufgesetzten Goldzahlen des massiv-goldenen Zifferblattes sind feine Onyxstäbchen eingeschlossen; in Sterling-Silver-Schatzüle 0.925 DM 1370,--. In Lederetui DM 1270,--. Gleiches Modell, Ref. 2943, in 18 kt Gold mit versilbertem Luxuszifferblatt DM 1100,--, in Edelstahl DM 488,--.

Die Constellation Calendar wurde für Männer geschaffen, die sich nicht mit Alltäglichen begnügen. Ausgezeichnet mit dem amtlichen Gangeschein, gibt Ihnen die Constellation Calendar die Gewißheit, die Uhr zu besitzen, die Ihrer Personlichkeit, die Ihrem Stilgefühl entspricht.

Früher oder später fällt Ihre Wahl auf Omega
Cases similar to that of the 2xxx series were still housing Constellations up until the mid-sixties. The earlier calibre 551s were housed in cases in the 14xxx range until the case number system changed in around 1963. The rule generally applies to the earlier calibre 561 date models as well.

In 1964, case 14393 and similar styles were sold alongside the distinctive dog-leg lug cases featuring a finer, rounded bezel lines, rather than sharply chamfered, that first appeared in 14900 cases. Later replaced by case number 167.005/168.005, the dog-leg case design has remained one of the most popular designs with collectors.

In the early 1960s, Omega broadened the range of case styles and dial designs and included an array of accessories that were marketed at sale point. This was one of the earlier attempts of multiple selling at the retail end, providing customers with a variety of options to ‘style up’ their purchase.

The range of solid gold, gold plated, stainless steel and leather bands increased, and in many instances watchmakers purchased the watch heads and gave customers the option of band or bracelet choice. Some of the bracelets were exquisite. The four-ribbed bracelet appearing on a solid gold case similar to that pictured above – reference number BA 3685415/886 on the 1964 pamphlet opposite – was simply stunning and is now quite rare.

New styles featuring round cases with both hidden and non-hidden crowns came out in the date model 561 under the case number 168.004. One of the first models to include an integrated bracelet was the 168.004 style case. Reference 368.5470/168.014 incorporated a solid gold mesh bracelet welded to the watch head to stunning effect. The 168.004 case style continued as a popular choice until the early 1970s.
Case 14399 Grand Luxe 18k solid gold. Calibre 551

Case BA 368.802 Grand Luxe 18k solid gold. Calibre 561

Case 168.005. Late 1960s calibre 564. Excellently preserved convex dial. Note that date surround has bevelled round corners but non-bevelled horizontal planes
Caseback 14381/2 SC-9 1959/60 calibre 551

Authentic version of the recently copied case 14900 SC 61 - calibre 551

Rarer Case 168.001 – 37mm case made especially for Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. Same shape as the 14393 SC

C-Shaped 168017 18k gold case, dial and bracelet – calibre 561

Caseback 14381/2 SC-9 1959/60 calibre 551 18k solid gold
Case 168.006. The deluxe, solid gold, Calibre 581 model with onyx inlaid markers. Case 168.005 housed the normal Pie pan dial with faceted markers, while case 167.005 housed the non-date calibre 551 movement.

Case 167.021. Calibre 712 serial number dates the watch to 1966. According to Omega, the replacement for 167.005. Has screw-in case as opposed to normal 712 press-in case.
As the values of 1960s Pie pans increase so does the potential for fakes. A character on eBay was offering fake case ensembles such as the example shown opposite. The case number on all current fake cases offered is 14900 62 SC, and the astute collector will avoid the case number until confirming it is genuine. One way of confirming a genuine case is patina and other signs of normal wear, along with dial script confirmation, movement calibres and serial numbers. Numerous dealers have purchased these fake ensembles and a steady trickle of Frankenwatches has ensued on eBay and other markets as a result.

Fake ‘solid gold’ cases made in Thailand, Vietnam and China have also reached the market, the most common of which is a case with the case back number 091919.

In around late 1964 Omega tested the C-Shape Constellation in the European market, so named because of mirror images of two Cs seen when viewing the case head-on. Case 168.009/17 in solid gold with a solid gold dial and bracelet was a sensation. The case also came in gold top and stainless steel models and remained as a staple of the line well into the 1000 series movements.

A range of C-Shaped cases with different dials followed, including calibre 561 powered 168.009/17 with gold hands and markers as well as the solid gold version of this case. C-Shaped models powered by calibre 564 include the 1966 white gold knurled bezel model 168.027 along with solid gold, stainless steel and gold top models of the same case number, and cases bearing the number 168.039 from the late 1960s.

Some changes were effected in later cases, such as the knurled gold bezel in later 564 calibre examples and the calibre 751 day-date models. But, it is a testament to the excellent design of the case that it withstood the eclecticism and fickleness of ‘Swinging Sixties’ fashion preferences to survive into the Seventies.

As in the earliest Constellation cases, some Constellation cases were not dissimilar to Seamaster and other Omega model cases, particularly some 149xxx cases, and this is where the buyer needs to be wary. Often, a perfectly respectable, albeit non-chronometer grade 500 series Seamaster movement and case crops up wearing a Constellation dial. Case numbers accessible through the Omega database become all-important.
The Omega database, however, is not complete, and many Constellation case numbers are not listed. In this instance, it is wise to seek expert help in establishing authenticity of the dial, movement, crown and case ensemble before committing to a purchase.

The last of the Second Chapter Constellations were seen in cases 168.015 and 168.025, as shown opposite. The flat dial model came in case 168.015 and featured gold hour markers and hands. The Pie pan model, 168.025, does not yet feature on the Omega database, and sported gold hands and gold onyx inlaid markers. The bezel of monocoque cases was highly polished, with brushed finish lugs.

Monocoque cases were the replacement for cases 168.005 and 168.006 solid gold Constellations. The movement is accessed through the use of a special tool to remove the bezel and crystal, and then by removing the crown and outer stem the movement can be taken from the case.

The calibre 751 movement introduced in 1966/67 signals an initial transition between the Second Chapter and the Third Chapter of Omega case design. Integrated bracelets and the move to what I call the ‘Haute Bling’ styles of the Seventies proper, when cases grew chunkier, heavier and larger than the simple elegance of the 34-35 mm case designs of their predecessors, signalled The Third Chapter proper.

As in the early 500 calibres, Omega proceeded cautiously with the initial 751 designs. In 1967, C-Shaped 168.019 and 168.029 (knurled bezel) and 168.016 the successor to 168.004, cases were the first to house calibre 751.
The Third Chapter proper of Omega case design began with the calibre 751 round-in-cushion case 168.0041/168.045. The cushion case 168.0845/368.0845 (later replaced by 368.08510) powered by a 751 looked magnificent in solid gold and was also released with a solid white gold knurled bezel and stainless steel bracelet. Round-in-cushion case 168.0847/368.0847 was also powered initially by calibre 751.

Perhaps the Swansong of the 700 series was the round-in-cushion shaped 166.0252/366.0857 powered by calibre 752 that appeared in 1978. I have seen several authentically dialled models of this case number belonging to Japanese collectors as well as a number of frankens and dials refinished with “Officially Certified Chronometer” when it should not appear on the dial.

In 1972, one of the first cases to enclose the calibre 1011 movement was the popular C-Shaped case 168.0056 with onyx inlaid gold/rhodium markers and gold/rhodium hands depending on the metal in which the case was made. The crystal in some cases was flat and mineral derivative, providing greater resilience against wear, although flat acrylic crystal is also common in these models.

The C-Case came in stainless steel, solid gold, gold cap and gold electroplate. Matching bracelets were offered at sale point to allow customers to upgrade the watch. This case was still being retailed in 1979.

The last of the line of Constellation Pie pans occurred in 1975. Case 168.0065 overleaf looks similar to 168.005 cases, but on closer inspection one finds that the only common features are the lugs and bezel. The case is not as thick overall as the earlier models and the flat case back reflects the slimmer dimensions of the movement. 168.0065 was powered by a calibre 1011 movement and rarely surfaces, having been made especially for the Japanese market.

In the early nineteen-seventies, the Japanese Quartz invasion was beginning to bite on Omega and the Swiss watch industry, and, as we will see later, some weird, wonderful and aberrant Omega product was produced during this crisis.
Cushion – round and cushion cases from a 1972 Swiss catalogue. Integrated bracelets and also hooded lug models.

Range of models available in leather band from a 1972 Swiss catalogue.
Case 168.0065 in the Pie pan style housing a calibre 1011 movement. Produced for the Japanese market only in 1975.

Case 168.041. Cushion style with hidden lugs, calibre 751

Case 168.041 with solid gold bezel and integrated gold plate and SS bracelet. Calibre 751

Case BA 168.029 solid gold C-Shaped with knurled bezel. Calibre 751
I believe that the calibre 700, 711 and 712 models fit snugly into the Third Chapter of the Omega design story. Featuring mainly superflat cases, these calibres were not ‘actually’ manufactured in-house, but, arguably, cannot be viewed as ebauches because their manufacture was contained within the Omega Group of the time. More on this series of movements will appear in an article dedicated to Omega movements. Many of the cases were of solid gold gold or solid white gold. Below is a sample of the much-varied case styles produced between 1966 and 1977 including that of a rarer calibre 711 stainless steel and solid gold integrated bracelet model 155.0022/355.0815.
The three main shapes to appear consistently on in-house manufacture calibres 1011, 1012, 1020 and 1021 were the C-Shaped case, the round-in-cushion case and cushion-shaped cased. The latter two are featured on the Omega brochure opposite, purloined from Steve Waddington’s website. A very good English catalogue of the early 1970s appears on Steve’s website, giving a good cross-section of models available at the time and includes the case reference numbers: http://www.old-omegas.com/catuk72.html

1000 and 1001 powered Constellations are not featured here, as a series of misguided ‘innovations’ in design occurred during development of the movement, driven in part by the onset of some piddling piezoelectric material that vibrated at a particular frequency when captured within an electric field, namely quartz technology.

I fear that the early 1000 series movements are costly and difficult to keep running and, generally, are only collectible by those who service their own watches. I’m sure there are those who may wish to disagree and I commend them for their courageousness in owning and, indeed, defending calibres 1000 and 1001.

The cushion case and the round-in-cushion case are the two champion steeds in the Omega Constellation stable of the nineteen seventies. Heavy but minimalist in their expression, with simple lines, stark dial design and tapering bracelets, these two case designs exude an air of functional elegance during a period where ‘Bling’ often overran good taste and good sense. This is why I believe that, in terms of design, Omega at least can be classed in the category of Haute Bling as opposed to the type of Bling that belongs in the kitsch category.

It is only a matter of time before Omega Geneve Cushion cases with integrated bracelets sporting Omega Constellation dials begin to hit the market. As the value of these models appreciate, unscrupulous dealers will re-fashion the dials on Geneve 166.0191/366.0835 cases and attempt to pass them off as real Constellations. The cases are basically the same with a very similar bracelet. It will then become very important to know the case numbers and other signs of authenticity of real McCoy later Constellations.
Mention has been made about the incompleteness of the Omega database, however, this is not to make any criticism of the efforts by the small number of dedicated staff who provide collectors with an easily accessible store of information. In reality, Omega collectors are indeed privileged to have such a rich source of data, particularly when one considers the paucity of on-line information offered by many of the other historical brands. A concerted effort has been made recently to upgrade information on the database and it continues.

Following are more examples of case style released in the 1000 series. Comments are added where necessary. All watches shown overleaf are genuine Constellation models. You will note references to non-COSC certification. During the meltdown of the Swiss industry in the 70s, it appears that Omega marketed numerous Constellation models without securing chronometer status. The non-COSC Constellations here have been added after noting the exact models surface in numbers over time. Some of the rarer models have been confirmed as genuine by the Omega Museum.
Caution About Case Back Numbers

How much faith should you place in case back numbers? The answer is that you should place a lot of emphasis on case back numbers except when you shouldn’t. Case back numbers are a useful means in which to glean vital information about a Constellation as long as the case back, case and movement have had a lifetime relationship! So, it is important that when assessing a watch for its authenticity you review a cluster of indicators. Your main purpose should be to establish that the dial, movement and case belong together.

Checking the case back number on the Omega database can be an essential step in your determining authenticity, but don’t place too much importance on case back numbers. Continue with your assessment until you are clear about the lineage of the watch. As your knowledge builds, you will be able to tell obvious errors at a glance, often to your profit.
For example, I examined at a bricks and mortar dealer a calibre 551 Constellation that I recognised as a 167.005 case. The dial had a very nice, light patina indicating originality: under a loupe, the dial script and fonts confirmed it. The movement was clean and showed signs of regular service; the gaskets were good and the tell-tale signs of neglect were not present. When I examined the case back it read 168.029 – a case back I immediately recognised as belonging to a much later C-Shaped with knurled bezel case housing a calibre 751. I knew this as I had recently collected one.

Now, many people would steer clear of the watch, declaring it a Franken rather than seeing it for what it was – an authentic cal 551 with a substitute case back. I told the dealer about the case back and he said, with some nonchalance, that he’d replaced the case back because it had a soppy inscription and “People don’t want to buy dead people’s protestations of undying love”. I asked him to find it so as to confirm the truth of his story and he did. With equal nonchalance I suggested to him that he was damned if he did and damned if he didn’t, because wrong case backs demand an adjustment in price just as “dead people’s dedications of love” do. I obtained a $150.00 reduction in the price, knowing that I had a 167.005 case back on a parts watch languishing in a drawer at home.

Just as case backs are swapped for all sorts of reasons, so are movements, and this is where you have to be careful. If a movement has been through the wars, some dealers and watchmakers will reach for the nearest fit, particularly if the dial feet apertures are configured correctly to receive an original dial. Often a movement may have a dial, and the whole kit and caboodle can be shoved into an incorrect case with perhaps a few minor adjustments. This is where examining a cluster of signs becomes important because, ultimately, you may save yourself from the pain and shame of having purchased a Frankenwatch.

In 1963 Omega changed the way in which it catalogued case back numbers. Product identity codes (PIC) are a different story and are not covered in this article. There are basically two models of identification currently used by the collecting community. The first model was compiled the late and dearly missed Chuck Maddox and can be seen overleaf:
### Description of Omega Case Back Numbers – Post 1963

<table>
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<th>Case Ref. Numbers:</th>
<th>Description of Omega Case Back Numbers – Post 1963</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 4 5 0 2 2 -74 ST</td>
<td>Example Case Reference Number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1                 | The first position indicates strap/bracelet material type:
|                   | 1: Leather strap (men’s)                           |
|                   | 2: Leather strap/diamond decorated bezel (men’s)   |
|                   | 3: Bracelet (men’s)                                |
|                   | 4: Bracelet diamond decorated bezel (men’s)        |
|                   | 5: Leather strap (ladies’)                         |
|                   | 6: Leather strap diamond decorated bezel (ladies’) |
| 4                 | The first position indicates the material and the presence or absence of diamonds on the bezel, differentiated by men’s and ladies’ watches. The reference number is very convenient for parts supply operations. |
| 5                 | The second position indicates mechanism type:      |
|                   | 0: Manual winding chronograph                      |
|                   | 4: Manual winding chronograph                      |
|                   | 6: Non-chronograph                                 |
|                   | 7: Self-winding chronograph                        |
|                   | 8: Quartz or tuning fork chronograph               |
|                   | The second position indicates mechanism type Since this Speedmaster data in most cases it indicates a chronograph type of mechanism. There are of course exceptions like the c.1049's... |
| 0 2 2             | The third position indicates supplemental function type. |
|                   | 5: No date                                         |
|                   | 6: Date                                            |
|                   | 8: Chronometer                                     |
|                   | The third position indicates the presence or absence of date display, chronometer grade, and other supplemental functions. Chronometers are always listed as "8" whether they have a date display or not. |
| -74               | 
| ST                | 
| 
| 
### Differentiation of various models:

These individual numbers do not designate anything specific, but are used to distinguish between the various models produced...

### Year of Manufacturer...

### Abbreviations for watch case materials:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Description:</th>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Yellow gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>White gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Pink gold</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Strap</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Stainless steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Titanium and yellow gold combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Titanium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Titanium and pink gold combination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Sometimes this code is stamped before the case number...

### Produced by Chuck Maddox
The second version of case number identification was compiled by Steve Waddington and can be seen in entirety at: [http://www.old-omegas.com/omrefcod.html](http://www.old-omegas.com/omrefcod.html)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Digit</th>
<th>2nd Digit</th>
<th>3rd Digit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Gent's Watch</td>
<td>1 - Manual winding without second</td>
<td>1 - Non-water-resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Gent’s Jewellery Watch</td>
<td>2 - Manual winding small second</td>
<td>2 - Non-water-resistant Calender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Gent’s Bracelet Watch</td>
<td>3 - Manual winding centre second</td>
<td>3 - Non-water-resistant chronometer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Gent’s Jewellery Bracelet Watch</td>
<td>4 - Manual winding chronograph</td>
<td>4 - Non-water-resistant chronometer calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Lady’s Watch</td>
<td>5 - Self-winding without second</td>
<td>5 - Water-resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Lady’s Jewellery Watch</td>
<td>6 - Self-winding centre second</td>
<td>6 - Water-resistant Calender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Lady’s Bracelet Watch</td>
<td>7 - Self-winding chronograph</td>
<td>7 - Water-resistant chronometer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Lady’s Jewellery Bracelet Watch</td>
<td>8 - Electronic chronograph</td>
<td>8 - Water-resistant chronometer calendar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we take Constellation numbers at random, both table appear to be accurate although providing slightly different information. I have not tried every permutation but it would appear that either table can produce useful information in which to authenticate a case. The table appears most useful to determine frankenwatches in some cases. For example, a Constellation dial on a 166 case. However case 166.0252, a Constellation authenticated by the Omega museum, while indicating correct information does not contain the third numeral 8 designation of a chronometer when it clearly was. So, in general, it is best to use either table as part of a cluster of information sources to help you authenticate cases.

The main sources in which to authenticate vintage cases are the Omega database, Steve Waddington’s excellent collection of Omega catalogues from the 60s and 70s at [WWW.oldomegas.com](http://WWW.oldomegas.com), the Omega Saga, a publication in French published by the Omega museum, and with any luck, OmegaFantatic, a forthcoming publication by the Omega Museum.

Hopefully, too, this article will in some way assist collectors in making more astute evaluations and purchases as well. My thanks to all those who directly or indirectly provided snippets of information through on-line forums and emails.