

## Omega Observatory Medallions

The Omega Constellation observatory medallion was designed to commemorate Omega's numerous triumphs in chronometer competitions in Neuenburg/Neuchâtel, Geneva and, of course, its world precision records at Kew, Teddington, in the early and mid thirties.

Marco Richon in 'Omega, a Journey through Time' states that the medallion was modelled after the Observatory in Geneva. The main dome, however, has what could be described as a smooth dome, as the lower mid-twentieth century picture reveals, thus fuelling a decades-long debate on whether Geneva was indeed the model for the medallion. Some collectors point to the domes at Greenwich, seen above, and their uncanny resemblance to the brickwork domes (complete with square window on some examples) that appear on solid gold Constellations. But, one would assume that a Swiss manufacturer would opt for a national symbol, and so it's difficult not to concede that the evidence supports Marco Richon's version of events.

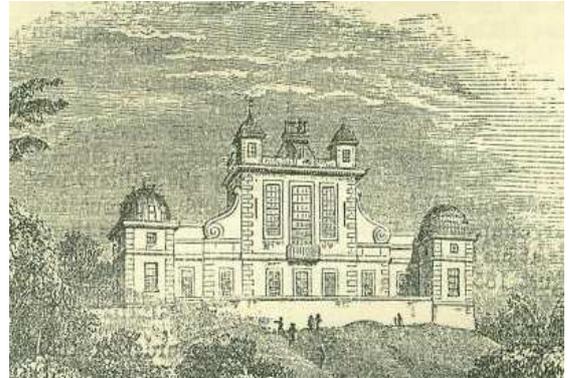
Never-the-less, the presence of different medallion designs and the inconsistent appearance of the gold medallion on cases of various metal content has resulted in a general confusion in the minds of collectors. So, is there a standard that can be applied across the range of models when determining correct case backs, or was the medallion in its various forms used so haphazardly that it is now impossible to arrive at a definitive conclusion?

The answer to the above question is that there is less inconsistency than first appears and that a certain pattern of logic can be discerned when reviewing medallions produced across various periods and models. That logic, as it appears to me, is detailed below:

### The first models

The first Constellation model was case 2648 with press-in case back. Solid gold versions featured a brickwork observatory, an etched sky and eight stars of similar dimensions arranged in a fashion that is exclusive to solid Gold Constellations. The stars from nine to twelve o'clock follow the curve of the outer rim of the medallion, while the stars appearing from twelve to four have an inverted L pattern.

This case number was also produced in stainless steel and gold capped models. The standard amongst stainless and rose and yellow gold capped models was the same. All models featured a gold medallion with non-brickwork observatory. The eight stars varied in size, and although worn, the case backs overleaf show three dominant stars amongst the constellation of eight.

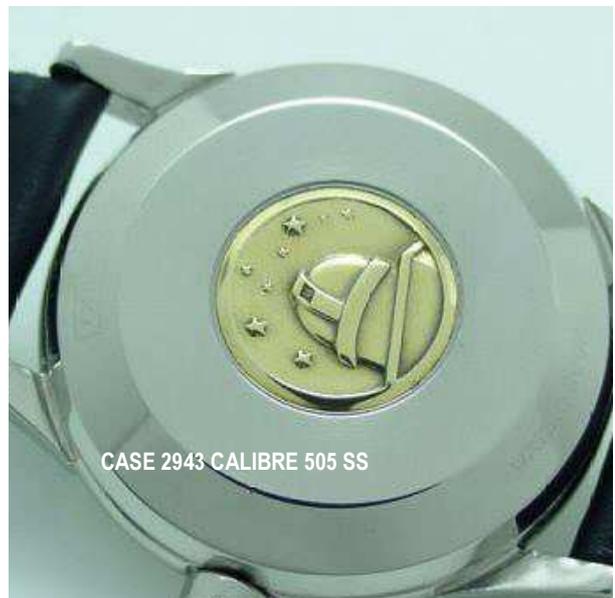


The old l'Observatoire de Genève. The observatory was closed in 1966. A new Observatory at Sauvigny on the outskirts of Geneva was opened in 1967. The Constellation observatory medallion is said to be modelled after the Domes of this observatory.





As the photographs below indicate, the standard for solid gold, stainless steel and gold capped models remained consistent through the 300 series of Constellations and indeed through to the early five hundred series models. It can be stated with certainty that even stainless steel models featured a gold observatory medallion until the advent of the mid-500 series of calibres. Note the departure in the configuration of the stars when comparing solid gold Constellations to gold cap and stainless. The inverted "L" is not so obvious and the stars from nine to twelve o'clock do not generally follow the rim of the medallion.



## The Second Design Phase

The transitional case designs of the early calibres 551 and 561 models continued the tradition of earlier models both in case and medallion design. Again stainless steel models carried gold medallions. There are some exception such as case 14902 in stainless steel which carried the embossed stainless steel medallion.



With the introduction of the 16x.xxx cases, the first design overhaul in case design for nearly a decade, we see stainless cases featuring embossed stainless medallions in stainless steel cases. From left to right below are stainless steel case backs 168.004 and 168.005, two of the updated designs that encased calibre 561 movements. The standard is that stainless cases in these models will always feature a stainless embossed medallion. Notice the sharp similarity in medallion design to earlier models.

The embossed medallions on solid gold models 168.004 and 168.005 that appear directly below their stainless counterparts don't have the etched background of previous models but retain an even star size in exactly the same configuration as earlier solid gold models.



Case 167.005 powered by calibre 551 adopts the same standard of embossed stainless steel case backs for stainless models and gold medallions for gold cap models. For all of these three models, case backs on stainless steel models that have gold medallions should be viewed with the utmost suspicion as they violate the standard of the time.



Another significant departure during the second design phase was the removal of the brickwork observatory design and a change in the configuration of the stars in solid gold cases. The 168.009 C-Shape Constellation, as shown opposite was the first model to reflect this change. I have seen many of the calibre 561/564 solid gold models and all have a plain observatory roof and the star configuration of the early gold cap and stainless models.



CASE 168.017 SOLID WHITE GOLD  
CALIBRE 564 C-SHAPED MODEL

There seems to have been a deliberate swap around of the two observatory designs. *The design on the 168.009, and later solid gold models powered by calibre 564 encased in 168.017 cases, follows the early style appearing on non solid gold cases, while the stainless and gold capped models adopted the solid gold medallion design.*

The design swap included solid white gold case 168.009/17 models as well, as shown opposite with the white gold C-shape calibre 564.

This substitution of medallion designs became the norm as we shall see in later models. Having, for some reason, turned the design tables, Omega then established a consistent approach to medallion design, with some notable exceptions, until the end of in-house manufacture.

The following pictures demonstrate that while there was a general consistency, some models did not conform to the new medallion design story.



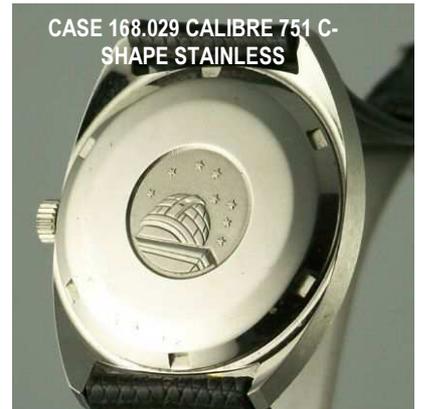
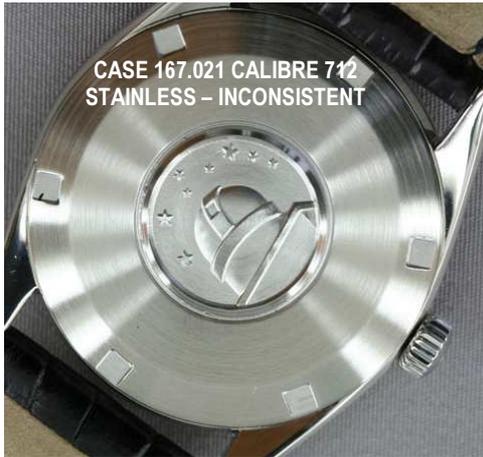
CASE 168.010 CALIBRE  
564 GOLD CAP



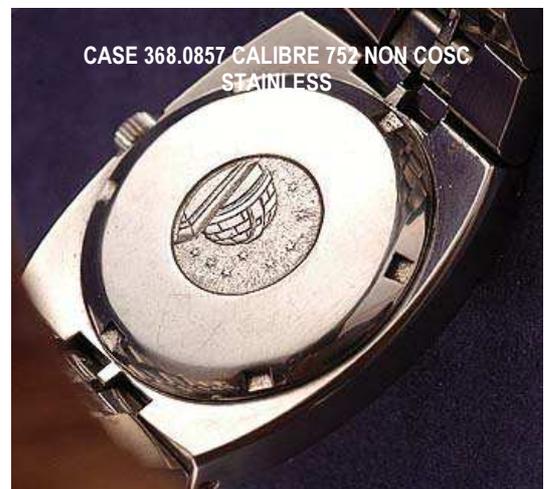
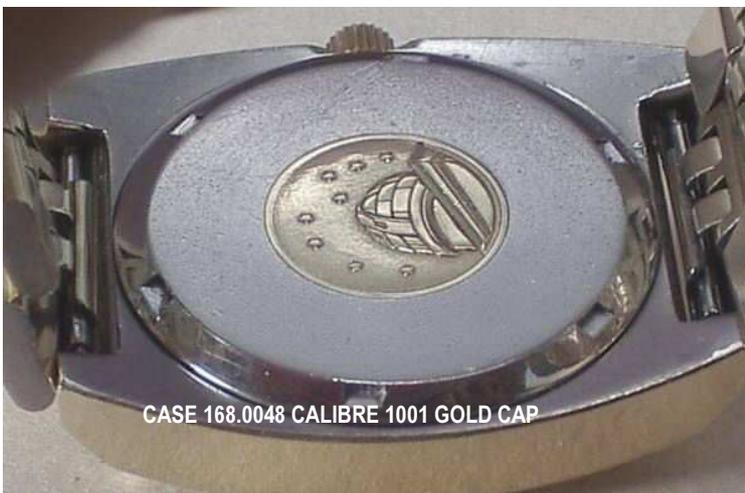
CASE 168.010 WHITE GOLD  
CALIBRE 564 - INCONSISTENT



CASE 168.015 CAL 564  
GOLD CAP - INCONSISTENT



In 10xx series models we see a continuation of the previously established standard.



## Summary

If you are looking for a simple set of rules to apply to Constellation case backs, you will be disappointed. Perhaps the most consistent aspect of Constellation case backs is the general inconsistency over time of the use of various design elements of the observatory medallion.

In reviewing literally hundreds and running into the thousands of observatory medallions over a number of years, I believe that the following rules of thumb can be applied, except when they can't!

- The 352, 354 and early 500 series models were relatively consistent: solid gold models had the brickwork observatory and their own star configuration and stainless steel and gold cap both had gold medallions with a different configuration of the stars;
- The 14xxx models generally followed the above rules, but there were exceptions, eg. Case 14902, which had the embossed stainless medallion in stainless steel cases;
- Cases 167.005, 168.005 and 168.004 had embossed stainless steel medallions in stainless cases and gold medallions in gold cap models;
- Solid gold versions of the above case numbers had brickwork observatories;
- The design story was swapped with cases 168009 and 168.017 with solid gold models featuring the non-brickwork observatory, gold cap featuring a gold brickwork observatory and stainless steel models featured a stainless steel brickwork embossed observatory medallion. This set a general standard for cases that followed;
- There were exceptions to the above rule in calibre 712 models and some of the monocoque cases;
- There was an inconsistent use of brickwork and non-brickwork observatories with the inception of the 1000 series, becoming ever more inconsistent as the sixties rolled into the 1970s.

For collectors of the 300 and early 500 series, there is a strict logic to medallions and it is less complicated in establishing factory specifications. It is also relatively easy to determine factory specification in cases 167.005, 168.004 and 168.005 (some of the most sought-after models). There is an overall consistency in some of the other 168xxx models, and then the inconsistencies begin to occur more frequently.

With the later models, particularly the 10xx models, my rule of thumb is to look for a range of examples of a particular case number and try to establish a standard. Often, over time, a pattern emerges which will allow you to make an educated guess on what the standard is.