

Authenticity and Condition Checklist

This prompt sheet reviews the most elemental aspects of determining the authenticity and condition of the first and second generations of vintage Omega Constellation. It covers the essential checks that you can make before deciding to purchase a 300 series (calibres 352 and 354) or 500 series (calibres 501,504,505, 551, 561, 564) model.

It is not suggested that you simply discount any Constellation that doesn't fit the bill. Information is power, and knowing exactly what you're bargaining for gives you both choice and leverage. Collectors make these checks for a number of reasons:

- to ascertain how much of a Constellation they're actually getting;
- to match the condition and status of the watch against their personal collecting standards;
- to determine the real value of the watch – even a dog is worth something;
- to estimate the cost of restoration to factory specifications against the capital value of the watch when restored;
- to establish their potential level of bargaining power.

Each of the checks mentioned below is underpinned by a body of knowledge. For example, in making a call on whether a dial is original or re-finished you need to have crucial knowledge about Constellation dials. If you can't confidently make a call, then you need to dive deeper into the knowledge pool. Every category mentioned below is supported by comprehensive information contained on this site.

Dial

- Original or re-finished? (review positioning of star, all lettering, chapter ring, swiss made etc)
- Correct dial for the period?
- Patina – light to heavy? (The more pristine an original dial, the more valuable. Don't discount light or attractive patina)
- Damage – reversible or irreversible (water damage, rust and dial spot emerging from under the dial is irreversible. Damage to the lacquer layer is reversible)
- Restoration (as opposed to re-finishing) – touch ups or overwriting of dial lettering?
- Correct date surround? Should be multi-faceted in most models.
- Markers properly aligned?



Genuine black dial with patina - case 168.004



Poorly re-finished dial - case 168.004

Hands

- Are the hands correct for the model and correctly faceted?
- Do the minute hand and second sweep over-reach the chapter ring (minute indices) by just a small margin?
- Do the hands reflect the T markings at 6 o'clock (In post 1962 Constellations luminous dials will carry either one or two Ts at six o'clock: the general rule is one T for hands and two Ts for luminous hands and markers) No T marking in post 1962 Constellations denoted non luminous hands and markers
- Are the hands made of the same metal as the hour markers?
- If the markers have Onyx inlay do the hands have black inserts?
- Are the hands in good condition and non-corroded?



A Frankenwatch with incorrect stick hands on a case 168.005.



Correct minute hand and second sweep. Note hands have matching black inserts. Case 168.005

Crowns

- Is the crown correct for the model? (most 300 and 500 series Constellations had the signature 10-sided crown – exceptions: cases 168.004, 168.025, 168.009/17 and some market-specific models)
- Is the crown sharp or worn?
- Does it have the raised Omega symbol?
- Is the crown the correct size?



Crown on case 2852. Larger than later models. Worn but serviceable. 2.5mm stem



Sharp crown on case 14900. Normal ten-sided but narrower . 2 mm stem



Crown too small and lacking Omega symbol on case 168.004



Wrong crown on case 2782. Should be 10 sided.

Case

- Is the case correct for the movement? (check the Omega vintage database at http://www.omegawatches.com/cu_vintage/index.php?r=index)
- Is the dial correct for the case?
- Is the case sharp, having maintained sharp edges, unrounded chamfers and clearly defined facets on lugs where applicable? Excessive polishing of the case may affect its value and appeal.
- Has the case been modified in any way, thus compromising its integrity?
- Is the case back in good condition – no rust on the inner rim and no case opener gouging?
- Are there any signs of corrosion or pitting on the inner case?
- Does the gold or stainless steel Omega decal on the case back have clear definition and eight stars in the sky?
- Is the crystal generic or does it contain the etched Omega symbol at the centre?
- Have the lugs been gouged or damaged by metal bracelets?
- Does the case have the correct metal finish?



Seamaster case 2866 with non COSC 501 movement sporting a solid gold constellation dial often seen in case



Case 167.005. Notice the well defined (as opposed to rounded) edges and the faceting present on the lugs



Note groove in case near the lug caused by reckless over-polishing to remove corrosion



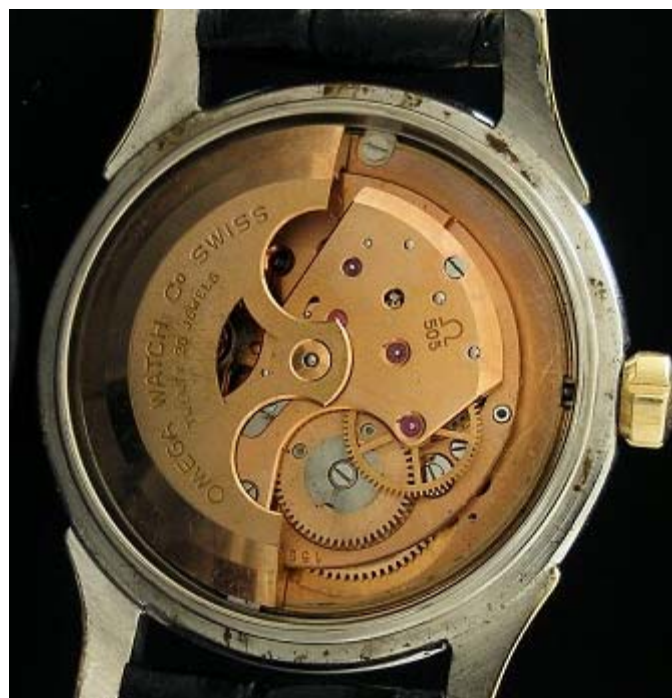
Well defined observatory and stars on the 14k decal of a 168.004 Constellation circa 1964

Movement

- Is the movement a Constellation calibre (See calibres list on this site)
- Does the movement have the correct rotor bridge inscribed "adjusted to five (5) positions and temperatures"? (In mid-500 series Constellations)
- Is the rotor (on 300 series and early 500 series models) inscribed as mentioned above?
- Is the right calibre number present when matched with the case number?
- Does the serial number match the production span of the watch? (Check approximate production dates through the Omega database and the serial number list on this site) This check is made to ensure that the movement has the original serial number on the bridge which enables an extract to be obtained from Omega. Genuine Omega parts replacement bridges may throw out considerably the accurate dating of the watch.
- Are the case clamps free from pitting or rust?
- Are the steel parts (particularly the crown and ratchet wheels and regulator) free from signs of pitting or rust?
- Do all movement parts have the same colour hue? (Different hues may indicate replacement of major parts or the creation of a franken movement)
- Is the copper plating on the movement free from blotches and colour differences caused by exposure to sea water or by exposure to wrong cleaning solvents?
- Is the copper plating on all parts free from scratches and marks? (The presence of marks and scratches could indicate the movement having sat in a watchmakers draw awaiting a ring-in dial and case)
- Are the screws in good condition and not badly burred? Some burring of screws is simply an indication of the watch having been serviced, but bad burring often indicates inexpert work.
- Has the movement been serviced recently? If that question cannot be answered, assume that the watch will need an immediate service.



Corroded rotor caused probably by exposure to seawater or other corrosive liquid



Calibre 505 movement. Rotor shows 20 jewel count instead of 24 jewels featured in the calibre 505. Notice the absence of the 'Adjusted to five (5) positions and temperatures' on the rotor.



Clean regularly serviced calibre 551 movement. Note all parts are the same colour hue and absence of rust. All correct markings appear.



Movement from a franken watch in the wrong 167.005 case. Notice the wheel bridge carries a newer looking calibre 565 bridge. This may have originally been a calibre 564 in need of repair.. Cal 565 never power Omega Constellations

Accessories

- Is the buckle correct for the period?
- Is the bracelet correct for the period?
- If BOR bracelet, is the bracelet vintage or is it contemporary?
- Is the box correct for the model and period?

Summary

In many cases minor variations from factory specifications can be corrected. Crowns can be sourced and replaced, crystals are still available, correct rotor bridges can be replaced from parts watches and hands can still be purchased from Omega service centres or on-line parts suppliers.

There are times however when a Constellation has lost its 'Constellation-ness' forever. When wheel bridges carrying the movement serial number have been replaced, particularly with non Constellation calibre wheel bridges, the integrity of the watch has been compromised forever. The knack is to acquire either original examples or examples that can be brought back easily to factory specifications.

In collecting Omega Constellations, it's a very good idea to have access to an older watchmaker who has worked with these movements over time. He will likely have better sources for parts and a more thorough knowledge of what constitutes a factory specified Constellation.