

WATCHES

AT HOME IN THE WATER



The IWC Aquatimer Automatic 2000



The JeanRichard Diverscope JR1000

Those who are serious about having fun and taking their watch into the water—whether it be for sailing, rafting, swimming, surfing, fishing or diving—should know that the water-resistance rating of a watch may or may not be a reliable indicator of its imperviousness to water damage. That's because there are other factors to consider when determining whether or not the watch in question is suitable for a specific activity. Water-resistant watches fall into one of two categories—because they are tested differently and held to different industry standards—those that are specifically constructed to be dive watches and those that are not. For non-dive

watches, generally the higher the water-resistance rating, the more suitable the watch is for a range of water sports. So for the greatest versatility, go for the gusto and choose a watch rated for at least 200 meters.

A sports watch with water resistance of 30–50 meters can withstand a light sprinkle or an occasional small splash, such as often occurs while fishing or boating. When swimming, surfing, snorkeling, sailing or engaging in serious surface water sports, a sports watch with a water resistance of 100–200 meters is definitely called for. However, when doing any diving not requiring helium gas breathing apparatus, a

The Jaeger-LeCoultre Master Compressor Diving Pro Geographic Navy SEALs and the Master Compressor Diving Lady Céramique



diver's watch that is water resistance rated between 100–300 meters will be necessary. And if deep sea diving that requires mixed gas breathing apparatus is on the agenda, then a diver's watch that is water resistance rated at 300 meters is advisable.

A dive watch must also have certain other characteristics to qualify as a tool used by divers—a unidirectional bezel, a backup time measurement tool that can't be misread or accidentally altered to indicate more time available underwater. Timing under the sea can be a matter of life and death, so a unidirectional bezel can be a last-ditch backup lifesaver. In addition, dive watches are designed to be extremely clear and readable underwater, which is achieved with lots of luminescence (Superluminova

and/or tritium), big markers and hands. These also aid in the watch's overall legibility on land, making it a functional tool that oozes capability and attitude. Other necessary features include high magnetic resistance, high shock resistance and corrosion resistance.

A chronograph is nice to have on a dive watch, to time dives and decompression. It's the rare watch, however, that allows the diver to use the chronograph pushers underwater, because doing so can compromise the watch's seals and thus its water resistance. A few companies make chronographs that can be used underwater, such as Omega's Seamaster Planet Ocean Chrono, Bulgari's Diagono Professional Acqua and the new Tissot Sea-Touch.

Most dive watches are not meant as the pri-



from left—The Baume & Mercier Hampton Magnum XXL; the Anonimo Professionale Crono automatic chronograph in 45mm stainless steel case with crown at 4 and screw-locked chronograph pushbuttons on the left caseside.

mary regulator of the time available underwater; they are usually used as backups, in case other systems fail. Some extreme dive watches offer water resistance of 500 meters, 1,000 meters and more—up to 11,500 meters. Even though a diver can never use a watch at this depth, it's remarkable when one realizes that a watch one is wearing can go to depths that could crush a human being like a soda can and still keep ticking. These extreme watches—for example, the Doxa Sub 5000T Seaconqueror Professional, the IWC Aquatimer 2000, the Blancpain 500 Fathoms and the Anonimo Professionale—are impressive feats of engineering, incorporating special seals and often helium release valves into good-looking designs.

Why are dive watches so popular today? First and foremost, they are attractive, beefy watches. Big watches are a strong fashion statement today, and dive watches are routinely the biggest of the big. Secondly, a dive watch is sturdy enough that one need not worry about harming it. The wearer can

shower, jump into the hot tub, dive to the depths of the oceans, go from a warm house to a cold ski slope, without giving it a second thought. For people with an active lifestyle, this is important, and dive watches fit this sensibility perfectly. Additionally, wearing a dive watch sends a message that the wearer is a man of action, even if he and the watch never get anywhere near the wreck of the *Titanic*. Wearing a hefty, rugged, solid diving watch is masculine, and that's not lost on the designers of these timepieces.

Twenty years ago, dive watches were the domain of Japanese companies who built heavy-duty, rugged quartz watches with features divers demand. Then the high-end Swiss brands started putting their luxury spin on the category. Suddenly, extreme water resistance became an attraction, and the Swiss companies put their R&D teams to work, resulting in some of the greatest dive watches ever made. Jaeger-LeCoultre's Master Compressor models, Girard-Perregaux's

Water Watch Words of Wisdom

Atmosphere (atm)—a unit of pressure equal to 101,325 newtons/m² in the European MKS system of measurement and roughly equivalent to 1 bar or to 10.3 meters (33.9 feet) of water pressure; used to describe the water-resistance ratings of some watches.

Countdown Timer—a timing function that counts down the time remaining to zero (as opposed to counting elapsed time from zero); this is particularly useful in boat or yacht racing, in which competitors must approach the starting line at speed and attempt to cross at an appointed start time.

Dive strap—a sturdy wristwatch strap made of material impervious to saltwater (e.g. rubber, nylon webbing, specially treated leather) and sized to fit over the sleeve of a diving suit; an even sturdier alternative is a convertible dive bracelet made of metal, such as stainless steel, which may feature a built-in extension that can be released when needed for diving and hidden within the clasp when not in use.

Helium release valve—a one-way valve in the case of a watch that releases helium gas that may be trapped inside a watch during a dive in a helium-rich environment such as a diving bell; release of the gas prevents damage to the watch as the gas expands during ascent to the surface; the valve may operate automatically or manually.

Luminescence—a feature that allows a watch's hands, dials and/or markers to be seen in the dark; this is commonly achieved by coating these parts with a photoluminescent material (e.g. Lumibrite, Luminova, Superluminova) that glows following exposure to light, mounting them with small capsules containing tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, or applying some combination of these technologies; still other watches illuminate the entire dial, for example by using a battery to power an LED.

Screw-down crown—a crown designed to tighten against an O-ring, sealing the case opening surrounding a watch's winding stem, and providing enhanced water-resistance at this point.

Unidirectional rotating bezel—a ring surrounding the crystal of a watch that rotates only in a counterclockwise direction; turned so that its primary marker indicates the planned ending time of an event (e.g. a dive), it facilitates tracking of remaining time; the unidirectionality functions as a safety device: remaining time can only be decreased, never increased, by an accidental bump to the bezel.



from top—Blancpain's 500 Fathoms; the Pierre Kunz Spirit Diver with depth gauge.



The Panerai Luminor Chrono Daylight 44mm in titanium

Sea Hawk collection and Rolex's Sea Dweller Deep Sea Submariner series are some of the better-known representatives in this category.

Today's dive watches are attractive enough to be an every day watch. Unlike in the past, when sports watches were black plastic toy-like things, these modern diving watches look great. Many times for the brands, having the features that qualify as extreme is a matter of owning the bragging rights. Will anyone ever need a 1,000-meter depth rated watch? No, but in order to withstand this type of pressure the watch needs to be constructed differently than other watches. And it stands to reason that this makes the watch more durable for the long run.

Customers of dive watches, such as the Panerai Luminor Submersible, and sports watches, like the TAG Heuer Aquaracer, probably want to wear them 24/7. Today's designs are versatile enough to wear to the office, on Saturday morning while playing a favorite sport and at the local nightclub.

Though many of the dive watches sold may hardly get wet, they are the epitome of style. A dive watch on the wrist says that the owner can play hard, work hard, conquer the depths and look danger in the eye and laugh. All this in a watch—what could possibly be better? ♦

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