

Star of the Month

This month's star shone very brightly in the early 1930s. It is a classic Art Deco piece still housed in its original bakelite Art Deco box. The watch is especially appealing for three reasons: its Art Deco styling, the superb quality of craftsmanship devoted to the case and its near mint condition.



Back in the early 1930s (probably around 1931-32) when watch and case came together in the Omega factory, Art Deco was not a term in circulation. What we know today as Art Deco was described at the time as 'Style Moderne'. The name, Art Deco wasn't coined until the 1960s, reportedly by art critic, Bevis Hillier, in reference to the pinnacle of Style Moderne which was said to have occurred around the time of the Exhibition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1925.

In the 1960s, interest in between-the-wars design was re-kindled. It had previously fallen foul of the post-WW2 style police who were derisive of the so-called extravagance of deco patterns and colour palettes. Pastels and softer shapes were prescribed for the more sober and reflective post-war mood. So, Art Deco became déclassé, an embarrassing reminder of a more naïve albeit excessive age, until a retrospective exhibition titled 'Le Années '25' was staged at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1966. Since then, genuine Art Deco jewellery of all kinds has been highly sought-after and valued by collectors.



Having established the watch's importance as an Art Deco piece, let's have a look at the watch itself. The porcelain dial features both 12-hour markers in Arabic numerals (typically Deco) and a 24 hour chapter registering each hour in red. The dial itself is pristine, providing a vivid background to the blue steel Breguette, or 'Moon', hands and arrow sub-second sweep.

The solid silver 'tonneau' case with fixed wire lugs is a work of art. Finely etched outlines filled with black enamel deliver a classic geometric design in the modernist manner and provide a beautiful frame for the dial. A large crown in solid silver, showing some wear, completes the design. The case is sharp and remarkably unworn for a watch of this vintage.



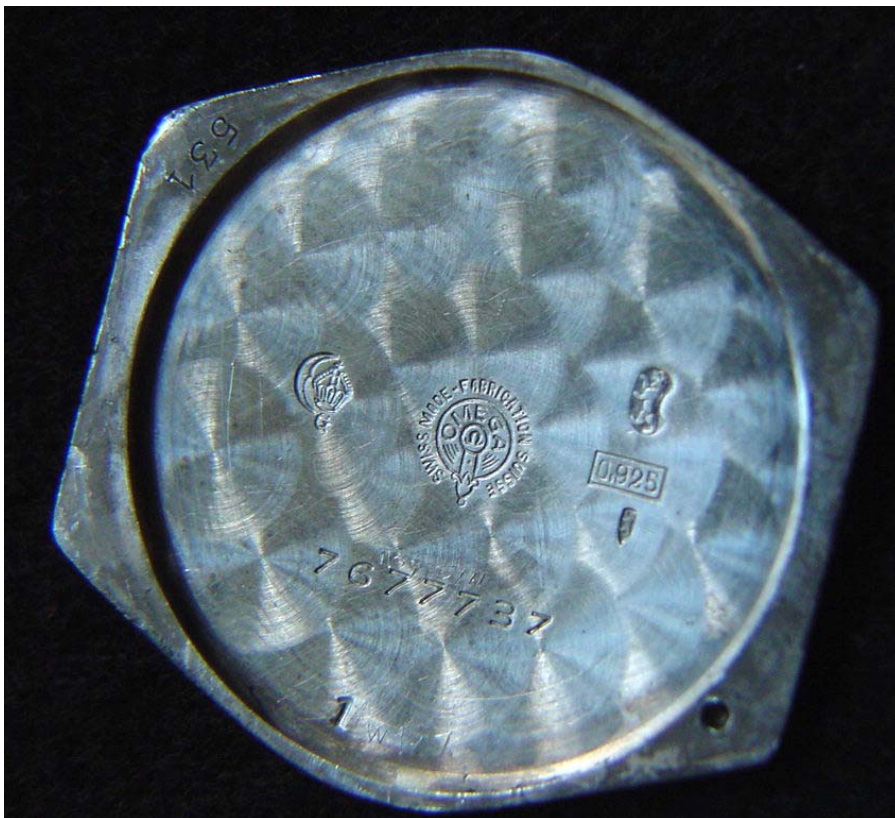
The watch is powered by the hand wound, 37 hour power reserve calibre 26.5 SOB, first introduced in 1926. The condition of the movement is superb, showing no rust or wear of the nickel plating. The acronym SOB stands for: S = Secondes, O = Omega and B = B grade finish with a Breguette overcoil. BB grade movements were the most finely finished Omega movements of the period, and this 15 jewel B grade movement was of a marginally lower finish and adjusted to two positions for accuracy to less than one minute per day.

The circular lever 26.5 SOB calibre was made in the Tissot factory for Omega, hence the O in the acronym. From 1925 onwards, owing to the economic difficulties that ensued after the First World War, Omega and Tissot began to amalgamate their operations, leading to a full union under the SSIH flag in 1930. The 26.5, in later versions called the calibre 100, became a mainstay Omega power plant for more than 30 years.





The original Bakelite Art Deco box, again showing modernist as opposed to sybaritic Art Deco styling, was produced after Omega changed its design livery in 1932. (Note the difference in the Omega logo on the movement and the logo on the front of the box.) And so, while the movement was almost certainly produced in around 1930-31, the whole ensemble probably came together in around 1933. These box styles in a variety of colours were selectively used through until around 1938.



This is a very difficult watch to value. Value, arguably, is simply a reflection of the balance between availability and desire, but this piece will attract desire from two different quarters. Watch Collectors place a premium on these rarer Art Deco styled watches and this one is most attractive because of its near-mint condition and original Art Deco Box. Collectors of Art Deco in general, and jewellery in particular, will find the watch a very attractive proposition for both its design and as an exquisite piece of period jewellery.

No matter where it ultimately finds its place, I am sure it will be loved and appreciated.

