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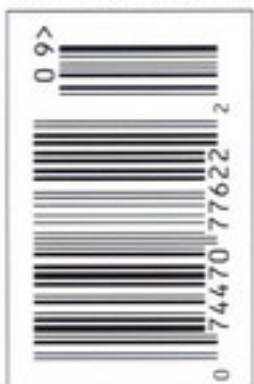


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# Collecting 110

**How to Buy a Watch (Part Two)**

PHOTOS BY RALF BEINENZ AND JEFF STEIN



**Opposite page:** The Sinn 142 Titanium D1 is fitted with the last of the 5100 Lemania's.  
**Below:** The "Steve McQueen" Heuer Monaco Model 1133 circa 1969.

## In Part One of Collecting 110

(which you can find in *International Watch*, June 2005)

**we covered the initial steps that you are likely to follow in purchasing a watch – doing the research on the watch, posing the tough questions to the seller, and inspecting the photographs. In Part Two of Collecting 110, we proceed to the more exciting steps -- determining the value of the watch, formulating and making your bid, and arranging for payment and delivery.**

perform a "market check" to determine a range of values for the watch. The best sources for this type of pricing information are likely to be comparable watches currently offered by dealers (brick and mortar or internet), as well as results of recent sales and completed auction listings on eBay. If you are interested in a particular model, and



notes or web pages (and even photographs) covering completed sales will be useful.

There are published price guides for watches, divided into guides that cover the entire market and guides that cover a particular brand or type of watch (military or chronographs, for example). Unfortunately, these price guides may become outdated quickly, however they may still be useful in suggesting relative pricing for watches (for example, that an 18 karat gold watch is selling at a forty percent premium to the stainless steel, or that the later version of a particular model sells at a thirty percent discount to the earlier ones.) For up-to-the-minute information, you may want to seek out an internet discussion forum for a particular brand or type of watch and ask some detailed questions. Some of these forums allow you to solicit views and values for a particular watch. Many forum participants will be happy to share their views as to the collectibility and value of a particular watch, either through the forum or in private e-mails or phone calls.

### 6 Establish the range of values

As you consider making an offer on a watch offered by a dealer, or one listed on eBay, you will likely want to

are on a long-term quest, you will want to track completed sales to establish a range of values. Prices of particular watches may fluctuate significantly over the short term, and yesterday's prices may become outdated quickly, so watch for the longer-term trends. Condition is likely to be critical in determining value, as is seller reputation and location (domestic transactions are easier than international ones), so detailed

### 7 Formulate your bid

Determining the "market value" of the watch is often the easy part. The real challenge comes in determining what you will be willing to pay for a particular watch. Here is where your enthusiasm for collecting, adrenalin, and even the desire to "win" can overwhelm your previously performed market research and common sense! If your research suggests that a particular watch should sell in the range of \$1,400 to \$1,800,





On the left is a 1163MH "Chronomatic" Heuer Autavia circa 1969 and on the right is a 1163MH Heuer Autavia Automatic Chronograph (which is made later and is far more common). A very slight difference can make a huge difference in terms of scarcity, value and desirability.

ask yourself whether you are willing to pay something extra. Does this one have a particularly nice bracelet? Full box and papers? Have you uncovered something in the watch's history that leads you to want to pay a little extra – maybe a recent servicing or something suggesting that other bidders may not be seeing things correctly.

As you formulate your bid, some points to consider are the mindset of the seller, and the perspective of other likely buyers / bidders. If a dealer has shown a watch on his website for two years, and it seems to be overpriced, it may be time for the dealer to move the watch at a discount. In other situations, a dealer may be content to leave the watch in his showcase or on his website year-after-year, waiting for his price. In the auction setting, information about other likely bidders is often critical. If there are three or four "usual suspects" who have been chasing a par-

ticular model, the competition may be intense. After two of them have made their purchases, you may find yourself in a much better position, with the likely price dropping considerably. Of course, new bidders can come onto the scene without notice, but this is the sort of information that you should analyze as you formulate your bid. Once again, maintaining good information about the market and your competitors may give you the edge that you need to win the auction or come to terms with a dealer.

Another consideration in determining how much you will bid might be the relative scarcity of the watch. Many watches are available with some regularity, so that there is a fairly well-established "market price" for the watch and there is also the opportunity to have a second or third chance, if you lose out on a particular watch. Like buses that leave the station every hour, even if you miss the

first one, there is always another one on the way to you. Watches that are truly rare present a different dynamic. Market prices may fluctuate significantly and the collector can't count on having another opportunity. A seller may often motivate the bidder with the simple question: "If you don't buy this one, when will you see another one this nice?" When several bidders have adopted this perspective, prices can be well in excess of what any of the bidders would hope to pay.

In *Collecting 101* (*International Watch*, February 2005), we discussed an approach to bidding, which we referred to as bidding to the "point of indifference". You may do well to remind yourself of this framework, as you consider your bid for a particular watch. To determine your "point of indifference" for a particular watch, you will visualize that the auction for "your" watch has ended, with one of two results: Either you have





A Heuer "Bund" Flyback Chronograph.

won the watch or you were first runner up. If you visualize winning the auction at your pre-determined price, ask yourself whether you will be happy with that price the "morning after". If you will regret having paid so much for this watch, then this version of "buyer's remorse" is suggesting that you should lower your bid. Now visualize that the auction has ended with someone else winning the watch. If you will regret not having bid more for the watch, then this "bidder's remorse" is telling you that you should increase your bid, before the auction ends. Somewhere between these two price points, you will find the price that will make you happy – the price at which you have no regrets either way, win or lose.

## 8 Confirming the Purchase

Once you have won the auction or agreed to buy a watch, then it's time to confirm the terms of sale with the seller. There is nothing at all wrong with being friendly and

conversational when making arrangements for the transaction, but be business-like. The goal is to confirm the detailed terms of the transaction -- method of payment, method of shipping the watch and everything else (warranty, if any, return policy, etc.) -- and document everything (e-mail communications, copies of the letter and other documentation sent, a photocopy of the money order, Cashiers Check, or bank transfer, etc.). The idea is to have everything you might possibly need if anything untoward occurs in the course of the transaction. A concise cover letter briefly summarizing the terms of sale and directions for shipping, can serve as a friendly reminder and clear statement of what is expected. When conducting a transaction via the web, it will be useful to provide the seller with a copy of all the relevant e-mail exchange(s) as well as a print-out of the pictures that were sent by the seller or included in the internet listing. You will also reduce the risk of error, and make things easier for the seller, if you will provide your own shipping label when you make payment.

Careful correspondence will provide the seller with a copy in writing of your understanding of the terms of the transaction. This also serves as his/her receipt. Additionally, this implies that since you have gone to the trouble to document this for him, you more than likely retain copies of

this documentation for your records should anything bad transpire. This serves to protect each party to the deal and is a "Good Karma" thing. The more open and above board the transaction the better for all parties concerned.

No one wants or needs the hassle of a transaction gone sour. The idea here is to assist the seller into making the deal as smooth, proper, prompt and painless as possible. The easier one makes it for the seller to do things the best possible way, the more likely it will be that the seller will follow through in that manner. When a deal goes well, all parties benefit. When a deal goes bad, everyone loses to one degree or another.

Remember that you are doing a business transaction with significant money, and a piece of history at stake. Treat your seller with courtesy, respect and professionalism and expect the same in return. This means, for example, that once you've received the watch you should confirm to the seller that you have received the watch. If the transaction is an eBay deal, you should leave feedback relating to the seller. Remember that many people use feedback left on eBay as a sort of "references" listing, so it is important that you leave good and accurate feedback. Once you have left feedback for the seller, it will be important to make sure that feedback is left for you as well.

## 9 Out of the box check

When you receive that wonderful new watch, the usual urge is to rip the box open, set the time and give the crown a few twists, slap it on your wrist, and call the seller to





The Rolex "Red" Submariner.

thank him profusely for allowing you to own this beauty.

Slow down! As they say in the emergency room, these first few moments can be critical, so it is important to be very cautious with your new treasure. Let's go through this phase step-by-step, just to slow the action to a reasonable pace.

Check the package before you open it! Does the box appear to be in good shape? Has it been tampered with? If you have any suspicion at all, pull out your digital camera and document what you received.

Open the packaging carefully – don't slice the leather strap with your scissors; don't throw away the extra links, as you toss the bubble wrap in the trash-can; and don't miss out on the notes or original papers that the seller has been kind enough to include. Handle the watch carefully – as the adrenaline surges, be careful with the setting and winding. And by all means, don't drop your purchase as you juggle the watch, the Styrofoam peanuts, the box and whatever else might be at hand.

After these first few minutes, a sensible routine with a new arrival would be to set the watch [in synch with a digital clock] and see how it runs over the first few hours. For a chronograph, you should start, stop and reset the stopwatch several times, to be certain that everything is operating properly. Keep the time test going over an extended period (say, two full days) to determine whether this one is the "runner" that you were expecting, and to see whether the date rolls over properly, whether the hour recorder on the chronograph is reliable, and whether it has proper power reserve. Then, and only then, do you write to confirm to the seller that everything is in order.

*Chuck Maddox collects modern and vintage chronographs and hosts his own site of articles at <http://home.xnet.com/~cmaddox/cm3articles.html>.*

*Jeff Stein collects vintage chronographs and is the creator of [Onthedash.com](http://Onthedash.com), an online guide to Heuer chronographs.*

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