

THE VOYAGE OF THE SKIPPER

The history of Heuer's entrance into yachting chronographs is patchy at best. But with a little detective work from the man who can, REVOLUTION untangles the tale of the Skipper.

BY JEFF STEIN

Founded in 1860, Ed. Heuer & Co. quickly earned its reputation for developing stopwatches, chronographs and other timers to address the most specialised and challenging requirements. Heuer made timers for the engineer using 1/10,000 hour measurements for time and motion study, for the artillery officer reading a telemeter scale to locate enemy installations, and for the physician timing 15 pulses, to quickly determine a patient's heart rate.

Sports timing, however, presents many different

challenges. Precision may not be important to time the three-minute rounds and one-minute breaks of a boxing match, but hundredths or thousandths of a second may determine where downhill skiers stand on the podium. Sporting events are staged in the heat of the desert, in frosty alpine regions, in the bright sun and in the dark of night. A parachute jump lasts only a few seconds (with no need for time-in and time-out functions), while a chess match may be timed over a period of hours or days.



Heuer provided timing equipment for the *Intrepid's* defence of the America's Cup in 1967, including Aquastar Regate chronographs for the crew.

THE CHALLENGES OF YACHT TIMING

A yacht race poses unique challenges for those who design and produce timing equipment. While speed on the course is important, timing the boat's arrival at the start line is critical. Race organisers use a series of horns and colourful flags, at five-minute intervals, to count down to the start of the race. The skipper needs a tactical plan – and reliable timing gear – to arrive at the start line at the precise moment when the horn sounds to start the race. Any boat that crosses the start line too soon will be penalised by race officials; the boat that crosses the line too late begins the race at a disadvantage.

The deck of a yacht is a busy place as the start approaches, with the skipper attending to numerous tasks, so the yacht timer must provide instant legibility, even as the boat bounces on the waves and the sun makes it difficult to detect numbers, markings and even hands. And, yes, the yacht timer must be waterproof, to withstand ocean sprays or the celebration at the end of the race.

THREE APPROACHES TO THE DISPLAY

Over the years, Heuer used three distinctive styles of display to track the countdown to the start of a yacht race, all intended to provide the best possible legibility for the skipper and his crew.

1 With the layout of a conventional stopwatch, the small, circular minute recorder counts down the minutes from 5, 10 or 15, corresponding to the horns sounded by race officials. The outer scale counts down the seconds, with markings from 55 to zero.

2 A unique design for yacht timing employs a pie-shaped or triangular recorder to count down the minutes, covering a range of 5, 10 or 15 minutes.

3 Under a third approach, the minutes were counted down with a series of five brightly coloured balls (for example, with one ball turning from red to white each minute). When the five balls have disappeared, the skipper and his crew know that the race will be underway.

HEUER'S AQUASTAR REGATE

Through the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, Heuer produced stopwatches and timers for yacht racing, but it did not offer a wristwatch for the racers. This changed, around 1964, when Heuer entered into an arrangement with Aquastar, the prominent maker of wristwatches and chronographs for diving and sailing, for the Aquastar "Regate" chronograph to be co-branded for Heuer. Priced at US\$89.50, Heuer's advertisements posed the question: "Why spend fifty dollars for a waterproof yacht timer when for just a few dollars more you can get a wristwatch, too?"

Patented in 1964, the Aquastar Regate used five disappearing red balls to count down to the start of a yacht race. When the pusher is pressed, the five red balls appear, and the seconds hand flies back to zero and starts running. After five minutes, the red balls have turned to silver, "disappearing" as they match the silver of the dial.

The version of the Regate produced for Heuer had "Aquastar Genève" across the top of the dial, with the Heuer shield across the bottom. Soon, Heuer would offer its own series of Regatta models, using the "disappearing balls" display, with these models remaining in the Heuer catalogue into the mid-1980s.

Below (left to right):
Conventional Heuer stopwatch ref. 912 WUS in splashproof case (circa 1950); Heuer produced this yacht timer, with its 10-minute countdown display, for Abercrombie & Fitch; this Leonidas stopwatch from the 1930s uses five disappearing balls to count down to the start of a yacht race.



Heuer Aquastar Regate, introduced in 1964.



SUPPLIER TO THE INTREPID

The 20th defence of the America's Cup was held in September 1967, off Newport, Rhode Island, with *Intrepid* representing the New York Yacht Club. This 12m class yacht was designed by Olin Stephens, and captained by celebrity sailor Emil "Bus" Mosbacher, Jr. (both of whom would subsequently be inducted into the America's Cup Hall of Fame). Jack Heuer reports that Heuer's US country manager was active in yachting, and had received the mandate for Heuer to supply the *Intrepid* with its timing equipment.

Intrepid sailed to a commanding victory over the Australian challenger, *Dame Pattie*, winning the best-of-seven series in four consecutive races. Pictures show members of her crew wearing Heuer Aquastar Regate watches.



Heuer marked *Intrepid's* victory with the creation of an entirely new chronograph model introduced in 1968 – the Skipper. Derived from the two-register Carreras of the day, the new Skipper (ref. 7754) featured a metallic blue dial, with a light green register for running seconds. Research by *Hodinkee* suggests that the green of this register matched the colour of the *Intrepid's* deck and was chosen because of its anti-reflective properties. For the 15-minute countdown function, Heuer employed a unique design – the chronograph minute recorder being divided into three segments, painted in dark green, light green and orange. Consistent with the demand for legibility, the chronograph seconds hand is bright orange.

Below (left to right):
Skipper with compressor case ref. 7764 (circa 1969); Skipper ref. 15640,
introduced in 1972.

Opposite page, clockwise from top right:
Executive Vice President of Heuer Time Corporation P. Douglas Grewer presents
Heuer's Aquastar Regate to *Intrepid* skipper Emil "Bus" Mosbacher; the US-22
Intrepid (right) sails to victory in the America's Cup over its Australian challenger,
the KA-2 *Dame Pattie* (left); Heuer celebrated the *Intrepid*'s victory with an
entirely new model chronograph: the Skipper.

The first Skippers were powered by a modified Valjoux 7730 movement, with the chronograph minute hand making a revolution in 15 minutes and jumping every 30 seconds. Being housed in the Carrera case, today's collectors refer to these very rare, first execution Skippers as the "Skipperrera."

COMPRESSOR CASE REF. 7764

While the first execution of the Skipper served as a colourful tribute to *Intrepid*'s defense of the America's Cup, it didn't take long for Heuer to move the Skipper into a new case that would be better suited to yacht timing – the compressor case of the Autavia (ref. 7763). This stout case offered superior waterproofing to the screw-back Carrera, the caseback being marked with the guarantee that appeared on all Autavias since their introduction in 1962 – "Waterproof Guaranteed 330 Feet Under Water." The 40mm Autavia case was also a better fit for the yachtsman, and accommodated a larger countdown recorder to improve legibility.

With the move to this Autavia case, Heuer also modified the colour scheme of the Skipper – the dial and running seconds recorder are black, and the chronograph countdown recorder is divided into three segments – red, white and blue.

SKIPPERS FOR THE 1970S – AUTOMATIC AND MANUAL

Heuer's catalogue changed dramatically in 1969, with its introduction of the Chronomatic/Calibre 11 automatic movement for its chronographs. To accommodate the larger, modular movement, new C-shaped cases were introduced for both the Autavia and Carrera models. There was no immediate impact on the Skipper, which continued to reside in the Autavia compressor case, but when Heuer began using C-shaped cases for its manual-wind movements (circa 1972), the Skipper (ref. 73464) arrived in its third home.

The colours for the dial and bezel returned to the original deep blue of

the first Skipper, with the red, white and blue continuing for the countdown recorder. The time-of-day hands were a vibrant orange, also consistent with the orange accent of the chronograph hand on the first Skipper. A date was added at 6 o'clock, a feature of all future Skipper models.

The first automatic Skipper (ref. 1564) arrived circa 1972, when Heuer introduced Calibre 15. Just as the Valjoux 7730 movement had been modified to power the first Skippers, the 30-minute capacity of the Calibre 15 was modified to provide the Skipper's 15-minute countdown. Later in the production of the ref. 73464 Skippers, the red-white-blue sequence of the countdown recorder was modified to white-blue-red, with this new sequence being used for the remainder of the Skipper's production.

BIGGER CASES FOR MINERAL CRYSTALS

Towards the end of 1972, Heuer modified the case for the automatic Autavia, so that it would accommodate a mineral crystal. These cases (ref. 15640 for the Skipper) have a higher profile than the earlier C-shaped cases, with a relatively thick black flange between the crystal and the dial.

Around 1978, Heuer offered a new version of the ref. 15640 Skipper, with a gloss-black dial contrasting with the bright white time-of-day hands. The bezel returned to black, to match the dial.

The very last version of the Skipper came in 1983, this time moving into the last case that Heuer would make for the Autavia (ref. 11063). Although the dimensions are similar to those of the ref. 11630, the case offers a beefier look, with 21mm between the lugs (versus 20mm on previous Autavia cases that housed the Skipper) and the hefty geometry of the bezel.





THE LIMITED-EDITIONS FOR HODINKEE AND REVOLUTION

Forty years after the *Intrepid's* defense of the America's Cup, the voyage of the Skipper came full circle in June 2017, when TAG Heuer created a limited edition of the Skipper, in a collaboration with the website *Hodinkee*. Rather than being a literal copy of one of the vintage models, the new design combined elements of the very first Skipper (the Skipperrera) with defining features of another vintage Heuer, the Carrera 45 Dato. The colours of the dial and minute recorder matched those of the original Skipper, with the date at 3 o'clock mimicking the asymmetry of the Carrera 45 Dato. Limited to 125 pieces, this new Carrera Skipper sold out in minutes.

One element of the *Hodinkee* Edition Skipper created considerable discussion – the use of a conventional 30-minute recorder rather than a 15-minute countdown timer. But, when we consider the very first Skipper from 1968, I conclude that Heuer was not seeking to make a timer for the sailors to wear – those would come later with the Autavia-cased Skippers. The 1968 Skipper was a new model created solely to celebrate the victory of a brilliant yacht, and its builder and skipper.



The TAG Heuer Skipper *Hodinkee* Edition (top and left), introduced in June 2017, and the 1968 Skipper ref. 7754 that was its inspiration.



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With this first Skipper, rather than seeking to create a tool to be used on a boat, Heuer produced a wristwatch that would be cherished by the yachtsman. Yes, it's the Skipper that we are celebrating! More mundane timepieces could be used to time the yacht races, but this Skipper captured the spirit of the *Intrepid* and the colours of the Newport waters.

So too, 41 years later, the newest TAG Heuer Carrera "Blue Dreamer" created for *The Rake and Revolution* has not been designed to time yacht races. It's easy enough for GPS and computer systems to do that. Rather *The Rake and Revolution's* 2018 Carrera celebrates the spirit of the 1968 Skipper, a brilliant piece of Heuer's yacht-racing heritage. ★

The Rake and Revolution's 2018 Carrera celebrates the spirit of the 1968 Skipper, a brilliant piece of Heuer's yacht-racing heritage created as a colourful tribute to Intrepid's defence of the America's Cup.

For a detailed look at the timepieces that Heuer offered for yacht timing over the period 1959 through 1984, see the author's post at his website OnTheDash — thoughts.onthedash.com/thoughts/heuer-yacht-timers.

Special thanks to Henrik Schreiber, creator of the website HeuerChrono.com, for his contributions to this article, including images of the vintage yacht-timer stopwatches.