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# JAMES BOND WORE QUARTZ WRISTWATCHES. YOU NOTICED.

DELL DEATON (MI)

The advance poster for *SPECTRE* gave nothing away in terms of plot details for that next EON Productions movie.

But it clearly showed Daniel Craig in character as Agent 007, wearing a diver's watch! On a NATO strap! Perfectly accessorizing the retro-contemporary look set by commando-black sweater, dress slacks, and leather shoulder holster, no less.

Given the *Watch & Clock Bulletin* readership, I'm willing to bet that many of you at least noticed that James Bond watch.

But when did the public notice?

And why?

Let me be clearer. At what point, historically, did people start to regularly take note of James Bond wristwatch choices? Can we identify some originally inherent reason

**Figure 1.** Ian Fleming consistently framed each James Bond story as a race against time. In the movies, no wristwatch better supported that dramatic imperative than the Seiko pseudo-analog LCD model worn by Roger Moore as Agent 007 in *Octopussy* (EON Productions, 1983).
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that led them to value having such information?

As the title of this article implies, I believe that we can. Furthermore, I can demonstrate that credit for the genesis properly goes to the Quartz Revolution, beginning with the early 1970s.

That was the point at which the age-old, universally agreed upon challenge of producing timepieces that performed to the highest practical accuracy standard was achieved. Equally important, society at large was focused upon and excited by this as it was happening. Worldwide, leading watchmakers saw, then leveraged the EON-Bond character to ride the wave crest.

The essence of every James Bond story always has been—beginning with Ian Fleming's first book in 1953, and including *Skyfall* in 2012—man against the clock.

For example, in his 1955 novel *Moonraker*, we only *thought* the enemy was Hugo Drax. But it was actually the countdown to rocket launch, with Agent 007 and the Bond girl trapped in a path destined for ignited engine exhaust.

This is what hooked readers and kept bringing them back for more.

The world of James Bond was conceived as fantasy that reflected real-world fears, cast in starker contrasts, offered up through a flawed hero who took control of circumstances dealt to him. He invariably prevailed, with aplomb.

He wore a wristwatch and used it as a tool. As such, its reliability was important. Even so, his watch choices throughout the 1950s and on into the early 1960s were essentially no different from those of the public: Anything functionally accurate to within a few minutes at any given point was accurate enough.[1]

One might think that a pivotal moment like the Sputnik launch would have changed this. It was a singularly terrifying and all but universally obsessed over event when the Soviet Union appeared to have taken the lead in the Cold War when it put the first artificial satellite into Earth's orbit in 1957. Reactions begat reactions. Successive launches by the USSR and the Americans led to Vanguard 1 about six months later.

For our purposes, recall that the US satellite Vanguard 1 carried a time device onboard, produced by watchmaker Bulova. And that instrument departed from estab-

**Figure 2.** By 1979, quartz wasn't simply offering the pinnacle of timekeeping accuracy, but actively redefining what a wristwatch could and should be expected to do. Its full-calendar functions weren't smart watch, and it never went into space, but the movie *Moonraker* unquestionably showed consumers the shape of things to come.
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lished balance wheel-type mechanics in favor of a metal tuning fork.

The result was a tenfold improvement in accuracy.[2]

In 1960, this space age technology was offered to consumers in the Bulova Accutron.

So, did Bond ever switch up to an Accutron wristwatch in any Ian Fleming book? No. Did EON Productions appoint Sean Connery's Bond with an Accutron? Never.

Still, EON movies continued to up the ante on presenting time-as-enemy threats. Unquestionably. In 1964, for example, the nuclear device in *Goldfinger* accounted for seconds ticking away before its detonation, by frequently cutting to close-ups on its multilayer edge-lit numeric display unit. That was exotic stuff in its day.

Yet the James Bond character never seriously advanced his wristwatch accuracy or precision.

His watches had to be regularly wound.

They aged: Sean Connery wore the same two wristwatch models (if not physical pieces) throughout his first three appearances as Bond. By 1969, EON Productions had made a total of six James Bond movies, featuring only five different watch models.

It wouldn't be fair or sufficient to say that there was still no interest in James Bond watches back then. Rather, I think the more correct statement is that there was little or no effort put into shining a spotlight on any wristwatch choices made.

In any case, the public wasn't paying much attention contemporaneously.

The advent of quartz wristwatches radically changed all of that. And this made for a period during which horological breakthroughs were able to capture the minds of Bond movie producers and society at large, because so much of the inherent "quartz story" was self-evident, unique, and compelling.

Radical shifts in foundational technologies ride high with drama. The Quartz Revolution was certainly dramatic. In spades.

At the heart of it all, quartz oscillators portended an accuracy 100 times greater than legacy mechanics.[3]

On top of that, the path to harnessing quartz was dramatic.

Its piezoelectric properties had been discovered by the Currie brothers in 1880. But it wasn't until 50 years later that Warren Marrison had bridled it to a clock. Then another 25 years further still were consumed before the silicon microchip and capable batteries were available to progress from household clock to wristwatch.

I also mentioned above the importance of consumer interest as a factor. People like my grandfather, your cousin, and the neighbor two blocks down the street had to have had a sense of why quartz watches were important to their lives. They had to want them.

The "space race" wasn't enough to sink that putt. We needed the microwave oven, too. Rapidly becoming ubiquitous in the ten years that began with 1967, it paved the way for getting every member of the household intimately attuned to the importance of seconds by way of meal preparation.

Within that span, in 1973, EON Productions didn't merely introduce Roger Moore as its new James Bond. *Live and Let Die* did so in a scene that included a close-up on the bright-red, digital LED dial of his quartz Pulsar model from Hamilton Watch Co.

That was in Bond's home. First in his bedroom. Then in his high-tech kitchen.

Looks to me like someone had read Kingsley Amis's dossier on James Bond: "We don't want to have Bond to dinner or go golfing with Bond or talk to Bond. We want to be Bond."[4]

The brilliance of establishing Bond-quartz watch placements wasn't limited to indulging audience members with a bent toward Walter Mitty. Rather, that marketing further helped keep reality-based interests stoked as watchmakers worked through persisting commercialization challenges.

Watches needed to reduce power consumption. Case sizes could stand to be thinner. Analog dials had to become indistinguishable from their mechanical counterparts.

After that, James Bond movies went even further. The motion pictures showcased quartz diver's watches in naturally flowing plot lines that delivered uncompromised performance against any competition.

Additionally, the 1983 *Octopussy*, delivered what I consider an unparalleled presentation of why we wear watches.

During a key sequence, Agent 007 raced across Germany to disarm a nuclear bomb smuggled onto a US Air Force Base aboard a circus train car.

Gadgetry aside, it's the rapidly changing pseudo-analog LCD display shown in close-ups of the Seiko watch dial that drive the climax (Figure 1).

*That* was a memorable wristwatch.

Finally, with the 1987 introduction of TAG Heuer as James Bond watch in *The Living Daylights*, that motion

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picture opened the door to the sort of content for debate that would keep "James Bond watches" a heated topic in perpetuity. Titans were identified and set into irreconcilable opposition: Japanese horology versus Swiss.

Even before the World Wide Web was established, ample fodder for flame wars was in place.

With quartz-tech market share en route to passing 93 percent of units sold worldwide in 1995,[5] Omega inaugurated its own relationship with EON Productions by placing a quartz Seamaster model on the wrist of Pierce Brosnan when he entered as Agent 007. Two years later, that piece was switched out for a virtually indistinguishable Seamaster Chronometer.

Why not? The Quartz Revolution had come to an end. Its victors had nothing left to prove.

James Bond was poised to take winnings from this as well. In the movies, his obviously fictional character had become established as a go-to watch wearer whose choice of latest timekeeper would never again go without notice (Figure 2).

That attention now begins before cameras even start to roll on the next film.

In 2006, Daniel Craig became James Bond. He made three movies prior to *SPECTRE*, which is where we started with this article. Craig's Agent 007 has thus far worn a total of five different watch models through just three movies. A couple of different styles, too.

But he has never worn the same watch model for more than one movie.

Now we all have a clearer basis for discussing why.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. "Horological Industry," years covering 1995-2012, Japan Clock & Watch Association, accessed January 13, 2015, http://jcwa.or.jp/eng/statistics/industry_99.html.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dell Deaton created JamesBondWatches.com and serves as curator for the new *James Bond Wore the Quartz Revolution* wristwatch exhibit that opened in June at the National Watch & Clock Museum.

His feature article titled "How I Found the Original James Bond Watch" appeared in the June 2009 *Watch & Clock Bulletin*.

# ON EXHIBIT

The National Watch and Clock Museum in Columbia, PA, is hosting the exhibit titled *James Bond Wore the Quartz Revolution* wristwatch exhibit curated by NAWCC member Dell Deaton. Shown here are watches on display. The ongoing exhibit officially opened in June. Deaton curated past James Bond exhibits at the Museum, including *Bond Watches, James Bond Watches* from June 2010 to April 2011 and *Ian Fleming's Own James Bond Watch* from May 2011 to July 2012. © 2015 JAMESBONDWATCHES.COM AND DELL DEATON, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USA. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION.