



# Master Makeover

*Omega's Seamaster Aqua Terra is the latest watch to be upgraded to the brand's in-house Caliber 8500. How does the new timepiece fare under WatchTime's exacting scrutiny?*

BY ALEXANDER KRUPP  
PHOTOS BY NIK SCHÖLZEL

Omega's in-house base Caliber 8500 debuted in the De Ville Hour Vision at the beginning of 2007, and has since served in many Omega watches. Among these is the Seamaster Aqua Terra, which was outfitted with the automatic movement in 2008. Omega has also refined the watch's exterior. The formerly smooth dial now sports vertical, parallel ridges, and the frame around the date display has been raised higher above the plane of the dial. The frame's faceting is a good match for the distinctively three-dimensional hour indices, which are now coated with luminous material. Two-digit numerals at five-minute intervals have replaced the small, luminous dots around the periphery of the old Aqua Terra's dial. The hands are double-faceted along their longitudinal axes, matching the faceting on the indices, and a welcome replacement for the simple fold that defines the long axes of the older hands.

The dial makes a high-quality impression, as does the 41.5-millimeter-diameter case, whose shape has remained the same. Credit for the visual panache is mostly due to the middle piece, which has organically curving lugs and very precisely alternating polished and satin-finished surfaces. On the watch we tested, only the transition to the lugs, where the polishing disk couldn't reach into the narrow angles, is less than meticulously executed. Otherwise, the craftsmanship of the case is excellent. The case has sapphire crystals in the front and back, with non-reflective treatment on both surfaces of the front crystal. The crown can be screwed shut and the back is threaded around its

**THE CASE AND BRACELET  
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 SHARP ANGLES OVER THE  
 STRAP LUGS, PERFECTLY  
 POLISHED.**

periphery. These details guarantee that the case can resist 150 meters' worth of water pressure.

The attention to quality is also evident in the stainless-steel bracelet, although the styling here has fewer details than that of the dial and case. The bracelet is massive but not too thick, and its links are solidly screwed. Its upper surface is satin-finished and its flanks are polished.

The double-folding clasp has its pluses and minuses. All components, including the two safety buttons, have been milled from a solid block of steel, and the lack of a closure bow gives the clasp a very elegant appearance on the wrist. But the bracelet's length cannot be adjusted by means of spring bars, so the only way to do so is to use a screwdriver to remove either half a link or an entire link until the bracelet fits perfectly. This means that the wearer cannot adjust the bracelet for minor variations in the size of his wrist without using a tool. Furthermore, the safety buttons open only one wing of the double-folding clasp, so the wearer must then flip open the other side by giving it a little tug.

**THIS WATCH** is very easy to operate. Its crown is constructed in such a way that it is firmly screwed, but has a large and easy-to-grip surface and snaps smartly into its various positions. After the crown has been unscrewed, the watch offers little resistance and clicks almost inaudibly when its mainspring is manually wound — although manual winding won't be necessary very often, because this self-winding watch amasses a 60-hour power reserve. You'd have to leave it motionless

throughout an entire weekend before you'd need to reset and rewind it.

When the crown has been pulled out to its first position, the hour hand can be reset in hourly increments, either forward or backward and without affecting the other hands, which continue to move in their usual orbits. The date display jumps forward or backward with the hour hand — a welcome detail that makes this watch eminently well-suited for frequent travelers who don't want to lose track of the correct minute and second when they reset the hour in a new time zone. This kind of reset mechanism for the date display also prevents it from confusing noon and midnight, which would cause the date disk to jump ahead at the wrong 12 o'clock hour. These advantages somewhat offset the absence of a quick-reset mechanism for the date, especially since, more often than not, resetting is required only in the forward direction. It is a pity, however, that the date disk switches so slowly in ordinary operation: the disk on our test watch began its advance at 10:45 p.m. and didn't reach the next day's date until three minutes before midnight. Pulling the crown out to its second position stops the second hand while the wearer readjusts the time on the other two hands.

Reading the time on this watch is not quite as easy as operating it. Although the hands are clearly different from one another, the tip of the minute hand is far away from the minute circle. Furthermore, the date disk spends much of its time in the shadow cast by the thick metal frame surrounding the window at 3 o'clock. Fortunately, however, the digits

**SPECS**

OMEGA SEAMASTER AQUA TERRA

**Manufacturer:** Omega S.A., Rue Stämpfli 96, CH-2500, Bienne, Switzerland

**Reference number:** 231.10.39.21.02.001

**Functions:** Hours, minutes, seconds; date display can be reset via the hour hand, which moves in hourly increments; stop-seconds function

**Movement:** Omega Caliber 8500, automatic; chronometer; 25,200 vph; 39 jewels; co-axial escapement, fine adjustment via four white-gold screws on the freely oscillating balance; two serially arranged barrels; Nivachoc shock absorption; 60-hour power reserve; diameter = 29 mm; height = 5.5 mm

**Case:** Stainless steel; curved sapphire crystal with nonreflective treatment on both its surfaces; fully threaded, screw-down back with sapphire viewing window; water-resistant to 150 meters

**Bracelet and clasp:** Stainless steel; safety folding clasp without outer bow

**Rate results:**

(Deviations in seconds per 24 hours)

Dial up	+3
Dial down	+5
Crown up	+2
Crown down	+1
Crown left	+3
Crown right	0
Greatest deviation of rate:	5
Average deviation	+2.3
Mean amplitude	
Flat positions	253°
Hanging positions	239°

**Dimensions:** Diameter = 41.5 mm, height = 13 mm, weight = 150 g

**Variations:** With alligator leather strap (\$4,750); with black dial and stainless steel bracelet (\$4,850) or alligator leather strap (\$4,750); in rose gold with dark gray dial and rose-gold bracelet (\$27,100) or alligator leather strap (\$15,600); steel and gold, with dark gray dial (\$7,850)

**Price:** \$4,850

## Pros

- + Beautiful, well-constructed movement
- + Regular rate
- + All components are well-crafted

## Cons

- A shadow obscures the date disk
- Clasp construction is not ideal



*Caliber 8500 has a co-axial escapement, a height-adjustable balance bridge and a gear train that runs with low friction.*



*The folding clasp is appealing, but doesn't open easily and has no spring bars to lengthen the bracelet.*

## SCORES

### OMEGA SEAMASTER AQUA TERRA

**Bracelet (Maximum: 10 points):** The bracelet isn't as elaborately designed as the rest of the components, but it is equally well made; the safety folding clasp could be more user-friendly. **8**

**Operation (5):** The crown is somewhat stiff, but once you've unscrewed it, everything else is simple. Resetting the date via the hour hand makes life easier when traveling from one time zone to another. **4**

**Case (10):** The case, with two sapphire crystals and a screwed crown, boasts many-faceted styling and is water-resistant to 150 meters. Except for the not-quite-cleanly polished angles over the strap lugs, everything else is very well crafted. **8**

**Design (15):** The many elegant details are best appreciated close up, but this watch loses individuality when viewed from a distance. **12**

**Legibility (5):** The hands differ very significantly from one another and they contrast strongly with the background of the dial, but the minute hand is too short. The frame around the date display casts a shadow on the date disk. The luminous tip of the minute hand is difficult to find at night. **3**

**Wearing comfort (10):** The feeling on the wrist is basically good, but if the wearer's wrist swells, the bracelet's length cannot be altered without a tool. **8**

**Movement (20):** Caliber 8500 boasts modern construction, good functionality, and distinctive embellishments. **18**

**Rate results (10):** All values were in the "plus" column and yielded a slight gain overall, but points were subtracted for five seconds of maximum difference among the positions. **8**

**Overall value (15):** Considering the good craftsmanship and the impressive movement, \$4,850 is a good price. **13**

**TOTAL: 82 points**



*The case's middle piece has ergonomic, curving lugs and alternating polished and satin-finished surfaces.*

remain legible enough because the font used on the date disk is very bold. The luminous material gleams with a bluish color and with moderate brightness at night, but unless the watch has been held under a light source beforehand, it can be difficult to find the luminous tip of the minute hand in the dark.

**ALTHOUGH THE WATCH'S EXTERIOR** is attractive, the real fireworks are inside: its movement ranks among the best that contemporary watchmaking has to offer. Caliber 8500 is an ideal base movement — well-constructed, efficient, beautifully decorated and ready to accept added modules.

Omega treads new ground here in many respects. A coating of DLC (diamond-like carbon) ensures that the two serially arranged barrels function almost without wear. The rotor transfers winding energy in both its directions of rotation. The self-winding mechanism works silently and with a high degree of efficiency thanks to its newly designed train of reverser gears and its ceramic bearings. Innovative teeth and special lubricants minimize friction throughout the gear train. Omega's own co-axial escapement functions with extraordinary precision in Caliber 8500. It consists of a new escape wheel with three functional levels, a black balance made from a special alloy that's unaffected by variations in temperature, and a freely oscillating hairspring. The space usually occupied by a balance cock is home to a massive bridge on which the balance is borne with the utmost stability. This bridge also makes it easy to precisely adjust the vertical play.

Last but not least, Omega devised an innovative treatment for the movement's flat surfaces: the rotor and the bridges on

*THE DATE JUMPS FORWARD OR BACKWARD WITH THE HOUR HAND, MAKING IT EASY FOR FREQUENT TRAVELERS TO CHANGE TIME ZONES.*

both sides are plated with rhodium and embellished with a new decorative pattern known as “côtes de Genève en arabesque.” The bridges —which have bevelled and polished edges — are held in place by blackened screws. The screws' dark color is a good match for the balance and the two barrels, which are visible along the periphery of the movement. The bridges, the rotor and the spokes of the balance are engraved. Circular grain-ing adorns the base plate.

**THE MANY TECHNICAL** innovations incorporated into Caliber 8500 give it greater resistance against wear and increase the longevity of its components. But that's only half the story: the movement's well-thought-out construction also contributes to the regularity of its rate. Our ultramodern timing machine (a Witschi Chronoscope X1) differs from conventional models because it can correctly interpret the ticking of a co-axial escapement. Using this apparatus, we measured a very slight daily gain of 2.3 seconds and an acceptable maximum deviation among the various positions of five seconds. All values were in the “plus” column, exactly where they should be. The watch ran best while on the wrist, where it kept nearly perfect time, gaining not quite one second per day.

The Omega Seamaster Aqua Terra's price of \$4,850, in our opinion, is reasonable for a watch that is both attractively styled and user-friendly and boasts a very well designed *manufacture* movement. ○