

## The problem with fake watches

Replica and counterfeit goods are illegal, by purchasing them you are breaking the law, and whilst you may not think that it harms anyone – there are many problems associated with counterfeit items and organised crime, sweatshops, and other nasty things that owning watches shouldn't be related to – but it doesn't stop people from buying them.

## So what are the tell tale signs?

In the last 20 years, the market for replicas has increased so much that the pieces that you see now are nothing like the terrible forgeries of old, in some circumstances you cannot tell without disassembling the watches, and looking at all the component parts, but as a rough guide, here are a few things that the forgers still get wrong on a regular basis, and for this example we will use probably the most counterfeited watch in the world – the Rolex Submariner.

### THE BEVEL

No, not the bezel, the bevel.  
The inner ring surrounding the dial has always been a difficult thing for the forgers to get right, either the depth or the angle – it has never quite worked, but in recent years Rolex having introduced an engraving to the interior of the bevel and unless the font and spacing is totally 100% spot on, then – you guessed it, its fake.

### THE CASE

To spot a fake case, check proportions - does it look too thick? Forgers often use the same case for multiple Rolex models, just changing markings and bezels.  
Material markings are another giveaway. Since fakers reuse cases across gold and steel models, mismatched markings are a red flag.

### THE BRACELET

One of my favourite go to things before looking at anything else in a suspected watch is the bracelet – if this is wrong it is usually a very good indicator, not always but 90% of the time. Look at the screws that hold it together, do they have a chamfered edge? Do they turn easily, are they all the same? Look at the end links where they meet the case, do they slot in perfectly?

### THE CRYSTAL

The crystal covers the dial and can be plastic, glass, or sapphire, with or without coatings. Ensure the watch has the correct type - if not, question it. Rolex's Cyclops lens magnifies the date 2.5x. Check alignment and ensure the date wheel font is correct. Since recent years, Rolex etches a coronet at six o'clock as an anti-counterfeit measure. If visible without magnification, it's fake. Under a loupe, it should appear to float due to engraving at different depths - replicas still fail to perfect this.

### THE MOVEMENT

Opening the case back used to settle any doubt, as the movement markings revealed authenticity. But in 2024, with 3D printing and cloning, fakes are nearly identical - except for small details.  
Check the brushing quality, wording clarity, jewel settings, and retainers. Screws are another key giveaway - poor finishing often exposes a fake.

### BOXES AND PAPERWORK

Replicas often fail within 30 seconds due to poor packaging. Boxes may be the wrong colour or size, and the glue has a distinct smell and sloppy application - unlike anything from a Swiss factory. Paperwork is another giveaway. Missing retailer stamps or stamps from Chinese jewellers are red flags. Rolex cards can be close but often have the wrong font, colour, or texture - easier to spot if you have a real one to compare. If things don't add up, walk away.

### THE DIAL

The biggest giveaway on a Rolex Submariner is the dial. With so many aftermarket versions, check key details: are the markers straight? Is there lume on the surrounds? Are they the right shape? A loupe will reveal flaws, but dust or dirt is a major red flag - these fakes are made in poor conditions, not clean labs.

## ALWAYS BUY THE SELLER, NOT THE WATCH

If you really are in doubt about a watch, walk away – a good seller will understand your questions and know that he can sell it another day, some passing off a fake will not.

Whilst a person working in a jewellery chain or a large watch retailer may have a lot of knowledge about certain things and usually a lot of bravado, they will not and should not tell you a watch is fake or genuine upon merely a first glance - When in doubt always have a watch appraised by a professional valuer/authenticator.