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Neil Armstrong's Omega Speedmaster Sells for \$2.1 Million at Auction

Offering the unprecedented chance to own a timepiece worn by the first man to walk on the moon, RR Auctions of Massachusetts sold Neil Armstrong's commemorative Omega Speedmaster on 17th April. With an estimate of '\$2,000,000+' it achieved a historic result of \$2,125,000.



Omega Speedmaster Professional, Ref. BA 145.022-69 (First 26)
Credit: RR Auctions.

Omega Speedmaster, ref. BA 145.022-69

Omega originally produced 28 of these commemorative Speedmaster watches to mark the occasion of the Apollo 11 mission taking place in July 1969. On 20th July of that year, Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon.

During the Apollo 11 mission, each astronaut was officially equipped with an Omega Speedmaster, qualified by NASA in 1965 as the only watch for manned space missions. Alongside Armstrong and Aldrin, the Omega Speedmaster Professional became "the first watch worn on the moon".

To mark this incredible historical moment for space discovery and horology, Omega produced the very first Speedmaster chronograph in 18ct yellow gold,

accented with a burgundy red aluminium inlay bezel with dot over 90, black markers and hands. The BA 145.022-69 was powered by a cal. 861 17 jewel manual wind movement.



The back of the watch showing the inscription. Credit: RR Auctions.

The first of these 28 watches were inscribed to the case back "To mark man's conquest of space with time, through time, on time" together with the recipient's name. The first two of these references were supposed to be presented to President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew although they had to decline the gift due to compliance reasons. The remaining 26 watches were presented to NASA astronauts both alive and deceased who paved the way for the moon landings in the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs at a gala dinner in November of that year. Numbers 29 to 32 were given to Swiss personalities and bear the same case back inscriptions as the astronaut's timepieces and exclude their sequential number, making these watches the only 3 out of 1,014 total pieces with this attribute.

Of course, Neil Armstrong, "Buzz" Aldrin, and Michael Collins were the highest profile recipients of these limited astronaut watches. However, other recipients' BA 145.022-69's have passed through auction rooms in the last couple of years, creating an exciting build up in interest around this collector's reference and paving the way for the sale of Armstrong's watch.

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Above: Armstrong was photographed frequently wearing this watch, with several images such as this accompanying the lot details. Credit: RR Auctions.

in 2008, noted space collector Larry McGlynn purchased this watch directly from the Schirra family and subsequently offered for sale fourteen years later. This watch reached \$1,906,954 (£1,469,403) at auction.



Alan Bean, the 4th man on the moon. Credit: RR Auctions.

“To mark man’s conquest of space with time, through time, on time”. The Twenty Six Speedmasters presented by Omega to NASA

A quick browse of the major salerooms results from 2021 to present shows six of these watches, nearly a fifth of the total production selling at auction in less than five years. In fact, RR Auctions sold two of these examples in 2022 and 2023, which no doubt helped to bolster vendor confidence in consigning Armstrong’s watch!

This watch, belonging to Apollo 12 moonwalker Alan Bean sold for \$302,500 (£233,091) against a \$200,000+ estimate in April 2023. Alan was still in Apollo 12 quarantine from his ‘Skylab Mission II’ in November 1969 and so received his watch at a later date. His was number 26, perhaps reflective of the timeframe in which he was able to access his watch.



Wally Schirra wearing his gold Speedmaster Professional BA145.022-69 Credit: RR Auctions.

Wally Schirra was a Nasa astronaut for a decade from 1959, his expeditions on Mercury Atlas 8, Gemini 6A and Apollo 7 were instrumental in informing the Apollo 11 mission. Wally the first astronaut to go into space three times, and the only astronaut to have flown into space in the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs. In total, he logged a remarkable 295 hours and 15 minutes in space. Upon his death



Credit: Sotheby’s.

Apollo 13 Command Module Pilot John “Jack” Swigert Jr’s Speedmaster was sold by Sotheby’s at their Important Watches Sale in June 2023. Played by Kevin Bacon in the 1995 film Apollo 13 recounting this renowned and ‘unlucky’ mission in which the oxygen tank in the service module exploded and the crew was forced to rely on their lunar module as a lifeboat. Swigert’s watch was essential in his on-board calculations of oxygen reserves and life-saving timing – this piece sold in June 2023 for \$152,400 (£117,333).



Credit: Phillips.

'The First Watch Worn on the Moon' Limited Public Release

Following the first 32 of this special reference, Omega sold the remaining of the 1,014 watches to the public. These limited-edition watches differed in their case back inscription, engraved to each 'The First Watch Worn on the Moon.'

In May 2023, Phillips sold another of these Apollo 11 Speedmasters, this one presented to Captain Charles 'Pete' Conrad Jr. This watch was number 12 of 1,014 and awarded to Conrad in recognition of his service as the commander of the Apollo XII space mission, in which he became the third person to walk on the moon in November 1969. This piece sold for 1,397,000 HKD (£136,983).



Xi 1969, ref. Ba145.022. A rare limited edition yellow gold chronograph bracelet watch, made to commemorate the "apollo xi" moon landing, circa 1971 - complete with original purchase receipt



The back of 'Adolf Brandle's' watch. Credit RR Auction.

In January 2021, Antiquorum sold a somewhat mysterious Apollo 11 Speedmaster. Bearing simply the name 'Adolf Brandle' with no further inscription or number, the lot presented somewhat of a challenge to collectors and enthusiasts. Having been through various sales from 2019 onwards, auctioneers were unable to trace Brandle's association with NASA, and furthermore the watch's original movement had been 'swapped out.' Presenting a conundrum to many considering its mysterious history, this watch eventually sold for €124,800 (£105,800).

In 2024, Bonhams sold one of these limited watches at their Hong Kong auction. This edition was number 626 of 1,014, and was presented for sale complete with original paperwork, iconic crater box and in good condition. This watch sold for HK\$384,000 (£37,539).

Other results for these watches include CHF47,880 (£43,141) at Sotheby's in 2022, and €54,600 (46,183) at Antiquorum in 2022. We would look to recommend an insurance figure of around £50,000 in the current market, subject to change upon physical inspection of the watch in question.

This year, Space Age interest for watches in the open market appears to be piquing, with Sotheby's Geneva homing in on this trend hosting a specialist 'Area 51' space themed watch sale this month that performed exceptionally well. This area of collecting certainly appears to be one that is in the spotlight once more, and we would urge any collectors to ensure their pieces are fully covered with a specialist valuation.

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