

Everything Red Sub Reference



Collecting the Rolex Reference 1680 "Red Sub aka "Single Red" An Collectors Experience by Mark Lerman (July 2010)

If you read this article you will be able to tell them apart (scary!)



I have previously owned many Red Subs and currently own all of the watches whose pictures appear in this article and others. Much of the information that I have learned over the years about the 1680 Red Submariner was gathered from the buying and selling process (dealers and original owners), an activity that I still enjoy today. It is has afforded me the pleasure of meeting some nice and interesting people and even some great travel opportunities. I would like to thank and acknowledge my fellow collectors, forum participants and dealers whose support and guidance over the years has been instrumental in developing my collection and knowledge base that has culminated in this article.

The Rolex 1680 reference model has to be one of my all time favorite vintage Rolex Sport models to own, collect and wear. I have decided to pay homage to this reference and the collectors who appreciate this wonderful model. This is not intended to be a history of the watch, but a collectors preference and loose guide. The 1680 is one of the most attractive Rolex sport models, and certainly on the list as one of the top sport Rolex model icons and in the same genre as the Double Red Sea Dweller, Daytona, Orange Hand and GMT.

I thought it would be nice to share my passion for this model and possibly create some more awareness in fellow collectors. The following is my own personal guide for collecting Red Subs and the information may not be absolute. In fact, I expect there will be some disagreement and I welcome the discussion and corrections that follow. I hope vintage Rolex collectors who are not focused on Red Subs may also find some of this information useful because many of the concepts can be applied to collecting other Rolex sport models from the same era.

Red Submariner Dial Varieties and Case Numbers

The Red Submariner was produced with 7 different dial versions that have been recognized by the collector community. I have estimated the production range based on my experience with these watches as follows:

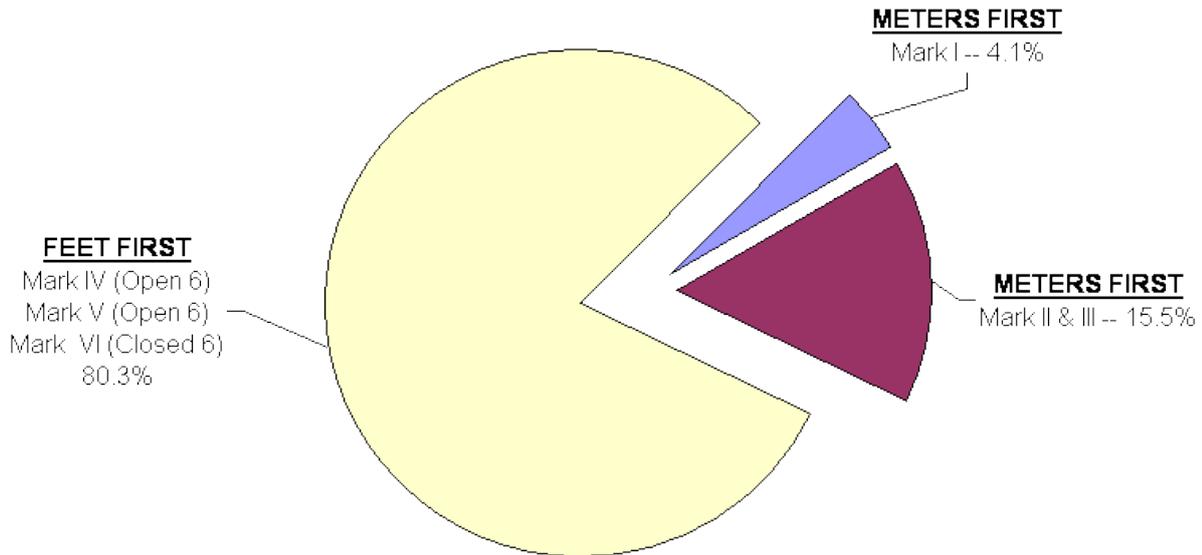
- Mark I (Meters First).....2.07M...2.2M
- Mark II/III (Meters First).....2.2M....2.45M
- Mark IV (Open 6 Feet First).....2.45M...3.?M
- Mark V (Open 6 Feet First).....2.?M....3.?M

Mark VI (Closed 6 Feet First).....3.?M....3.999M
 Mark VII (White Submariner).....4.0M....7M+
 Mark VIII (Luminova).....Red Sub Service Dial

The above serial number ranges are guidelines and should not be taken literally, and like a lot of Rolex information out there, may be subject to some revision. They help me establish some boundaries that to follow in my collecting endeavors. For example, I will not buy a Red sub with a case number above 4M or a Meters First with a case number higher than 2.5M.

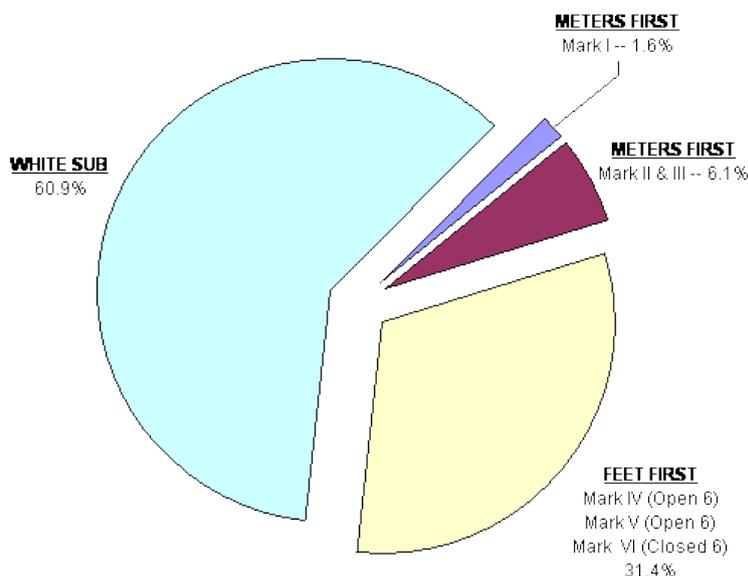
Red Submariner Dial Version Relative Rarity

Mark I = 2.07M - 2.15M
Mark II/III = 2.15M - 2.45M
Mark IV/V/VI = 2.45M - 3.999M



1680 Submariner Dial Version Relative Rarity

Mark I = 2.07M - 2.15M
Mark II/III = 2.15M - 2.45M
Mark IV/V/VI = 2.45M - 3.999M
Mark VII (White Sub) = 4M - 7M



Why are Mark II/III dials on a single slice as well as the Mark IV/V/VI?

Mark II/III dials appear simultaneously so there is no way to distinguish which came first. In fact, I would have preferred to call them Mark IIa and IIb. But I have already seen references to them as Mark II and III, so I did not want to cause any more confusion. The Mark IV, V and VI have a much more defined chronological sequence, but I could not clearly define the breaks in the case numbers, so I kept them together. If anyone has more experience or has some additional facts, please let me know!

It is not uncommon (but not desirable for serious collectors) to find a later dial version in an earlier watch case. Such a discrepancy can be explained as the result of a service received in the decades old history of that individual watch.

I would be more than a little skeptical of a watch that has an much earlier dial version that is installed in a much later case. For example, a Mark II/III dial that is in a case number higher than 3M would raise some big red flags. I cant easily imagine how that could have happened. It is possible a watchmaker had a dial lying around and decided to fit a watch that came in for service. The more likely scenarios is that the watch has have been put together from spare parts (aka a Frankenwatch). As a general rule, I would simply stay away.

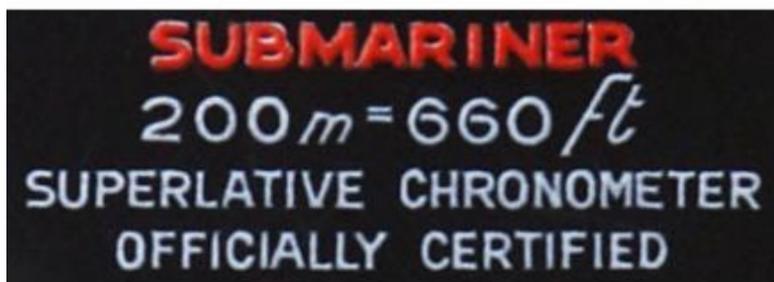
The Dial Variations

Here is a chart that can be used to determine the various dial versions:



Mark I Meters First

Red Lettering over White
(look carefully)
Elongated Closed 6s
Long & Curvy F
Distinctive Condensed Font



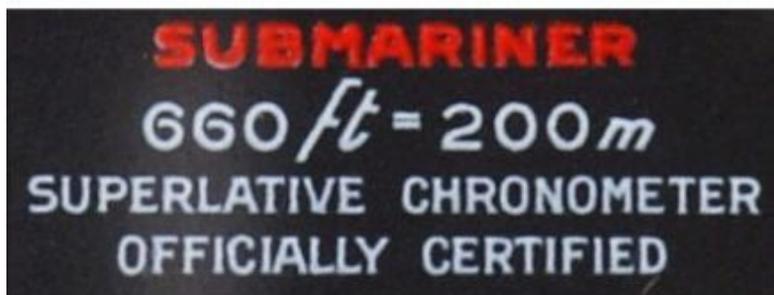
Mark II Meters First

Same time as Mark III
Black or Brown Dial
Red Lettering Printed white.
Open 6
Thinner Font
Longer F than Mark III



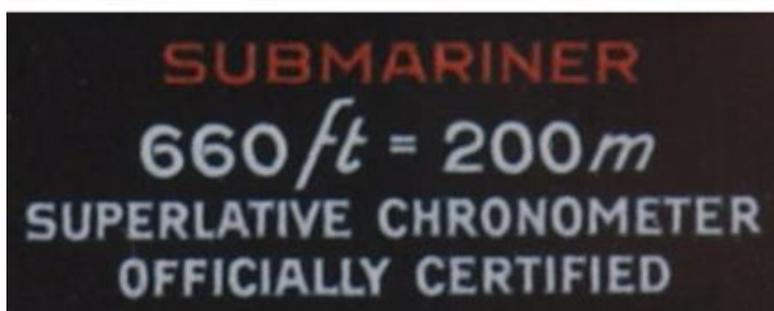
Mark III Meters First

Same time as Mark II
Black or Brown Dial
Red Lettering Printed Directly on Dial
Open 6
Thicker Font than Mark II
Shorter F than Mark II



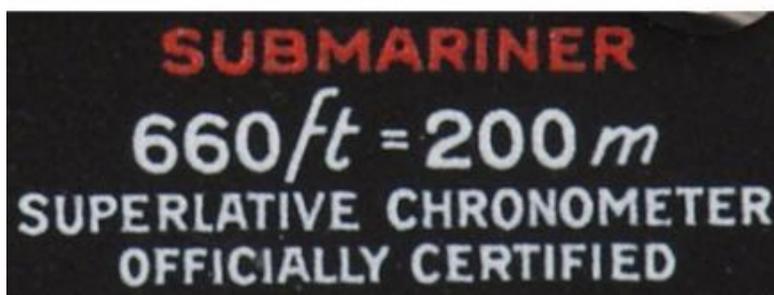
Mark IV Feet First

Earliest Feet First Dial
Red Lettering on white.
Distinctive Open 6



Mark V Feet First

Middle Feet First Dial
Red Lettering Directly on Dial.
Less Pronounced Open 6



Mark VI Feet First

Last Feet First Dial
Red Lettering Printed Dial.
Closed 6
S looks rounded not flat

Note: I do not have a Mark VIII (service dial) sample to share. But its easy to tell that one apart:

It says only SWISS at the bottom and glows brightly because it is made with Luminova (not Tritium).



[Mark I Meters First](#)



[Mark II Meters First](#)
(Black or Brown)



[Mark III Meters First](#)
(Black or Brown)



[Mark IV Feet First](#)



[Mark V Feet First](#)



[Mark VI Feet First](#)

Dial Notes

The dial is the most valuable component on most Rolex vintage models. The Red Sub is definitely no exception to this rule. If you have a Red Sub with a dial that needs to be replaced, a dial in good condition will cost thousands of dollars and is very difficult to find. It is almost never worth any discount to buy a watch with an inferior dial.

Tropical Brown Dial aka Chocolate Red Subs

The Brown Sub variant, as rare as it is beautiful, was most likely spawned from a manufacturing flaw. This makes it highly sought by collectors worldwide. I would consider a Chocolate Sub a grail watch! In my experience, Brown Dial Subs are only found in Meters First Mark II & Mark III dials and typically in case numbers in the 2.2M or 2.3M ranges. Brown dial subs are Ultra Rare because it is likely that only a small fraction of the dials turned brown and many if not most of those dials were probably destroyed or replaced during service.



Brown vs. Black Mark II (Left Comparison)

Brown vs. Black Mark III (Right Comparison)

There are a number of theories out about Chocolate Subs, but I believe that dials turned brown due to unstable materials that were used in their manufacture. The original paint material was intended to be black, but changed to brown due to improper mixing ratios or impurities in the chemicals. Whatever the reason, dials changed color over some time, possibly months or years after production. Due to the variances in the brown dials, some environmental factors such as light/sun exposure, temperature and humidity must have also have played a role in determining the intensity of the color change. The color change process took place in the first few years and is not ongoing.

Patina or No Patina

The world of Rolex vintage collecting is full of theories and mysteries. I have yet another theory that is shared by some collectors about how and why the markers and became yellowish with patina while other watches remained white. By talking to original owners, I have observed that watches worn regularly, DID NOT turn yellow, or develop a patina. On the other hand, watches that were unworn and presumably stored in a drawer or a safety box, turned color. The degree of patina or lack thereof probably depended on the amount of light exposure and other environmental factors not entirely clear to me. Similarly to the Tropical Brown Sub, the aging process stopped after several years and I dont believe that the process is ongoing. The markers will not continue to turn white or yellow depending on light exposure any longer.

A more important question that needs to be answered about patina and that is How much patina is desirable? Ultimately, this is a personal preference. Some collectors like watches that look like they came out of the factory and prefer the white markers, while others like to see a more vintage look with more patina.

Patina can vary in degrees of intensity on all Rolex vintage watches. I have attempted to make a scale for easy reference:



When evaluating patina, the main thing to look for is that markers have nice EVENLY colored patina and that they do not have dark spots or streaks (marbling). Although the darker patinas (5+) can give a watch a really interesting look, they tend to be more likely to have markers with discoloration problems. It is also important to note that matching patina on the dial with the hands is also important. (See the section on Hands.) Watches with strong even patinas (3 & 4) are highly sought by collectors and bring strong premiums!

Dial Imperfections

Due to natural aging, minor dial defects are acceptable and unavoidable when collecting Red Subs.

1. Broken Hash marks are the most common minor imperfection found on Red Sub dials (and other matte Rolex dials). Small parts of some of the hash marks chip off where the case meets the dial. This chipping occurs when the watch is taken apart for service. It is so common that it is one of the tells used to confirm authenticity. Therefore, small chips or missing pieces at the end of a hash mark touching the case, or even a few hash marks, is normal. However, if an entire

hash mark is missing, then this can be easily seen with the naked eye and has an adverse effect on value.

2. Tiny chips where the dial meets the case are also fairly common. When they are and difficult to notice with the naked eye, it is not a problem. I would avoid dials that have chips that are larger.

3. Tritium Loss on the markers Red Sub dials is fairly common and is perfectly acceptable. I would try to avoid watches with dials that have large chunks of missing tritium to the point where it is a distraction.

4. The Red Writing (Submariner) on dials that have Red over White printing is almost always imperfect due to the manufacturing process used to create the dials. It is normal for these dial versions (Mark I, III, IV) to show some white on the edges of the letters. It is also natural for some white to show through the red lettering.

Aftermarket Parts aka Fakes

Watches that have aftermarket dials, also known as fake dials, should be avoided at all costs. Most of these watches have many other fake parts and you are probably buying a few hundred dollars in parts for thousands of dollars!

It is also a good idea to stay away from watches with refinished dials. These are dials that have been scraped of all original print material and then reprinted, usually very poorly. I have seen claims that the dial is an original Rolex dial, which is technically true, however once refinished they are pretty much worthless.

I would also stay away from relumed dials because these dials never look as good as the original factory finish. Relumed dials are more acceptable on older gilt models, depending on rarity and condition of the rest of the watch. Red Sub markers typically do not degrade enough to warrant redoing. Therefore, Red subs with relumed dials have a very low demand and trade at steep discounts.

Hands

Hands should match to the patina on the dial. If hands do not match, have been relumed, or have been changed to Luminova, it can be an eyesore. However, hands can be replaced without too much effort. But depending on the patina, they can be difficult to find in the right color. If you buy a watch that needs hands to be changed, hopefully, you are getting a slight discount for this and are patient enough to find the hands that match. Most collectors prefer matching tritium hands that do not glow, but Luminova hands can be a nice match to a dial with very white markers.

I do not mind original hands that have some minor oxidation or corrosion or even small cracks in the Tritium. As long as these imperfections are not a distraction, I will not change these hands in order to keep the watch as original as possible. I only replace hands when they do not match the color of the dial patina or have noticeable chunks of missing Tritium.

Inserts

The insert can make the watch and is probably the most aesthetic component aside from the dial! The most desirable inserts are the FAT FONTS which came installed from the factory originally. The amount of fading someone prefers is a personal preference and also depends on the watch for which it is intended. In the past few years, prices of attractively faded FAT FONT inserts have increased dramatically. These used inserts fetch high premiums even when they are scratched up.

I would certainly add a premium if a watch had an especially nicely faded FAT FONT insert. While inserts are more easily replaced than other components, like the hands, they can be expensive and difficult to find, keep this in mind when buying a watch that has a Thin Font service insert.

The thinner font varieties are service replacement inserts and later came with Luminova pearls. They do not tend to fade and are still available from Rolex today. They are usable, but they do not enhance the look of a watch like the faded inserts with the fater fonts.



There are several versions of Font Thicknesses on inserts and an infinite amount of variations of fading and wear. the "Thin Font" service replacement version is 3rd from left.

Pearl Dot

The pearl is one of the least critical components when purveying a Red Sub but buying a Red Sub that still has a tritium pearl on the insert that is still intact is like getting the cherry on the cake. Most pearls lost their luminous material or broke off altogether. Although they can be easily replaced, they are getting difficult to source.

Aesthetically, the pearl is not part of the dial and hands ensemble and therefore the color of the pearl does not have to be as close in color match as the dial and hands.

Caseback

The Red Sub casebacks starting with the 2M case numbers and ending with about 3.4M were stamped with a date code starting with II 69, and ending with II 72. Somewhere in the 3M range, the date code was dropped. It is pretty clear that all watches from 1973 onward did not have a stamped date code. Rolex service replacement casebacks did not have date codes.

Case Condition

Next to the dial, the case is the second most important and valuable component of a Red Sub. Unlike hands or an insert, a case is something you cannot easily change or improve on a watch without buying another. Therefore, it is important to gauge the case condition and make sure it is strong enough to suit your tastes. Most watches will have been polished at least once. It is very rare to find a Red Sub with an unpolished case. I have learned to treasure such finds and would pay a very strong premium for an unpolished case even if the watch has other inferiorities.

Polishing a watch is definitely an art form more so than fixing a watch. It is very easy to ruin a watch with a bad polish and just because a watch was serviced at Rolex does not mean anything when it comes to how poorly it was polished.

One has to remember, that polishing, no matter how light, takes metal off the watch. Therefore, unless there is a very specific gouge or scratch is causing a distraction and only in an area that has already seen polishing, I would not even consider polishing a case any further. I consider this wear part of the beauty of wearing a vintage watch and eliminates that most awful feeling of putting on that first scratch on a new or freshly polished watch. The only thing worse is getting your first ding on that brand new sports car.

Here is a loose guide to evaluating cases in order of priority:

1. Case Engravings The engravings help authenticate the case and therefore it is important that they are not completely lost from bracelet wear, pitting or intentional mistreatment. Unlike some earlier Rolex references, Red Subs generally don't have severe bracelet wear problems or pitting. Therefore, I would not consider buying a Red Sub with engravings or a

case numbers that have worn off completely. As a minimum requirement, all the case number digits must be present and accounted for. Even if the digits are missing most of their form and a 10x loupe is needed to read the numbers, as long as the full case number can be discerned, then the watch earns a passing grade in my book. Once the numbers have been confirmed and the band is back on the watch, the strength of the engravings becomes irrelevant.

2. Lugs Examine the lugs to make sure they are not too thin and that they are about the same thickness. Sometimes in one of the lugs sustains a serious injury and the owner has no choice but to over-polish one of the lugs making it thinner than the others.

3. Crown Guards - Look at the crown guards to see if they have been polished to a pinch. It is also a good idea to compare the size of the crown guards, as sometimes one side can be polished significantly more than the other.

4. Pitting or Corrosion Slight pitting is normal, but Excessive pitting or corrosion can be detrimental. Check between the lugs and where the case meets the caseback. Avoid watches that have severe problems with corrosion or if the pitting completely obliterates any of the digits of the case number.

Crown

Red Subs with case numbers

Although there are no premiums attached to having either crown, it is nice to see a watch with its original Twinlock crown still in place. This novelty adds a small flair of authenticity and some reassurance that the watch is still in its original state.

Bracelet

The bracelets are easily changed and therefore I would not look critically at a watch without a bracelet or if a watch has a later bracelet. I readily admit that I am not an expert on bracelets, so if you have any corrections or input, please feel free to make additions or corrections.

There are 4 bracelets that were manufactured by Rolex that fit Red Subs:

1. The 9315 Folded Link is considered the correct bracelet model for the Red Sub.

Here are the important points to note:

The model 9315 should be stamped just prior to the end piece on at least one of the links.

The correct end pieces are stamped 280 or 380

The clasps were date stamped from 67 to 72

Clasps without date stamps are from 1973+

The folded bracelet was manufactured until the late 1970s

The earlier version of the bracelet is known as the Patent Pending and is more expensive for its rarity and from demand by Double Red Seadweller collectors. They are stamped from 67 to 70 on the clasp and have Pat Pend stamped on the diver expansion when it is unfolded.

It is not critical to have the exact year of your watch stamped on your bracelet or the date on the caseback.

A bracelet that is dated a year or two after the caseback is perfectly fine.

Unfortunately in order to shorten the bracelet, links have to be removed by a watchmaker or jeweler.

It is also difficult to reinstall the links once removed and the links will be bent out of shape.

Even bracelets found in superior condition tend to be very loose and feel flimsy when compared to modern bracelets, therefore most people find that they do not make a good daily wearer.

2. USA Made Riveted Bracelets -- There have been more than a few Red Subs that were purchased from original owners that had USA Riveted bracelets on them. Whether they were originally installed, requested by the customer or switched by the dealer, we may never know for sure. Dont be surprised if you find a Red Sub with this bracelet configuration. Keep these points in mind:

These bracelets do not have a model number stamped and are simply known as USA Made Riveted Bracelets

There is no diver expansion or a flip lock on this bracelet

The end pieces are attached to the bracelet and are not stamped

The clasp is the only component with stamped hallmarks

There is always a date stamps that ranged from the 1960s to the late 1970s

These bracelets have a cheaper feel than any of the other bracelets

3. Occasionally, a Red Sub will be found to have a 7836 Folded Link bracelet installed. Although it was designed primarily for the GMT and the Explorer II, the 7836 fits the Red Sub perfectly and can take 280 or 380 end pieces. The only major difference between the two models was the clasp. The 9315 had the flip lock and the divers extension and the 7836 did not have these two features.

4. The 93150 Solid Link with 580 end pieces was introduced in the late 1970s and is fully compatible with the Red Sub. In fact it is the most comfortable wearing bracelet for the Red Sub as well as other vintage Rolex models. These bracelets are less expensive than the 9315 because they are more readily available and are not sought by collectors looking to complete their Red Sub sets.

I prefer this bracelet for daily wear because it has a great feel/weight and the end pieces seem to fit better than the earlier

models. Also, the links can be easily removed or added with a small screwdriver.

The Movement

The power plant of all Red Sub models is the Rolex made 1575, however all the engravings I have ever seen on the rotor bridge are have been marked 1570. The 1575 is the same movement as the 1570, with the exception that the 1575 has a date function. The same movement was used in all the Rolex sport models like the 1675, 1655 and the 1665. It is a great automatic movement that is relatively inexpensive to service with parts readily available. When oiled and regulated, it can run for many years with great accuracy and dependability.

Since the movement and/or parts are easily obtained, or simply swapped with much less expensive Rolex models of that period, I would not look to the movement to verify if a watch is genuine.

If a watch is running strong, it is certainly a plus, but I would not discount a watch if it is not in perfect running condition. But I would rather get a watch in its original condition and have it serviced my way. It can be some trouble and expense to have a service performed, but it is a small price to pay for a nice original Red Sub. There have been numerous times when I have had owners who decided to sell their watch take them in for service, only to have them ruined from a collectors point of view.

Box & Papers

When I first started collecting, I sought out watches with papers because it helped reassure me that the watches were not stolen or fake. Over some years, I learned that these are not primary reasons to buy watches with papers. I heard the statement You cant wear the papers. Many times. The question is why bother paying all that money for watches with papers? The answer is simple: RARITY. Rarity means collectability. I was very glad to have made this decision, because the watched I bought increased in value more dramatically than any of the loose watches that I collected.

Papers are not for everyone. If you simply want a nice watch for the lowest possible price and are not looking for an investment, forget the papers, buy a nice Red Sub and enjoy!

Papers are for serious collectors who are looking for investment grade pieces. In the recent market upturn, it was clear that because of their rarity, that watches with papers accelerated in value when compared to loose watches. This will very likely repeat itself in the next upturn. Most collectors recognize this phenomena and this is the reason that sets with papers still fetch healthy premiums.

It is important to note that Red Subs may have come with a variety of papers from the dealer. The Red Subs that deserve the with papers premium are the ones that come with either of the PUNCHED GREEN CERTIFICATES (with a matching case number) pictures here. Even though dealers sometimes used papers on which they wrote in the case numbers by hand, handwritten papers do not carry the same premium as punched papers. The same applies to blank papers.



The earlier Red Subs had the smaller green paper that was punched. These papers we printed on thicker stock and had no watermark. They were accompanied by a small booklet titled "**Your Rolex Oyster**" in which the back pages could

also be punched. This is called double punched.



Around the 2.8M case number, Red Subs started getting the larger green-border certificate that was printed on thinner paper and had the Rolex watermark when held up to a light. The small white booklet is renamed "**Your Rolex**" was no longer punched.

Although the boxes and other accessories are a nice addition to any watch, given enough time and money, they can all be purchased separately from a variety of sources, including online. Therefore, I would concentrate on the core of the acquisition, in terms of condition and punched papers.

A Buying Tip

It is impossible to authenticate a watch to be 100% genuine from pictures alone. Therefore, I highly recommend that you never buy a watch without the right to return it or from someone you do not know. Look for sellers who have a reasonable no hassles return policy and have a good reputation that they want to protect. One of the most important things is to work with a seller who knows Red Subs intimately. Sellers who sell a lot of other Rolex models or even more expensive watches can easily make a mistake when taking a trade and may try to pass along a problem watch, sometimes unwittingly, to an unsuspecting buyer. Proving a watch you bought is a fake to someone who only cares about their cash flow is not all that easy. If you are lucky enough to have used a credit card with buyer protection in this situation, you may still have a tough time getting your money back. It may come down to having a third party give you a written evaluation. This is not an easy task even where an obvious fake is concerned. Even Rolex will refuse to take sides or do anything on your behalf in this situation. The best thing to remember is the saying "**buy the seller not the watch.**"

Mark Lerman

MARK@WEBSTORM.COM