

CX Swiss Military Watch – A deep sea creature emerges

Would you have thought that someone with more than 10 years experience in diving watches, someone who believed he had seen all there was to diving watches would virtually be gasping for air when confronted with this new model in the spring of 2005? Well, it happened to the author of this site.

Since 2002 BREITLING held the record for mechanical diving watches (3000m) and nobody would have guessed that the one company breaking this record would be a not overly well known Swiss manufacturer who so far had not been producing deep sea diving watches. And who would have thought that this record would be pulverized not just by an ordinary three-hand watch but by a chronograph, putting all other diving watches to shame by its sheer size and water resistance? Well, the author of this site didn't.

One thing however did not come as a surprise to the author: he quite expected his first encounter with this behemoth to add a new dimension to the world of mechanical diving watches: the size, the weight and the outfit of the CX Swiss Military Watch's 12000 FEET have proven that the sun has not yet quite set in the world of professional diving watches. Sometimes size does matter...

Now for a first sparring round in this newly created super-heavyweight class (be prepared – a BIG timepiece calls for a BIG review):

3657 Meters – 3657 meters??

Never in the history of mechanical diving watches did a mechanical watch – albeit one produced in series – withstand such an incredible depth. And definitely not a chronograph. Some people might ask why one would produce a watch for such depths. It is quite clear however that only those who appreciate innovations expanding the border of what is technologically possible will appreciate such a new timepiece – the same people who will applaud the even more potent version of a new super sports car or a new record-breaking skyscraper.

The same goes for the 12000 FEET as produced by CHARMEX (a traditional watch manufacturer in Basel/Switzerland): at least two thirds of its technological potential will never be used and there is a more than sufficient safety margin left in the first third. But then again, the development of this mighty watch was driven by the wish to produce what up until then seemed impossible to produce.

In one word – it is the most water resistant watch ever available on the market, manufactured for the aficionados of records and technological innovations. He who cannot understand why someone would want to fly around the globe in a mere balloon will never fall under the spell of the 12000 FEET so.

Conclusion: as with all luxury watches the new no. 1 in the world of the professional deep sea diving watches has more to do with emotions than rational thinking. Let those who do not seek the extreme stick to their less spectacular timepieces water resistant to a mere 100 meters.

For all others: please continue reading!

The difference between “big” and “gigantic”

It cannot be denied that the CX Swiss Military Watch's 12000 FEET is a big timepiece; however, one has to admit that the manufacturer succeeded in developing a watch whose perfect harmony hides its actual size. Don't be fooled though – the crown has a diameter of 8mm, the bezel 47mm with a thickness of 5mm. Compare this to Panerai whose biggest cases stop at roughly 47mm. A Breitling Super Avenger is almost as big with more than 48mm but less than half the weight at 153gr. This shows that the 12000 FEET is really big. And heavy: even with the optional genuine rubber strap it weighs 285gr and thus more than a standard carton of Swiss premium butter. With the steel bracelet attached the scales tip at 368gr – a weight up until now reached only by a few solid platinum or gold watches (if at all) and the equivalent of three “normal” watches.

Given the fact that the watch is produced in very limited numbers only and the producer might not have a close-knit net of distributors the most important question a potential buyer should ask himself is – can one actually wear this timepiece?

The answer – surprisingly – is a definite yes, once your wrist is at least 5.5cm wide (which does not take a Hercules). The moving end pieces of the rubber strap allow the watch to rest comfortably on the wrist. Mind you, the watch remains very impressive nevertheless and the only way to seemingly reduce it in size is to look at it in a mirror!

The large caseback prevents the watch from being top-heavy; together with the ample distance between wrist and crown/pushers and the absence of any sharp edges and corners the 12000 FEET is surprisingly comfortable to wear. And you will get used to the weight, too. If worst comes to worst you might have to put up with a bigger biceps.

The stainless steel bracelet does ask for a slightly stronger wrist as the solid, screwed links do stand out more than the rubber strap. Alternatively, you can wear it over the wet suit – which the 12000 FEET was intended for anyway.

Conclusion: while the CX Swiss Military Watch's 12000 FEET is undeniably exceptional in size and weight it is also easy and comfortable to wear with the rubber strap. Whoever is interested in this timepiece should first check if it actually matches his wrist. On the other hand – if you are interested in buying a Hummer H1 you probably won't be worrying about parking either...

Outstanding appearance

The CX Swiss Military's 12000 FEET got more comments than any other watch the author had ever worn before. These comments ranged from “you cannot be serious” to “finally a REAL watch”. Whatever the comment – everybody solemnly inspected the 12000 FEET and then handed it back, nodding approvingly.

The same phenomenon was experienced in all the watch collectors' discussion forums – everybody couldn't help but to comment on the 12000 FEET. However, nobody was able to analyse this watch first hand (except the author) as 50mm stainless steel simply don't fit even through a broad-band connection.

The 12000 FEET is one cry for attention – there probably isn't one shirt on this planet you could push this watch under. And only very few sweaters. It remains a very special feeling indeed, letting this timepiece glide from one hand to the other.

Conclusion: if you buy the 12000 FEET don't be surprised if you don't go unnoticed.

Packaging

With the 12000 FEET it is not just the watch that is big – the whole kit including the packaging is enormous. You get a massive wooden box in black high-gloss lacquer (normally collectors would store their whole collection in a box this size). This box contains everything you could wish for: instructions, certificates, screw-driver, additional strap and an enormous wiping cloth.

Conclusion: beautiful big box with all you need.

Bracelet

The 12000 FEET comes with a massive solid stainless steel bracelet. This bracelet alone is as heavy as most ordinary watches, yet comfortable to wear as its weight counterbalances the weight of the case. The engraved butterfly-buckle is secured by a safety-clasp and operated by two pushers; it also has a diver's extension. This extension and the screwed links allow for easy adjustment of the length of the bracelet. The quality of the bracelet seems to fall somewhat below the quality of the case. The author also noted that for wearers with slim wrists the bracelet might protrude a bit.

A lot easier to wear is the already mentioned genuine rubber strap (included in the set): it offers a tighter and more comfortable fit. Due to the connecting adaptor links you can use virtually any strap with a width of 19mm – heaven for strap fetishists. Especially sought after at the moment is black leather with red seams...

The butterfly buckle of the rubber strap seems a bit too small in comparison to the whole watch; however it shows that the manufacturer tried to squeeze as many amenities into this timepiece as possible. It sometimes proved somewhat tricky to fit the strap into the two rather tight loops. Maybe some of the future owners of this timepiece will invest a small sum to get a traditional clasp instead of the butterfly buckle.

Exchanging the rubber strap for the stainless steel bracelet was somewhat difficult: one of the connecting links took a bit of force to screw in. As the timepiece investigated by the author was from the test run (this explains the scratches on the case) the series probably won't have this problem.

Conclusion: the fact that with the 12000 FEET the wearer can basically chose any strap with a width of 19mm is highly positive. However, although of high quality both the stainless steel bracelet and the rubber strap could not convince the author 100%.

Here's looking at you, kid

Charmex offers the following choice of dials: yellow – as presented at the Basel show – black (more classic), blue and silver. The yellow version obviously offers more contrast than the black or blue and is, together with the red and white logo, more active. The black edging of the hands somewhat reduces their readability on the black dial though.

First the author intended on criticising the size of the hands – they seemed too small compared to the case. However, after careful consideration this proved not to be correct: were the minute hand any bigger it would cover the chronograph function too much. The different design of minute and hour hand ensures perfect readability.

In order to find at least one flaw: maybe the second hands could have been slightly longer and the hour and minute hands with white instead of black edging.

Choosing a different colour for the chronograph hands – red – while the hour/minute/small second hands are white ensures nobody will mix them up in the heat of the night.

The quality of dial and hands is excellent – no flaw to be found here, not even with a magnifying glass (binoculars might be of better use given the size of the watch). The author congratulates the manufacturer on choosing a minute/second scale on the dial and omitting any further fragmentation – which usually is not in line with the movement anyway. The dial certainly seems more composed this way.

At a depth of 3657 meters all you will encounter is darkness and so the 12000 FEET offers sufficient and long-lasting luminosity (with room for improvement for the chronograph function).

Conclusion: the yellow/silver version offers more contrast while the black one will appear to the more classic buyer. All versions are well readable and of good quality. The minute hand on the black dial could have been a bit more prominent though.

Practical Use

This watch can claim what only very few can claim: that the 12000 feet water resistance is not just a theoretical value. Even though one is tempted to believe the 12000 feet upon just seeing this timepiece there is actual proof of it: the Oceanographic Institute of the University of Southampton / UK tested the 12000 FEET up to 365 bar (the equivalent of roughly 3.5 tons) and deployed one timepiece down to 3657 meters, attached to a diving robot.

Since March 2005 there is another 12000 FEET deployed in a depth of 2500 meters – for a full year. And as no free - , scuba- or pearl-diver with a penchant for big watches will ever dive to such depths one can unveil where this is happening – off the English coast.

Up until now the 12000 FEET withstood all pressures, the more than 5mm thick sapphire crystal can thus withstand a pressure of 370kg per cm².

This should convince all those technocrats who rely on DIN-/ISO-conformity. Like many other well known diving watches the 12000 FEET, too, forgoes compliance with these norms. The 12000 FEET offers a classically designed rotating bezel indicating the first 15 minutes. The bezel with a continued minute scale would not have looked half as nice. The inlay of the bezel is done in black, all applied indices are polished. Beautiful.

Looking at the polished edges of the bezel one may think that in water or when wearing gloves it wouldn't offer much of a grip – however, the more than 5mm thick bezel does in fact offer sufficient surface area and grip for every hand. And with the 120 clicks and being perfectly aligned at 12 o'clock the bezel's a real beauty to both eye and hand.

This impression continues: the crown offers a fantastic grip (no wonder with a diameter of 8mm) and an engraving aligned with the case; the pushers have markings “unlocked” / “locked”; the caseback is stylishly engraved (with an embedded colour marking); the perfect fitting of the sapphire crystal – all this shows but one thing: careful attention to highly functional details, driven by high quality standards. Like the helium relief valve, using a new technology: not really necessary with a watch of such standing but added to complete the picture.

Conclusion: the only concession the owner of a 12000 FEET will ever have to make is to screw in the pushers should he decide to actually dive down to 3657 meters. And that's it.

Deep Blue's movement

The difference between a Valjoux 7750 and a delicate limited edition hand-made movement is about as vast as the one between scuba-diving and synchronized swimming. The Valjoux 7750 has been around since 1973 and has proven to be one of the most reliable mechanical movements. It has been used in such a variety of watches – from the ordinary 3-hand to the obviously upgraded 812-parts complication – that one cannot find any justified reason to criticize this classical movement.

Obviously its mechanism is somewhat simpler than its more intricate competitors and the winding process does create some scratching noises. But these apparent drawbacks are nothing in comparison to the wide availability of spare parts, the easy maintenance, the reliability and the precision of this movement.

The CX Swiss Military Watch's 12000 FEET is equipped with the COSC-certified Valjoux 7750 so the buyer does indeed get a top quality movement whose chronometer timekeeping results are achieved even during the day-to-day wearing of the watch.

Comparing the dimensions of the watch to those of the movement is quite interesting, too: the 7750 Valjoux has a diameter of 30mm and a height of 7.9mm – the comparison to the 50mm diameter and over 20mm height of the case shows how much steel was built around the movement to protect it against water. Probably that is why you can hardly hear the ticking of the movement.

Conclusion: a well proven movement that will serve you for decades, known to most watch enthusiasts from some other watch they once owned. It is by all means not a loss to have this reliable tractor hidden away underneath a thick caseback and doing exactly what it is intended to do – precision timekeeping.

The question of price

An objective analysis of price is almost impossible with any luxury product. Nevertheless, all consumers feel tempted to find out one way or another if they get their money's worth.

This also goes for the 12000 FEET which in the year of its launching costs EURO 3657. But here, too, there is no definite answer – simply because there is nothing you could compare it to and the sapphire crystal alone – over 5mm thick and 3.4cm wide – must cost a fortune.

But let's sort out some basic facts:

A mechanical diving chronograph water resistant to a "mere" 1000 meters with an identical movement – e.g. the LIMES 1 TAUSEND – did cost EURO 1'525 in 2005. The 12000 FEET should therefore – measured by its water resistance only – be at least three times that price.

The BREITLING SEAWOLF cost 2004 EURO 2380, water resistant to 3000 meters – but only with a three hand movement ETA cal. 2892.

GIRARD-PERREGAUX' SEA HAWK II is also water resistant to 3000 meters and costs a whopping EURO 6170 but sports a bespoke movement manufactured by GP (including power-reserve).

The PANERAI SUBMERSIBLE CHRONO, water resistant to "only" 1000 meters, is also priced way above the 12000 FEET at EURO 5400. It offers a lot of branding power but no stainless steel bracelet.

Etc. etc.

In brief: although the absolute price of the 12000 FEET is no bargain this timepiece offers good value for money in comparison to other models water resistant to 3000 meters. And obviously the percentage of marketing costs included in the price of the 12000 FEET is smaller than with one of the well-known brands. With UTS MÜNCHEN'S (also a less well known brand) PROFESSIONAL DIVER one has a similarly calculated diver's watch at EURO 3280, albeit without a chronograph and with 657 meters less water resistance than the 12000 FEET.

Conclusion: to evaluate the price of the 12000 FEET all you have to do is look at what you get: a diving chrono limited to 365 pieces per annum with a reliable movement and representing the maximum that can be achieved with today's technology. Add to this a comprehensive kit, a high quality matching the watches' intended use and a brand name not yet very well known. Depending on what you are looking for – the equation of water resistance, movement and image does reveal a surprise. Almost always in favour of the 12000 FEET.

OVERALL CONCLUSION:

The courageous decision to build the 12000 FEET has proven once more that up front it is always somewhat lonelier – only very few of these timepieces will be seen out on the range. But those that are will attract a lot of attention.

For brand name fetishists the watch might be too expensive; not though for technology enthusiasts. The only weak point detected during the test were the bracelet/strap. And this means a lot.

This timepiece with its unrivalled water resistance and dimensions might well advance to be the surprisingly easy to wear exotic choice of diving watches enthusiasts. The only draw-back – if you chose the 12000 FEET your other watches might suffer – he who gets used to the weight and size of the 12000 FEET will end up considering all other watches ladies' models.

OVERVIEW

Positive	Neutral	Negative
excellent time keeping results	solid, functional design	reduced comfort to wear, depending on wrist size and choice of strap/bracelet/buckle
finish of case unspectacular but with above average quality	reliable well known movement of high quality	minuted hand on black dial a bit too unobtrusive
surprisingly comprehensive kit	manufacturer not yet well known for diving watches	
most likely state-of-the-art model regarding water resistance and dimensions for years to come	doesn't conform 100% to the various DIN-/ISO norms due to obvious reasons	
moderately priced in comparison to similar watches	watch attracts a lot of attention	
surprisingly easy to wear and high functionality	depending on choice of bracelet/strap weight needs getting used to	
lot of attention to details	innovation regarding water resistance; diving related problems were solved with existing technologies	
very easy to use		