



# How to buy a lust-worthy vintage watch for under £1,000

If you're new to the world of watches, you might love the idea of owning a vintage timepiece – something full of history and aesthetic interest – but have no idea where to start, especially if you're on a budget. Allow us to offer some buying advice and some suggestions...

**By Adrian Hailwood**

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Over the last few months, this column has highlighted a wide range of vintage and “neo-vintage” oddities for the collector. Occasionally they have been affordable rarities around the [£100](#) mark, but more often the term “affordable” is relative and can easily run into [the thousands](#). So if the vintage bug has bitten you hard and you want to take a first step but have to stay within three figures, where should you start?

A few caveats first. This list is not definitive, merely suggested directions along a road. I have stuck to “time only”, not because complications are unavailable at this price – a vintage chronograph can be bought for less than £500 – but this is about secure first steps and the service bill for a “cheap” chronograph can be an unwelcome surprise. The same is true of electronic pieces; they can be stylish and affordable, but a movement glitch can render them unfixable and unwearable.

A three-figure limit will leave most Rolex watches out of reach, for which reason Hans Wilsdorf created Tudor, but my advice is to first consider [Omega](#). The value for money in vintage models is unbeatable. Omega Constellation chronometers have some of the best automatic movements ever made and while you won't have enough for a “pie pan” you should be able to grab a late 1960s

model in either round or “C” case. Avoid gold-plated cases, even though they come cheaper; it's better to stick to steel for long-lasting good looks.



An Omega Constellation ref ST 168.027 from 1969

The craze for tool watches means the addition of a dive bezel pushes many vintage pieces over the three-figure limit, but not all. Cheap and cheerful 1970s skindivers can be less than £100 but the quality can be bargain basement, too. For something with both quality and heft at an affordable price, take a look at [Tissot](#). Its 1970s T12 range covers time-only, world time and chronos, but their dive watch has twin compressor crowns, contemporary case sizing and brutish retro looks. For those who care, Tissot made its own movements for these and one could be yours for half your budget or less.



A 1970s Tissot T12 dive watch

A military watch scratches two collector itches at once and they were born to be used and abused so make a good, reliable first choice. The classic “[Dirty Dozen](#)” (the 12 models commissioned for British soldiers during the Second World War) have all risen above £1,000 unless you take your chances at auction on a rougher example. A later W10 (the hand-wound, MoD-spec military-issue watch that succeeded the Dirty Dozen) is a great alternative and presents a choice of mechanical or quartz in a larger case size. An original, hand-wound example with genuine MoD provenance from either [Hamilton](#) (which, we note, recently remade its [W10](#)) or CWC will come in well under budget at around £600 or £700.



A 1970s Hamilton W10 field watch

The crucial aspect of a first vintage watch is condition. You could scrape around to buy a prestige brand for under £1,000, but it would likely be a wreck that you will regret. An unrestored, crisply dialled, sharp-cased example of a less sought-after brand will still hold a valued place in your collection years later. And, should you sell it, you will always see a good return.