

Bell & Ross Hydromax

A few weeks ago I wrote about the CX Swiss Military 20 000 Feet Diver which is in the Guinness Book of Records for being the deepest diving mechanical watch (and chronograph). This is the "Incredible Hulk" of watches – big, tough and chunky – and water resistant to an astonishing 6000m!

Well, here's a watch, the Bell & Ross Hydromax, that is water resistant to over 11000m and it's not big and chunky at all! In fact, for a diver's watch it's rather sleek! How have Bell & Ross managed to achieve this and why aren't they the world record holders? The answer is two-fold. Firstly, the Hydromax has a quartz movement as opposed to a mechanical movement – and, secondly, it contains a revolutionary fluid formulated by Bell & Ross called Hydroil. Having the watch case filled with this transparent oil guarantees perfect water resistance.

The precise depth that the Hydromax is rated to is 11100m. Why have they chosen this depth and not just rounded it off to 11000m? The reason is because the deepest place on earth, the Mariana Trench, is 11035m. So it's all about saying that the Hydromax is capable of going literally anywhere on earth. Not that a human being could ever survive down there - except of course if they were in a custom-made submarine – which would mean they could be wearing any watch at all! But that's all beside the point. As we've seen before, in the world of dive watches, bragging rights count for a lot.

Bell & Ross is a French company based in Switzerland. Their motto is "the essential is never compromised by the superfluous" and the four design principles they always adhere to are functionality, precision, visibility and water resistance. As a company they are justifiably proud of the fact that their watches are used by astronauts, military pilots, elite police, race car drivers, submariners and underwater bomb disposal experts. For this reason all their watches are designed and manufactured to function in a variety of extreme conditions.

All of the Bell & Ross design principles come together in the Hydromax. There is of course the unrivalled water resistance, already mentioned above. The legibility of the watch is also quite extraordinary. Having a deep black dial with clear white numbers obviously helps but it is the Hydroil in the watch that enhances the legibility and makes it possible to read the face even at the most acute of angles. Surprisingly, visibility in low light is not that impressive. For a watch that can go deeper than any other you would have thought they would have paid more attention to the luminosity.

The oil inside the watch also means the Hydromax has a couple of other interesting features. For example the oil makes the watch absolutely silent – no annoying ticking sound from this watch! It also makes the date look like it is painted onto the dial. And, since temperature changes cause the oil to expand and compress, Bell & Ross have had to develop a flexible rubber gasket to compensate for this.

The Hydromax also rates highly in the areas of functionality and precision. The quartz movement is very accurate and the watch's battery life is a very handy five years. Having the crown in the 4 o' clock position prevents it from digging into the back of your hand and the bezel uses a clever ridged system which makes it easy to grip and is a welcome alternative to the usual rough saw-tooth design. As mentioned the watch is relatively slim for a dive watch and, with a diameter of only 39.5mm, it's not that big either.

The Hydromax comes with three types of straps – a stainless steel bracelet, a semi-rigid shock-proof rubber strap and a synthetic canvas strap with Velcro.

It's available with a black or a white dial and you can pick one up for somewhere in the \$2000 range. That seems like a very reasonable price for what is undoubtedly an extraordinary watch.

For more see www.bellross.com