



Watches (24 March 2022 A)

Thu, 24th Mar 2022

Viewing:

At Chiswick Auctions
1 Colville Road, W3 8BL

Saturday 19 March 11am to 4pm
Monday 21 March 11am to 5pm
Tuesday 22 March 11am to 5pm
Wednesday 23 March 11am to 5pm
Thursday 24 March 11am to 12pm

Lot 463

Estimate: £10000 - £15000 + Fees

BLANCPAIN. RARE FIFTY FATHOMS.

A VERY EARLY, EXTREMELY RARE AND UNUSUAL DIVERS BLANCPAIN MEN'S STAINLESS STEEL AUTOMATIC WRISTWATCH.

Model: Fifty Fathoms

Date: Circa 1953

Movement: Signed Blancpain Rayville S.A. Fifty Fathoms, 17-Jewels, Cal. AS1361N, inner dust cover engraved "In case of opening the water tightness of this watch must be re-checked by an official BLANCPAIN Fifty Fathoms Dealer, Patents+Pending"

Dial: Signed, black lacquered, Rotomatic, gilt Blancpain Fifty Fathoms, applied radium hour dots, white outer minute division, white sword hands with roodium applied, white centre seconds hand with roodium applied

Case: Signed, stainless steel three piece case, bi-directional Bakelite bezel with roodium numerals division, screw down 2 pieces back, inner dust cover, Antimagnetic, Waterproof, Shock Protected, No. 5318

Strap: Nato style grey

Size: 41mm

**For the most recent similar watch at auction, visit Phillips New York auction, 5th December 1, Lot 36, sold for \$30,000*

In the early 1950's, French Navy Captain Bob Maloubier and Lieutenant Claude aspirant Riffaud, of the 'Nageurs de combat' (Combat swimmers), required a watch rugged and reliable enough to safely accompany the specialist force to the deepest waters during difficult missions. Maloubier drew up requirements for his ideal watch but no company wanted to invest in what was considered a niche market. Unable to find a suitably keen manufacturer, he himself drafted preliminary sketches of what would ultimately become the Blancpain Fifty Fathoms. Eventually, Maloubier and Riffaud contacted the CEO of Blancpain, Jean-Jacques Fiechter, who was an avid diver himself and he accepted the challenge.

After its release in 1953, the model proved to be robust and with no real contemporary competition went on to serve Israeli, Spanish, German and the United States special forces, proving crucial to specialist dive teams undertaking sabotage, coastal raids, underwater reconnaissance and the like. Furthermore, Jacques Cousteau and director Louis Malle used the Fifty Fathoms during the shooting of 'Le Monde du Silence' – the 1957 award-winning underwater film. Its size

was due both to maximising legibility and to make room for the external rotating bezel – the first of its time and a safety mechanism that would allow the diver to line up the bezel with the minutes hand when starting a dive and thus making it clear how many minutes had elapsed when underwater.

Over 50 derivatives of the Fifty Fathoms were produced, many for specialist military/industry use and never for public purchase.

Given their limited production numbers, the demanding conditions that these watches were subjected and the thirsty collectors market, good examples offered for sale are few and far between.

Dimensions: 41mm.