

1953-2013: Blancpain Fifty Fathoms 60th anniversary! The story of a legend

How it all began:

When Jean-Jacques Fiechter, himself a diving fan, took the helm of Blancpain in 1950, he began working on a reliable and robust instrument capable of accompanying him in his leisure sports activities. Diver's watches, still inexistent at the time, were to prove crucial in that measuring dive times and the ability to time various operations are of paramount importance. In 1953, the first modern diver's watch was introduced and christened Fifty Fathoms after the British measurement corresponding to around 91 metres and then considered to be the maximum depth divers could reach given the compressed air technology used at the time. Jean-Jacques Fiechter tested his new model when diving in the south of France, and also submitted various watches to the scrutiny of instructors in the diving clubs of which he was a member.

That same year, after several unsuccessful attempts to address national suppliers, Bob Maloubier, co-founder of the French elite combat diver unit, turned to Blancpain. In equipping itself with the only existing reliable and robust diver's watch of the time, the French military made an exception to their rule by accepting the Swiss provenance of this vital working instrument.

The 1953 Blancpain Fifty Fathoms the first modern diver's watch

It is truly amazing to note that the entire set of characteristics established by Blancpain in 1953 is virtually identical to the NIHS 92-11 (ISO 6425) norm introduced for diver's watches in 1996, almost 40 years later:

- SAFETY: a lockable bezel bearing markings in order to check the dive time and the remaining air reserve: first patent for the FIFTY FATHOMS.
- RELIABILITY: substantial water resistance to almost 100 metres. In order to enhance the watertightness of the case, Blancpain developed a double O-ring seal on the crown: a second Blancpain patent for its diver's watch.
- STURDINESS: automatic winding to reduce the number of times the crown would need to be unscrewed and thus in turn reduce the significant risk of wear on the crown's water-resistance system.
- READABILITY: a black dial with clearly visible luminescent indications, housed within a broad case.
- ANTI-MAGNETISM: an indispensable form of protection for a diver's watch.

A major development becomes a legendary success

While the Blancpain Fifty Fathoms rapidly asserted itself as the international benchmark for military diver's watches, it was also soon adopted by civilian divers. It was used for the diving immortalised by Jacques-Yves Cousteau Oscar-winning film *The Silent World*, which also won a Palme d'Or at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival.

An authentic professional instrument, the Fifty Fathoms also took part in other endeavours, such as the 1964 speleological expedition to the Gouffre Berger cave system in France, which saw it descend to a record depth of 1,122 metres below earth's surface.

Water resistance, luminosity, sturdiness, a rotating bezel: such were the other specific features indispensable in accompanying these sporting adventurers.

The variations on the Blancpain Fifty Fathoms theme, born of a passion

Since its creation, this fascinating diver's model has been interpreted in countless different ways: with or without a date, featuring variously shaped hands, different bezels and dials, as well as in a range of case surface treatments.

Like all the greatest success stories, the Fifty Fathoms by Blancpain stems from a passion. A passion shared by two Blancpain CEOs: that of Jean-Jacques Fiechter who inspired its birth; and that of the current President and CEO Marc A. Hayek, who was the driving force behind its contemporary version, in keeping with the tradition of innovation that is Blancpain's key strength.

Today, the 2013 Fifty Fathoms Bathyscaphe model appears in the wake of a fabulous lineage extending over more than half a century and still meeting the requirements of modern divers.