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The Silverstone LE is available with a teal blue dial or a brown dial, with 1,860 of each version being produced.

Beyond FLATTERY

BY JEFFREY STEIN

TAG Heuer's Silverstone Limited Edition successfully updates the style and technology of the 1974 original



I have a 1967 Mini Cooper S, red with a white roof. I have a 2002 MINI Cooper S, red with a white roof. Every once in a while, someone will ask me, "How are the two cars different?" or "Are the two cars the same?"

My answers to these questions vary. My favorite answer, useful for anyone born before 1960, goes something like this: "Remember the television you used to watch in 1967? Now think of the television you are watching now. How would you describe the differences?"

The point of answering this question with another question is to suggest that any comparison of a 1967 car with a 21st century car is not meaningful, regardless of whether we are discussing Minis, Mustangs or

Maseratis. Automotive technology has changed in such fundamental ways over the last four decades, that describing the differences between a car from the 1960s and a modern car is usually not informative. Even where the body panels create a similar look, everything under the skin has changed over the past four decades—engines, electronics, brakes, suspension and safety equipment. Indeed, my 1967 Mini and my 2002 MINI have very little in common, except that they are both red cars with white roofs.

Those who collect vintage watches sometimes face the same sorts of questions. Watches from different eras might carry the same name—Heuer Monaco, Zenith El Primero, Omega Speedmaster or

Rolex Submariner—and have the same look, leading people to ask, "What's the difference between the two watches?" To those who are not collectors, the 2010 Monaco looks very similar to the 1970 Monaco, and the same for certain versions of the El Primero, Speedmaster or Submariner. All of which brings us to two chronographs from Heuer—both named "Silverstone"—one from the year 1974 and the other from the year 2010. (For ease of reference, we will refer to them as the "vintage" Silverstone and the "Limited Edition" Silverstone or Silverstone "LE".)

Meet the Limited Edition

The Silverstone Limited Edition 150th Anniversary Chronograph was introduced in Spring 2010 as part of



In the style of the vintage Silverstone, the LE features its crown on the left and its chronograph pushers on the right.



Heuer's year-long celebration of its 150th Anniversary, the company having been founded in 1860. The Silverstone LE is available with a teal blue dial or a brown dial, with 1,860 of each version being produced. The watch is an automatic chronograph with two registers, one for running seconds (at 3 o'clock) and one a 30-minute chronograph recorder (at 9 o'clock), with a date at 6 o'clock.

In the style of the vintage Silverstone, the crown is on the left with the chronograph pushers on the right. The LE has sapphire crystals front and back; the caseback is engraved "150th Anniversary 1860-2010", "Silverstone Limited Edition", "Swiss Made" and "Caliber 11," with a serial number showing each sample's place among the 1,860 of its color. The watch is water resistant to fifty meters and comes on an alligator strap, in either blue or brown, with a deployant clasp.

The "Silverstone" was one of several 1970's Heuer chronographs to take its name from a racetrack, in this instance the track that has been home to the British Grand Prix since 1948. The case has a unique shape,

square with rounded corners; a deep flange connects the round dial to the square case. The Silverstone screams "1970s!" and will be noticed on your wrist; it will evoke questions, so don't wear it if you are not ready to talk about it with both friends and strangers.

According to Jean-Christophe Babin, TAG Heuer CEO, the idea to re-issue the Silverstone came from the community of vintage Heuer collectors. During a 2008 visit to a vintage Heuer discussion forum, Babin saw a unique passion for the Silverstones. Two years later, the Silverstone LE took its place in the line-up of re-issues, right between the always-round Carreras and the always-square Monacos.

Imitation—Sincere Flattery.

At the extremes, there are two styles of re-issue watches—those that closely resemble the original watch and those that are merely inspired by



The key measurements of the Silverstone LE are all within one-third of a millimeter of the original.

the predecessor. The look-alikes may be almost indistinguishable from the originals—visualize the profiles of the Mustangs from the early 1970s and 2010. The re-issues that are “inspired by” their predecessors may use some styling cues or elements from the originals, but will have a very different look—think of the 1967 and 2002 Minis.

The Silverstone LE is clearly in the “look alike” category, bearing a remarkable similarity to the vintage Silverstone. The distinctive circle in the square of the vintage Silverstone is replicated in the LE, along with the unique flange / inner bezel. The blue and fume color choices come from the classic palette; the vintage

“Heuer” logo on the dial and the lettering of the “Silverstone” and “Automatic Chronograph” are true to the originals. Whether at a quick glance, or even with some focus, viewed from the front, the two cases and dials appear to be nearly identical.

Tape and Scale

A pair of calipers confirms the similarity of the two cases. As shown in the table below, the key measurements of the Silverstone LE are all within one-third of a millimeter of the original.

The one dimension that shows a clear difference between the vintage Silverstone and the Silverstone Limited Edition is in the weight. With both chronographs on their original

straps, the vintage Silverstone comes in at 96 grams, with the Silverstone LE almost 30 percent heavier, at 123 grams. On the wrist, the Silverstone LE feels like a much more substantial timepiece. One feature in which Heuer has made good progress over the intervening decades is in the strap. Whereas the corfam strap on the vintage Silverstone has the look of skinny legs supporting a large dog, the padded alligator strap on the Silverstone LE feels fully up to the task of handling this large chronograph.

Chronograph

A key difference between the new Limited Edition Silverstone and its vintage predecessor is in the capacity

Comparison of Dimensions

Measurement

Across the Dial

Vintage Silverstone

42.2 mm

Silverstone LE

41.9 mm

Top to Bottom

43.8 mm

43.9 mm

Thickness (Back of Case to Top of Crystal)

14.4 mm

14.3 mm

Total Weight (on strap)

96 grams

123 grams



and arrangement of the chronograph. Powered by the same Caliber 12 movement found in Heuer's Autavias, Carreras and Monacos, the vintage Silverstone has a 12-hour chronograph capacity, with the hour recorder at 9 o'clock and the minute recorder at 3 o'clock. The Limited Edition has only a 30 minute chronograph recorder, at 9 o'clock, but has the advantage of showing running seconds at 3 o'clock. So while the basic layout of the two Silverstones remains the same, the capabilities—as chronographs—are different.

Case Design

As described above, the vintage Silverstone and the Silverstone LE have a very similar appearance, when viewed from the front. The front surfaces of the two cases (see below)(A) are almost identical, with both of them having the same shape and a polished finish. Interestingly, TAG Heuer made some changes with the other two primary surfaces of the case. Whereas the midsection of the vin-

tage Silverstone (B) is relatively thin and polished, the midsection of the Silverstone LE (B) is deeper and has a brushed, satin finish. Finally, the back surface of the vintage Silverstone (C) is brushed, whereas this surface (C) is polished on the Silverstone LE. Polishing the two top and middle surfaces of the vintage Silverstone (A and B) gives it more of a bright, 1970s look, whereas the brushed midsection of the Silverstone LE has a quieter, more sophisticated look. The case-back of the vintage Silverstone (D) is much deeper than the case-back on the Silverstone LE.

Studying the profiles of the two watches, we see that while the vintage Silverstone and the Silverstone LE have the same overall thickness (of approximately 14.3 / 14.4 millimeters), that thickness is distributed very differently, with the vintage model having the far deeper case-back and thinner midsection. The case-back on the Silverstone LE is virtually flat, with the extra depth being allocated to the midsection.

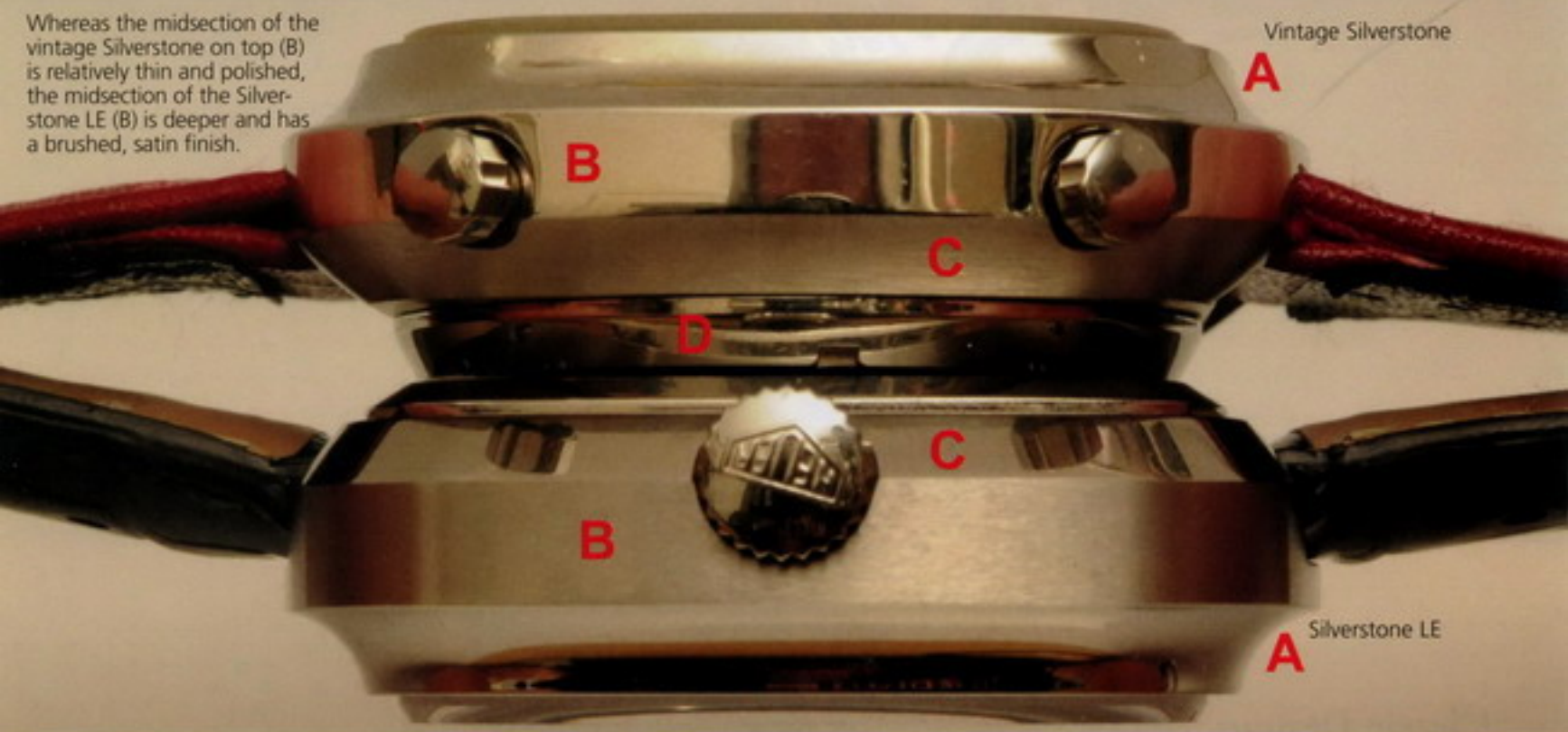
To my eye, the Limited Edition Silverstone is a more refined design, with better proportions between the three main elements—front bezel, midsection and case-back. The thicker midsection on the LE, with its brushed finish, is especially attractive. The case-back contributes well to the style of the watch. Rather than simply being a cap that has been screwed onto the back, to cover the movement, the LE case-back continues the effective combination of brushed and polished surfaces, and is attached to the case by four screws.

In-Depth Look

Having provided this overview of the Silverstone LE, let's examine some key elements of the watch. Indeed, in the execution of its details, the Silverstone LE goes beyond the original version, to offer today's enthusiast some refined features and attractive design elements.

The Dial and Hands: Compared with the aged lume on the vintage Silverstones, which shades towards a rich amber over the years, the hands

Whereas the midsection of the vintage Silverstone on top (B) is relatively thin and polished, the midsection of the Silverstone LE (B) is deeper and has a brushed, satin finish.



Vintage Silverstone

Silverstone LE

Beneath the unique 1970s shape of the Silverstone's case and inner flange rests a traditional round dial.



The sapphire crystal in the case-back provides a view of the nicely decorated movement. The rotor is finished with cotes de Genève stripes and has the red, vintage-style Heuer logo; the larger bridges are decorated in the perlage style, with the oeil-de-perdrix (eye of the peacock) pattern.

and hour markers on the Silverstone LE have a bright white look. The hands have the same "pencil" shape as the originals, but are slightly thinner. All in, the Silverstone LE has a bright, clean look, with nice contrast between the bright white hands, markers and lettering, and the deep blue of the dial.

The Crown—Winding and Setting: The feel of the crown is exceptionally good in winding and setting the Silverstone LE. If the vintage Caliber 12 movements can occasionally be stubborn, the Limited Edition is silky smooth in every function—winding the watch, setting the time and changing the date. This is similar to the difference between the feel of the heavy mechanical clutch on a 1960s sports car and the feel of

modern hydraulics on today's luxury cars. The modern version is light and smooth, absolutely effortless to wind the movement or set the watch.

Chronograph Operation: Among the vintage Heuer enthusiasts, there has been much discussion of the LE's chronograph pushers. Comparing these smaller capped pushers to the fluted ones used in so many of Heuer's vintage models, some vintage enthusiasts have criticized the pushers on the Limited Edition as being too light or small. Having worn the Silverstone LE for several days and used the chronograph repeatedly, I am entirely happy with the look and the feel of the LE's pushers. As with the crown, the pushers feel crisp and sure, with a lighter touch than their vintage predecessors.

The Movement: The Silverstone Limited Edition is powered by an ETA 2892-2a base movement, with a Dubois-Depraz 2002 chronograph module. TAG-Heuer has named this movement the "Calibre 11" as a tribute to the first automatic chronographs developed by Heuer in 1969. The new Calibre 11 movement represents a significant upgrade from the ETA 2894 movements that have powered many of the TAG Heuer reissues. My Silverstone LE was accurate to within 6 to 8 seconds per day, under a variety of conditions, and the chronograph functions were flawless.

The sapphire crystal in the case-back provides a view of the nicely decorated movement. The rotor is finished with cotes de Genève stripes and has the red, vintage-style Heuer logo; the

larger bridges are decorated in the perlage style, with the *oeil-de-perdrix* (eye of the peacock) pattern. This decoration is tasteful and sends the clear message that rather than being an ordinary production model, this Silverstone is marking a special occasion.

Strap and Buckle: While the vintage Silverstones were supplied with either a corfam (synthetic leather) strap or a stainless steel bracelet, the Limited Edition comes on a perforated alligator strap, in blue with the blue dial and brown for the brown dial. The strap is padded to just the right thickness to handle the 14mm-plus depth of the watch. The deployant clasp features the vintage Heuer logo and operates exceptionally well, providing the wearer with the feeling that this large watch is being held securely in place. This deployant clasp and buckle would be a welcome addition to any of the vintage Heuer chronographs.

So Which One Would You Keep (If You Could Only Keep One)?

It's funny, I have owned my two Mini Coopers for eight years now, and no one has ever asked me the question, "If you could only keep one car, which one would it be?" You see, these are two very different cars that serve two very different roles. The 2002 MINI Cooper S is the daily driver, having racked up 80,000 trouble-free miles, most of them on the daily commute to the office. The 2002 is also the car for the long road

trip, where reliability and comfort are at a premium.

But give me a few free hours on a pretty fall day and a twisty country road, and the 1967 Mini is the vehicle of choice. Here, the noise of the engine, the squeak of the suspension, and the lack of protective metal are no longer liabilities, they are the virtues that give this old car its character.

What machines from the 1970's still perform their tasks flawlessly?

Surely, no car enthusiast would opt for the 2002 version for the run through the fall foliage. And that's probably why people never ask the question, "Which car would you keep?" It's obvious that these are different cars, serving different purposes, and evoking different feelings in the driver.

Things are different among the watch collectors, where it is not uncommon for collectors to ask each other "If you could only keep one, which one would it be?" or "Which are your 'go to' watches?" The fact that collectors may include vintage watches on the same terms as their modern counterparts is a tribute to the timeless style and durability of the vintage watches.

No, it's not realistic to suggest that I drive the 1967 Mini Cooper on the cross-country road trip, but it is certainly realistic to suggest that I wear the 1974 Silverstone every day

for a week, month or year, without any concerns about reliability.

In this sense, my time with these two Silverstones has reinforced my appreciation of the vintage Heuers. What machines from the 1970's still perform their tasks flawlessly? Where the 1967 Mini Cooper and the 1967 television may have their limitations, the vintage Silverstone

continues to perform flawlessly, holding its own against today's watches in every respect. Beyond being a reliable performer, the vintage Heuer Silverstone offers the rich patina that only the decades can bestow on a watch.

Yet my time with these two Silverstones has also shown me how a modern brand can go beyond building a "carbon copy" of one of its classics, to create a new experience for devotees. By refining the case design and finish, perfecting the winding, setting and chronograph operation, and building a strap and clasp so well suited for the watch, TAG Heuer shows us that, indeed, there have been significant advances in watchmaking over the past three decades.

Just as the 2002 MINI Cooper S provides comfort and reliability well beyond the capability of any 1967 automobile, the 2010 Silverstone Limited Edition combines an iconic design of the 1970s with the carefree experience of owning a modern watch.

So which Silverstone will I keep, if I can only keep one? As with the Minis, I'll keep one for work and one for fun, one for the straight-aways and one for the twisties, one for the light and one for the dark.

Yep, I'll keep two for the road and now two for the wrist. ☺

Jeff Stein chronicles Heuer chronographs and dashboard timepieces at onthedash.com.



MINI and Mini. I'll keep both of them.

