

AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK



In the village of Le Brassus, in the Swiss Jura region, lies one of the oldest and most respected manufactures of haute horlogerie timepieces, the legendary Audemars Piguet. It is a little-known fact that this company is still in the hands of its founding families—the great-grandchildren of founders Jules-Louis Audemars and Edward-Auguste Piguet now control the manufacture. This makes Audemars Piguet every bit as unique a company as the magnificent and complicated timepieces it produces. The Audemars Piguet Royal Oak, first introduced in 1972, is perhaps the most well known model to come from Audemars Piguet.

The classically designed Royal Oak has not only found favor with aficionados of luxury timepieces but with celebrities as well, including, famously, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Among mere mortals, the Royal Oak has achieved the status of a watch world icon. The

watch reviewed here, Ref. 15300ST.00.1220ST.01, is the first Royal Oak I've had the pleasure of wearing.

Far from being another “me too” sport watch, the Royal Oak is a watch that is often emulated, even imitated. Its austere, angular design is decidedly masculine and instantly recognizable. Contained within the 39mm stainless steel case (water-resistant to 50 meters) of the Royal Oak is a simple yet beautiful white “waffle” pattern dial. Silver baton markers encircle the dial. These are matched to three silver hands. A date display is located at 3. The ample crown has a similar angular appearance, which also makes it easily gripped when winding or setting the time. The dial is protected by a scratch-resistant sapphire crystal.

The bracelet and clasp of the Royal Oak are particularly well designed. Like the Royal Oak case, the bracelet is brushed stainless steel. A row of two polished



The signed and numbered caseback of the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak, exhibiting the automatic movement.

center links runs down the center of the bracelet. The two ends of the bracelet are held together by a double folding clasp that is both secure and cosmetically appealing. The deployant clasp is opened via twin buttons—one on each side of the clasp—and each side of the clasp features the initials “AP” which join the bracelet to the clasp—a very clever design feature I’ve not previously seen. This strikes me as a detail that must be difficult to manufacture; the attachment is a nice reminder of how different the Royal Oak is from other sport watches, as well as how different the Audemars Piguet approach is. The bracelet can be sized via removable links held in place by screws—once the bracelet was sized, I found the watch to be quite comfortable. While the vast majority of watches in the highly competitive sport watch category feature case sizes well in excess of 40mm, Audemars Piguet has not bowed to this contemporary style trend. The 39mm case size of the Royal Oak contributes to its no-nonsense, classic scheme, which I found refreshing. The thin profile of the case allows it to fit comfortably beneath a buttoned cuff, which was also refreshing.

As attractive and functional as the exterior features of

the Royal Oak make it, it is what lies beneath the case that makes the watch noteworthy among followers of haute horlogerie—the Audemars Piguet Caliber 3120. Audemars Piguet has chosen to fit the Royal Oak with a sapphire crystal display back, held in place by screws mirroring the pattern of screws on the bezel. Caliber 3120 is a 40-jewel, self-winding mechanical movement with balance vibrating at 21,600 bph and adjustable via eccentric weights. The winding rotor of the Caliber 3120 winds the mainspring in both directions of rotation, and when fully wound, the movement has a power reserve of approximately 60 hours. Caliber 3120 also features highly desirable components such as Kif Elastor shock protection, a Nivarox-1 flat balance spring and a Gyromax balance. The decoration and finishing of this movement are nothing short of exceptional. The winding rotor and balance are constructed from 22 karat gold, and the rotor is engraved with the coats of arms of both the Audemars and Piguet families. The steel parts within the movement have been beveled and polished with perlage applied to the base plate and Côtes de Genève engraving applied to the bridges. In this movement, Audemars Piguet exhibits its



skill and craftsmanship. The Caliber 3120 is a relative newcomer to the Audemars Piguet family, but owes its foundations to the famous calibers 2120 and 2121. In short, very few sport watches can boast a movement of the same quality and construction as the Audemars Piguet Caliber 3120, and it is an excellent match to the Royal Oak.

There are few truly unique and distinctive sport watches left in the world, but the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak manages to set itself apart nicely from a sea of competitors. While the Royal Oak is technically classified as a sport watch, I find this handsome watch suitable when worn with either dress or casual attire. In fact, the white dial looks particularly stunning next to a white dress shirt, and the timepiece exudes such high quality, it certainly doesn't look out of place with dress attire. The retail price of the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Ref.

15300ST.00.1220ST.01 is \$11,000—considerably higher than similar offerings in this category, but reflective of the exclusivity associated with the Audemars Piguet name as well as the exceptional craftsmanship of the movement. The Royal Oak well deserves its place in horological history, just as Audemars Piguet deserves its seat at the table of the world's finest watch houses. ❖

Review and photography by John B. Holbrook II for InSync.

The bracelet and signed clasp of the Royal Oak.

