

AGAINST THE CLOCK

To commemorate its work with the Coral Restoration Foundation, Oris launches the Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition timepiece – and introduces REVOLUTION to the living wonders of the deep.

BY HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON

It is mid-June, and I find myself in the Florida Keys with Oris, wet suit on and ready to learn more about its ocean conservation work. With a third of the world's coral reefs already destroyed, and current projections increasing this figure to over 60 per cent in the next 30 years, time is of the essence to save this precious marine ecosystem. Oris, in partnership with the Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF), is investing heavily in the conservation of coral reefs and 2017 sees the launch of the Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition timepiece to celebrate the ongoing relationship.

"Divers ready" shouts our captain over a barrage of wind and rain. At three miles off the coast of Key Largo, Florida, the tumultuous weather front on the horizon appears increasingly ominous as the clouds roar, the occasional shard of lightening illuminating the sky around.

"One step onto the ladder and a giant stride in," says the captain, motioning toward the steep aluminium apparatus clanking against the boat's hull in the rocking waves. With my BCD (buoyancy control device) fully inflated, I leap in and float effortlessly on the surface, take a few breaths through my regulator, and let the air ease out. Within seconds I'm submerged, and all signs of the storm brewing above have disappeared.

A few metres below, I see Ken Nedimyer, President and Founder of the Coral Restoration Foundation, gliding effortlessly around the coral-trees growing the next generation of live Staghorn coral to be planted on the nearby reefs, and I descend further to meet him. "These are almost nine months old," Nedimyer writes on

a waterproof slate. "They're ready for out-planting now."

I glance at the new Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition diver's watch on my wrist; the latest in a long list of marine-conservation watches released by the brand. The central seconds hand and the bezel's zero marker on the minute scale radiate in a vibrant orange, penetrating with absolute clarity through the underwater haze; I read 15 minutes submerged. Checking the pressure gauge in my left hand, which reads 2,500 bar of air in the tank, I'm ready to continue. With an "OK" signal, we glide gently on through the nursery.

In its ubiquitous support of marine conservation, Oris proffers not just a new member to its Aquis range, but continues to expound ocean preservation. "The story of the world's coral reefs is tragic and shocking, but not irreversible," says Oris Chairman Ulrich Herzog. "We hope and believe that through this important partnership, we will set an example to others that change is possible, that we can save this precious ecosystem, and above all, that we must save it."

Indeed, since 2010, when Oris launched the Great Barrier Reef No.1, it has released seven further limited-edition diving watches, most recently the Hammerhead Limited Edition at Baselworld earlier this year. "We really started in 2010 to make a change, to be aware of the environment," asserts Herzog. "It's not through millions of dollars that we show our support, but it's in ideas and connections, and Oris as a company is behind this. As our motto says, we make real watches for real people."



Wearing the Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition watch while planting coral at Pickles Reef.



GOOD REEF

Clambering back onto our boat, *Sea Star*, we continue some ten minutes to Pickles Reef, where we'll be planting some of the corals seen in the nursery. On board, I ask VJ Geronimo, Oris CEO North America, how they came to partner with Nedimyer and the CRF. "For the past six years we've been running a project called Sea Heroes in North America. This programme tries to recognise people who are doing great work for the oceans through conservation and in 2014 Ken was our Sea Hero of the year – that's how we first came to work together."

Nedimyer, who started life as a tropical fish collector, stumbled upon a process that successfully reproduces live coral. By taking small cuttings of live Staghorn and Elkhorn from the surviving reefs, tying them to "coral-trees", where they can grow to the size of a basketball in just nine months, and then out-planting them onto dead reefs using waterproof epoxy resin, the CRF has seen a dramatic increase to the coral population in the Florida Keys. Indeed, the CRF now operates and maintains seven offshore nurseries, where 550 coral trees hold over 40,000 live coral fragments that are ready for out-planting. As Nedimyer says: "I like to think that we're selling hope. By putting these corals back onto the reef, we're buying time so that in 50 years people can look back and say, 'It's a good thing they did something when they could.'"

Hugh with his fellow divers and conservationists taking time out to harvest and replant coral at Pickles Reef.

As we reach Pickles Reef, the torrent of rain shows no sign of abating, the *Sea Star* rocks ferociously to and fro, the all too familiar sign of seasickness begins to creep onto our faces. With a gleeful leap off the boat, we're once again safe from the violent weather and, as we descend to the desolate reef, all colour and life void except for a few infant grouper fish, Nedimyer beckons us closer to demonstrate how the coral is fixed.

With a hammer in hand, he scrapes back the algae on the reef in a triangle formation, sets the epoxy to it and gently places the coral on top, squeezing the resin around to form a strong hold. As Kayla Ripple, the CRF Science Programme Manager, says later that day: "These corals then keep growing, come together and fuse, just like you would have seen 40 years ago. Every year, around the full moon in August, the corals spawn by releasing gametes into the water where they're fertilised before floating down to settle in the reefs to start growing. We've noticed that within two years, our corals are spawning themselves, in turn aiding the re-growth of the reefs."





Top to bottom: The Oris Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition watch; adventurer Hugh Francis Anderson.

A TIME TO SOW

I begin to realise that the Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition on my wrist goes far beyond acting as a mere timepiece and diving tool. Although it functions with absolute precision, what this watch represents transcends horological importance: it actively aims to better rehabilitate the reef systems, which are incidentally worth over \$11 billion per year in tourism revenue. “Yes, it’s a watch, and yes, it’s a limited edition, but really, it’s about getting the message of coral restoration out around the world,” says Geronimo. “And I feel there’s value in that.”

Unlike the weighty Hammerhead Limited Edition, which came in at 45.5mm, the Staghorn’s 43.5mm stainless-steel case perfectly toes the line between ergonomics and show. The automatic Oris Calibre 735, based on Sellita’s SW 220-1, also found in the Oris Williams Day Date and Big Crown Timer, displays the date window at 6 o’clock, and the weekdays are shown through seven apertures on the inner circle by an

orange indicator, all set against a dark-blue dial. The orange, also found on the seconds hand and bezel, not only radiates underwater, but was specifically chosen to mimic the colour of the Staghorn coral itself.

The caseback is embossed with a Staghorn coral relief and limited-edition number. It comes mounted on a rubber strap (stainless-steel bracelet optional), with an Oris-developed safety-anchor for security underwater, and a wetsuit extender. As with every diving watch in the Aquis Collection, the black-ceramic cased Staghorn features a uni-directional rotating bezel and insert for timing dives. Continuing in its eco-friendly endeavours, Oris presents the Staghorn Restoration Limited Edition in a box made from 30-per-cent regenerative algae, together with 100-per-cent recycled paper, in a move to eliminate all plastic from its production.

After some 40 minutes submerged, planting new corals onto the bleak reef, I’m out of air. In the underwater world time becomes obsolete; it is only the

Oris on my wrist that keeps reality in check. I signal to my buddy and look skywards. Above, I see the snorkellers of our group gaze down, their bodies bobbing on the surface. I may be a mere 5m below them, but we’re worlds apart. It strikes me that this is simultaneously the charm and curse of the ocean. Moving weightlessly beneath the waves is truly magical, yet those on the surface cannot fathom its vastness. It may well be in this way that the oceans have become so easily neglected; the old adage “out of sight, out of mind” rings true here. If not for non-profit organisations such as the CRF, and the partnership of brands such as Oris, we may well lose an entire ocean ecosystem within a matter of years. It’s a profound thought, and one that lingers in the days after.

With a few kicks of my fins, I ascend and break the surface. Ahead, the clouds have parted, rays of sunlight reach down and glint off the surface, and the storm-front has swiftly drifted further out to sea. The healing reef below may feel like a world away, but it’s closer now than ever before. ★