

THE EVOLUTION OF

O MAS EXTRA PENS



Omas Extra 556/F
with faceted clip.



Duofold-style Omas Extra in rare Mahogany celluloid—note the large imprint.

Letizia Iacopini, an Italian pen expert with decades of experience in collecting, selling and writing about Italian pens, is interviewed by Jack Leone, an Omas collector.

Letizia is the author of *La Storia della Stilografica in Italia 1900-1950/The History of the Italian Fountain Pen 1900-1950*. It is the primary source of information about vintage Omas pens. This two-volume set was published in 2001 and is now out of print yet is available as a free PDF download on her website at tenpen.it/readings. The information about Omas is at the beginning of the second volume.

JACK LEONE: WHY DO YOU THINK OMAS CHOSE "EXTRA" AS A MODEL NAME?

Letizia Iacopini: Omas wanted its top-of-the-line pens to be perceived as better than the pens of its competitors. In Italian, the word *extra* derives from Latin meaning “beyond the scope of what is expected” as in the Latin word *extraordinarius*. The connotation of being extraordinary was exactly what Omas wanted.

In this era, makers sought names that sounded distinctive, a bit exotic, yet were easy to pronounce and would be understood by customers in many countries. One example is the British pen maker Onoto. Onoto is said to have selected its non-English name for its exotic appeal and ease of pronunciation in countries where the pens were exported.

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Omas wasn't the only Italian pen maker to use "extra" for its pens. We have the Montegrappa Extra, Radius Extra, Aquila Extra, and many others that used "Extra" to designate their top-of-the-line models.

WHEN DID OMAS BEGIN TO USE OMAS EXTRA AS A MODEL NAME FOR ITS PENS?

It was about 1928. In 1925, Armando Simoni established OMAS, which is an acronym for *Officina Meccanica Armando Simoni*. It translates as "Armando Simoni's Mechanical Workshop." He was already a skilled craftsman, making precision parts for pasta machines and movie projectors. Simoni's company referred to itself both as OMAS and Omas. The imprints on its pens, as well as in print advertising, used both formats over the years.

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2. Omas Extra Ogiva button in Jade Green celluloid. Note the large barrel imprint.

3. 1930s Omas Extra small lever fillers with clips and ring-tops.

4. 1930s Omas Extra in Arco Grigio celluloid.

5. C. 1940 Omas Extra Lucens set in Tortoiseshell celluloid.



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Simoni's passion for pens was ignited by his role in fabricating parts for the Parker Duofold fountain pens sold in Italy.

By about 1928, he was selling his own fountain pens, which were identical to the Parker Duofold with an imprint of "OMAS" on the clip and his proprietary nib. The Omas version was produced in two sizes, both as button fillers. They were fitted with 14 karat gold nibs with an "Omas Extra" imprint and a swirling graphic (fig. 1). After the initial production, the nib art evolved, making these earliest Omas nibs extremely rare today.

Omas was not the only Italian pen maker replicating the Duofold shape under its own brand name. It was commonplace for Italian pen makers to use American pens, like the beautiful Waterman's safeties of this era, as the starting point for their own products.

In the early 1930s, Omas introduced a new pointed-arch design, a shape described in Italian as *Ogiva*. It paid homage to the Art Deco designs enjoying sales success across Europe and the USA. This Ogiva model was a button filler available in only two colors, Jade Green and Caramel Brown. Omas produced it for a short time, so it is now among the rarest of all Omas models (fig. 2).

In 1932, Omas began producing Omas Extra in what would become the iconic design features for the brand.

First to market was the Omas Extra with 12 facets, followed shortly by the cylindrical Omas Extra. They were lever fillers in three sizes, with the domed ends, roller clips, and three cap bands, which became distinctive Omas features for decades (figs. 3, 4).

Omas did not standardize the size of the "Omas Extra" imprints on the barrels. During the first years of production, imprints tended to be larger than what was later the norm. However,

one can find identical pens with the only perceptible difference being the size of the imprints.

HOW DID THE USE OF THE NAME "EXTRA" EVOLVE?

The pen designs evolved, and the model names evolved, leading to Omas Extra being used for the premium version.

In 1936, Omas introduced plunger fillers with both greater ink capacity



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and translucent barrels so the ink could be seen inside when they were filled. This apparently was a competitive response to the Parker Vacumatic model introduced in 1933.

The new Omas pens were called *Lucens*, deriving from the Latin meaning shiny, bright, and full of light, to emphasize the transparency of the barrel. The standard model was the Lucens. A faceted version followed shortly as the Extra Lucens, implying the facets enhanced the way the light was reflected off the barrel.

The wartime economy of the late 1930s led to reduced use of gold and other metals. The large Greek key-style cap band was replaced by three narrow bands. The Omas Lucens model

continued with the roller clips that were on the previous lever-filling Omas Extra. The Extra Lucens introduced new arrow clips. During the war years, the limited availability of gold led to chrome-plated cap bands, clips, and the use of Permano nibs, a patented metal alloy that replaced gold (fig. 5).

In 1946, Omas again redesigned its pens. The popular cylindrical and faceted shapes of the Omas Extra lever fillers continued. However, the plunger fillers were replaced with piston fillers, which maximized ink capacity and were easier to use and more reliable. These Omas Extra models are rare today, as they were produced for only two years.

6. Omas Extra Model 556 F. This gray celluloid usually gets a greenish hue as it ages.

7. Omas Extra Ogiva including one with a rolled gold cap.

8. Omas Extra Ogiva 556/C.

9. Early Omas Extra in black celluloid.



These Omas Extra piston fillers were manufactured in three sizes. The 555 was the smallest, also known as the lady size, and came with either a clip or a ring-top. The 556 was the standard size, with the 557 the largest size. Omas used a suffix of “F” for pens with facets and “S” for cylindrical pens.

Available colors were Nero (Jet Black), Perla Grigio (Gray Pearl), Cappuccino (a rare, creamy, light caramel color with brown streaks), Arco Grigio (gray), and Arco (brown). Apparently, Arco Grigio was the best-selling version, especially the desk pen called the 559 (fig. 6).

By 1948, Omas had decided its cylindrical pens needed a more modern look. The new model was called the Omas Extra Ogiva, which had an aerodynamic shape, straight clip, and simplified cap bands. The faceted versions no longer had translucent barrels and also had single cap bands. The three available sizes were again the 555, 556, and 557.

All models were available in black celluloid. For a short time, a very few were also made with blue-marbled, brown-marbled, and Cappuccino celluloid. There also were versions with rolled gold caps, e.g., 556/C, as well



as rolled gold caps and barrels, e.g., 556/R (fig. 7).

This product line soon evolved. As Omas entered the 1950s, there were subtle changes to the Omas Extra Ogiva models. They became Omas Extra 555/S and 556/S, where “S” meant simple. The imprint on the cylindrical pens had two lines. The name of the model, Extra, appeared on the top line with patent numbers on the line at the



12 Omas 556/S with ink window and slimmer barrel than the Omas Extra Ogiva.



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10. 1950s Omas Extra pen and pencil sets in Cappuccino celluloid.

11. 1950s Omas Extra 556/F in gray Arco celluloid.



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bottom, BREV 445846 – 464162 (fig. 8). (BREV is an abbreviation of *brevetto*, meaning “patent.”)

The model names of the faceted pens became simply 555/F, 556/F, and 557/F. Initially, they had a simpler imprint that reads *Omas Extra*, without the patent information. Later, they also had the two-line imprint (figs. 9–11).

By the mid-1950s, the Omas Ogiva Extra designation was dropped, and the pens were known as the Omas 555, 556, and 557, with “S”, “F”, or “C” suffixes according to the design of the pen. The Cappuccino celluloid appeared only in the small 555 size.

It can be difficult to tell the difference between the Omas Ogiva Extra pens and their successors, the 555/S, 556/S, 557 series, as they were very similar shapes produced in the same celluloids. However, a side-by-side comparison shows the difference in size and details of the two series (figs. 12–14).

As had been the case for years, the imprints evolved. The barrel imprints on the 555 and 556 cylindrical pens began to show the numerical model number, while barrel imprints on the 555 and 556 faceted pens began to include the name Extra.

The imprint on the barrel of the 557 was not changed, which remained

Imprints showing Omas Extra Ogiva above and OMAS 556/S below.

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“Omas Extra” with the old style and the patent number. However, later in the 1950s, the faceted Omas Extra also had a two-line imprint with patent dates (fig. 15 and p. 40).

During the 1950s, Omas also began to differentiate between celluloids that were available on the cylindrical versions and the faceted versions. The cylindrical pens were available in black and Pearl Gray. The faceted versions were in black, Pearl Gray, Tortoise, and Arco Gray. A few 555/S and 556/S pens in blue celluloid are known, which likely are prototypes that were not marketed (figs. 16, 17).

In 1958, the founder of Omas, Armando Simoni, died. Understandably, it took some time for Omas to regain momentum, so the Omas Extra 555, 556, and 557 pens remained in production well into the 1960s.

The 1960s were a time of change across the pen industry, with many sleek new designs, often in metal rather than celluloid. It was tough times for the fountain pen industry and especially for Omas, given its design heritage.

In 1965, Armando Simoni’s daughter, Raffaella Simoni Malaguti, and her husband, Angelo Malaguti, became the leaders of Omas. They

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On the Omas Extra Ogiva (above), the clip was placed lower on the cap, and the cap lip was rounded below the cap band, compared to the Omas Extra 556/S below.



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Late 1950s imprint on Omas Extra 556/F.



The following resources were used for this article:

1. *Letizia Jacopini’s website, tenpen.it, which shows vintage Omas pens, as well as the blog OMAS EXTRA—The reason of a name and its use over the years.*
2. *Letizia Jacopini, La Storia della Stilografica in Italia 1900-1950/The History of the Italian Fountain Pen 1900-1950 (Milan, Italy: Editore O.P.S., 2001)/ISBN 88-901012-1-D. This two-volume set is out of print yet is available as a free PDF download at tenpen.it/readings.*

The information about Omas is at the beginning of the second volume.

3. *Emilio Dolcini, OMAS: La storia di una grande casa italiana e dell’intera sua produzione/OMAS: The history of an important firm and its entire production (Milan, Italy: I libri di PENNA, 1997)/ISBN B000UV4SYI. This book is out of print and difficult to find.*

forged ahead with new designs and model names. In 1968, the Omas Extra name was superseded by the Milord.

By 1984, the Arte Italiana collection reintroduced the classic shapes from 50 years earlier and the Omas Extra became known as the Paragon.

I think the concept for the Paragon name was the same as the original idea for the Omas Extra—indicating the ultimate—the pen to which others are compared. In that sense, the spirit of Omas Extra lived on.

Additional new model names like Gentleman and Dama appeared later in the 1980s.

In 1990, the Collezione Celluloide was introduced, featuring classic Omas designs. These products brought new prosperity to Omas.

WHAT DO YOU CONCLUDE ABOUT HOW THE NAME EXTRA CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF OMAS?

The name was one component of its success. Omas's reputation for producing some of the very best pens in the world was due to a combination of factors including elegant designs, beautiful celluloids, high quality standards, and smart marketing, including model names like Extra and Paragon.



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16. 1960s Omas Extra Ogiva in Pearl Gray celluloid.

17. 1960s Omas Extra Ogiva in Jet Black celluloid.

Photos from the collections of Jor Lin, Paolo Piazza, Jack Leone, and Letizia Iacopini.