

# SERIALIZATION

## AMERICAN ARCHTOP SERIALIZATION

According to luthier Dale Unger, the digits after the dash in the serial number are the year the guitar was completed.

## BENEDETTO SERIAL NUMBERS

To date, Robert Benedetto has completed over 750 musical instruments. 466 are archtop guitars, with the remainder comprising of 51 violins, 5 violas, 1 classical guitar, 2 mandolins, 11 semi-hollow electrics, 209 electric solid body electric guitars and basses, and one cello.

The 11 semi-hollow electrics include six unique carved top, semi-hollow electrics made between 1982 and 1986. The other five include three prototypes for, and two finished examples of, his new "benny" semi-hollow electric line introduced in 1998.

The 209 electric solid bodies include 157 electric guitars and 52 electric basses. Benedetto began making them in 1986 with John Buscarino. He stopped making them in the Spring of 1987.

The 11 semi-hollow electrics and the 1 classical guitar are included in the archtop guitar serial numbering system. The two mandolins have no serial numbers. The violins, violas and cello have their own serial number system (starting with #101) as do the electric solid body guitars and basses (starting with #1001).

Serial Numbers:

All Benedetto archtop guitars (except his first two) are numbered in one series, Electric solidbodies and basses each have their own separate series, as do the violins, violas and cello.

Archtop guitars have a 4- or 5- digit serial number with configuration ##(#)yy.

2 (or 3) digits ##(#)=ranking, beginning with #1 in 1968.

Last 2 digits yy=year.

Example:

43599 was made in 1999 and is the 435th archtop made since 1968.

From Robert Benedetto's Archtop Guitar Serial Number Logbook

(Note: year listed on the right indicates date shipped, not made).

0168 (#1)*	1968
0270 (#2)*	1970
0372	1972
0473	1973
0575 through 0676	1976
0777 through 1177	1977
1277 through 2778	1978
2879 through 4279	1979
4380 through 5580	1980
5681 through 7381	1981
7482 through 9582	1982
9682 through 10983	1983
11084 through 11984	1984
12085 through 12885	1985
12986 through 13586	1986
13686 through 13987-A	1987
14087 through 16488	1988
16588 through 19189	1989
19289 through 22490-A	1990
22591 through 25091	1991
25192 through 28092	1992
28193 through 30293	1993
30393 through 32994	1994
33095 through 36595	1995

36696 through 39496	1996
39597 through 40697	1997
40798 through 43498	1998
43599 through 45199	1999
45200 through 46200	2000
46301 through 46601	2001

Note: Benedetto models made at the Guild Custom Shop in Nashville have a separate serial number system beginning with the letter N.

\*Actual number in log: Benedetto did not adopt his current serial number system until his third guitar, serial #0372.

Seven guitar serial numbers are followed by the letter "A". Example: archtop guitar #23891 and #23891-A are two separate instruments even though both are numbered the "238th".

**Further information and a full serial number list can be found in Robert Benedetto's book, *Making an Archtop Guitar* (Centerstream Publishing/Hal Leonard, 1994).**

## BREEDLOVE SERIALIZATION

Breedlove serial numbers can be found on the guitar's label inside the guitar (look through the soundhole). The first two digits of the serial number are the year (last two digits of the year; i.e., "19XX") the guitar was built.

## BUSCARINO SERIAL NUMBERS

Luthier John Buscarino had the privilege of apprenticing with not one but two Master Builders, Augustino LoPrinzi and Robert Benedetto. Buscarino formed his first company, Nova U.S.A. in 1981; he changed the company to **Buscarino Guitars** in 1990.

The last two digits of the Buscarino serial number are the year the guitar was completed.

## COLLINGS SERIALIZATION

Collings guitar serial numbers are expressed as the date, which is written on the label on the inside of the guitar. However, here is a more expanded view on Collings serialization:

Flattop Serialization

1975-1987: Guitars do not possess a serial number. Most are marked with a handwritten date on the underside of the top. Some guitars from 1987 may have a serial number.

1988 to date: Guitars began a consecutive numbering series that began with number 175. The serial number is stamped on the neck block.

Archtop Serialization

Before 1991: Archtops before 1991 had their own separate serialization.

1991 to date: Archtops are now numbered with a two part serial number. The first number indicates the archtop as part of the general company serialization; and the second number indicates the ranking in the archtop series list.

**(Serialization information courtesy Collings Guitars, Inc.)**

## D'ANGELICO SERIAL NUMBERS

Master Luthier John D'Angelico (1905-1964) opened his own shop at age 27, and every guitar was hand built - many to the specifications or nuances of the customer commissioning the instrument. In the course of his brief lifetime, he created 1,164 numbered guitars, as well as unnumbered mandolins, novelty instruments, and the necks for the plywood semi-hollowbody electrics. The nature of this list is to help identify the numbered guitars as to the date produced.

D'Angelico kept a pair of ledger books and some loose sheets of paper as a log of the guitars created, models, date of completion (or possibly the date of shipping), the person or business to whom the guitar was

sold, and the date. The following list is a rough approximation of the ledgers and records.

**First Loose Sheets**

1002 through 1073      1932 to 1934

**Ledger Book One**

1169 through 1456      1936 to 1939

1457 through 1831      1940 to 1949

1832 through 1849      1950

**Ledger Book Two**

1850 through 2098      1950 to 1959

2099 through 2122      1960

2123                      1961

**Second Loose Sheets**

2124 through 2164      Dates not recorded

Again, we must stress that the above system is a guide only. In 1991, author Paul William Schmidt published a book entitled *Acquired of the Angels: The lives and works of Master Guitar Makers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc.; Metuchen, N.J. & London). In appendix 1 the entire ledger information is reprinted save information on persons or businesses to whom the guitar was sold. This book is fully recommended to anyone seeking information on luthiers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto.

**D'AQUISTO SERIAL NUMBERS**

Master Luthier James L. D'Aquisto (1935-1995) met John D'Angelico around 1953. At the early age of 17 D'Aquisto became D'Angelico's apprentice, and by 1959 was handling the decorative procedures and other lutherie jobs.

D'Aquisto, like his mentor before him, kept ledger books as a log of the guitars created, models, date of completion (or possibly the date of shipping), the person or business to whom the guitar was sold, and the date. The following list is a rough approximation of the ledger. As the original pages contain some idiosyncrasies, the following list will by nature be inaccurate as well - and should only be used as a guide for dating individual instruments. The nature of this list is only to help identify the numbered guitars as to the date produced.

**The D'Aquisto Ledger**

1001 through 1035      1965 to 1969

1036 through 1084      1970 to 1974

1085 through 1133      1975 to 1979

1134 through 1175      1980 to 1984

1176 through 1228      1985 to 1990

Beginning in 1988, serial number was 1230. 1257 was D'Aquisto's last serial number on non-futuristic models.

Other guitars that D'Aquisto built had their own serial numbers. For example, solid body and semi-hollow body guitars from 1976 to 1987 had an *E* before the three digit number. D'Aquisto also built some classical models, some flat-top acoustics, and some hollow body electric models (hollowbody guitars run from #1 to #30, 1976 to 1980; and #101 to #118, 1982 to 1988).

In 1991, author Paul William Schmidt published a book entitled *Acquired of the Angels: The Lives and Works of Master Guitar Makers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc.; Metuchen, N.J. & London). In appendix 2 the entire ledger information is reprinted up to the year 1988 except for information on persons or businesses to whom the guitar was sold. This book is fully recommended to anyone seeking information on luthiers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto.

**DOBRO SERIAL NUMBERS**

The convoluted history of the Dopyera brothers (Dobro, National Dobro, Valco, Original Music Instrument Company) has been dis-

cussed in a number of wonderful guitar texts. Serialization of Dobro instruments is far less tangled, but there are different forms of the numbers to contend with. Dobro serial numbers should always be used in conjunction with other identifying features for dating purposes.

Dobro was founded in Los Angeles in 1929, and production continued until the outbreak of World War II in 1942 (resonator guitar production ends). The numbers listed by year are the serialization ranges, not production amounts.

# 900 - 2999              1928-1930  
# 3000 - 3999              1930-1931

Between 1931 to 1932, the *cyclops* models carried a serial number code of B XXX.

# 5000 - 5599              1932-1933  
# 5700 - 7699              1934-1936  
# 8000 - 9999              1937-1942

In the mid 1950s, Rudy and Ed Dopyera return to building wood bodied Dobros from pre-war parts under the trademark of **DB Original**. The serialization of these models is still unknown.

In 1961, Louis Dopyera of Valco transfers the **Dobro** trademark to Rudy and Ed. These models are distinguished by a serialization code of D plus three digits.

After Semie Moseley gained the rights to the Dobro trademark, the Original Music Instrument Company was founded in 1967 by Ed, Rudy, and Gabriela Lazar. OMI regained the Dobro name in 1970, and instituted a new coding on the instruments. The code had a prefix of **D** (Wood body) or **B** (Metal body), followed by three or four digits (production ranking) and a single digit to indicate the year, thus:

D XXXX Y                      OMI Dobro coding 1970 - 1979

The code reversed itself in 1980. The single digit prefix indicated the year/decade, then three or four digits (production ranking), another single digit to indicate the year, then the body material designation (D or B), like:

8 XXXX YD                      OMI Dobro coding 1980 - 1987

In 1988, the code became a little more specialized, and shared more information. The prefix consisted of a letter and number that indicated the model style, three or four digits for production ranking, another letter for neck style, 2 digits for year of production, and the body material designation (D or B):

AX XXXX NYD                      OMI Dobro coding 1988 - 1992

In 1993, Gibson bought OMI/Dobro. Production was maintained at the California location from 1993 to 1996, and the serialization stayed similar to the 1988 - 1992 style coding. In 1997, Gibson moved Dobro to Nashville.

**EPIPHONE SERIAL NUMBERS**

In 1917, Epaminondas *Epi* Stathopoulos began using the **House of Stathopoulo** brand on the family's luthiery business. By 1923 the business was incorporated, and a year later the new trademark was unveiled on a line of banjos. Stathopoulos combined his nickname *Epi* with the Greek word for sound, *phone*. When the company was recapitalized in 1928, it became the **Epiphone Banjo Company**.

Guitars were introduced in 1930, and were built in New York City, New York through 1953. Company manufacturing was moved to Philadelphia due to union harrassment in New York, and Epiphone continued on through 1957. Serial numbers on original Epiphones can be found on the label.

Epiphone **Electar** electric instruments were numbered consecutively, using a die stamped number on the back of the headstock. The numbering system began at 000 in 1935, terminating at about 9000 in 1944. Between about 1944 and 1950, the two number prefixes 15, 25, 26, 60, 75, or 85 were assigned to specific models. These were followed by three digits which were the actual "serial" number. In 1951, electric instruments were brought under the same numbering system

as acoustics, and serial numbers were relocated to a paper label in the instrument's interior. Some transitional instruments bear both impressed numbers and a paper label with differing numbers. The latter are the more accurate for use in dating.

Number	Year
1000 - 3000	
[electrics only]	1937-1938
4000 - 5000	
[electrics only]	1939-1941
5000 [acoustics]	1932
6000	1933
7000	1934
8000 - 9000	1935
10000	1930-1932, 1936
11000	1937
12000	1938
13000	1939-1940
14000 - 15000	1941-1942
16000 - 18000	1943
19000	1944

In 1944, a change was made in the numbering sequence.

51000 - 52000	1944
52000 - 54000	1945
54000 - 55000	1946
56000	1947
57000	1948
58000	1949
59000	1950
60000 - 63000	1951
64000	1952
64000 - 66000	1953
68000	1954
69000	1955-1957

ELECTRIC INSTRUMENTS (Numbers are approximate):

1935	000 to 249
1936	250 to 749
1937	750 to 1499
1938	1500 to 2499
1939	2500 to 3499
1940	3500 to 4999
1941	5000 to 6499
1942	6500 to 7499
1943	7500 to 8299
1944	8300 to 9000

In May of 1957, Epiphone was purchased by CMI and became a division of Gibson. Parts and materials were shipped to the new home in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Ex-Epiphone workers in New Berlin, New York "celebrated" by hosting a bonfire behind the plant with available lumber (finished and unfinished!).

Gibson built Epiphone guitars in Kalamazoo from 1958 to 1969. Hollow body guitars had the serial number on the label inside, and prefixed with a "A-" plus four digits for the first three years. Electric solid body guitars had the serial number inked on the back of the headstock, and the first number indicates the year: "8" (1958), "9" (1959), and "0" (1960).

In 1960, the numbering scheme changed as all models had the serial number pressed into the back on the headstock. There were numerous examples of duplication of serial numbers, so when dating a Epiphone from this time period consideration of parts/configuration and other details is equally important.

Number	Year
100 - 41199	1961
41200 - 61180	1962

61450 - 64222	1963
64240 - 70501	1964
71180 - 95846	1962* *(Numerical sequence may not coincide to year sequence)

95849 - 99999	1963*
000001 - 099999	1967*
100000 - 106099	1963 or 1967*
106100 - 108999	1963
109000 - 109999	1963 or 1967*
110000 - 111549	1963
111550 - 115799	1963 or 1967*
115800 - 118299	1963
118300 - 120999	1963 or 1967*
121000 - 139999	1963
140000 - 140100	1963 or 1967*
140101 - 144304	1963
144305 - 144380	1963 or 1964
144381 - 145000	1963
147001 - 149891	1963 or 1964
149892 - 152989	1963
152990 - 174222	1964
174223 - 179098	1964 or 1965
179099 - 199999	1964
200000 - 250199	1964
250540 - 290998	1965
300000 - 305999	1965
306000 - 306099	1965 or 1967*
307000 - 307984	1965
309653 - 310999	1965 or 1967*
311000 - 320149	1965
320150 - 320699	1967*
320700 - 325999	1967*
325000 - 326999	1965 or 1966
327000 - 329999	1965
330000 - 330999	1965 or 1967 or 1968*
331000 - 346119	1965
346120 - 347099	1965 or 1966
348000 - 349100	1966
349101 - 368639	1965
368640 - 369890	1966
370000 - 370999	1967
380000 - 380999	1966 to 1968*
381000 - 385309	1966
390000 - 390998	1967
400001 - 400999	1965 to 1968*
401000 - 408699	1966
408800 - 409250	1966 or 1967
420000 - 438922	1966
500000 - 500999	1965 to 1966, or 1968 to 1969*

501009 - 501600	1965
501601 - 501702	1968
501703 - 502706	1965 or 1968*
503010 - 503109	1968
503405 - 520955	1965 or 1968*

Number	Year
520956 - 530056	1968
530061 - 530850	1966 or 1968 or 1969*
530851 - 530993	1968 or 1969
530994 - 539999	1969
540000 - 540795	1966 or 1969*

540796 - 545009	1969
555000 - 556909	1966*
558012 - 567400	1969
570099 - 570755	1966*
580000 - 580999	1969
600000 - 600999	1966 to 1969*
601000 - 606090	1969
700000 - 700799	1966 or 1967*
750000 - 750999	1968 or 1969
800000 - 800999	1966 to 1969*
801000 - 812838	1966 or 1969*
812900 - 819999	1969
820000 - 820087	1966 or 1969*
820088 - 823830	1966*
824000 - 824999	1969
828002 - 847488	1966 or 1969*
847499 - 858999	1966 or 1969*
859001 - 895038	1967*
895039 - 896999	1968*
897000 - 898999	1967 or 1969*
899000 - 972864	1968*

In 1970, production of Epiphone instruments moved to Japan. Japanese Epiphones were manufactured between 1970 to 1983. According to author/researcher Walter Carter, the serial numbers on these are unreliable as a usable tool for dating models. Comparison to catalogs is one of the few means available. Earlier Kalamazoo labels were generally orange with black printing and said "Made in Kalamazoo", while the Japanese instruments featured blue labels which read "Epiphone of Kalamazoo, Michigan" (note that it doesn't say made in Kalamazoo, nor does it say Made in Japan). While not a solid rule of thumb, research of the model should be more thorough than just glancing at the label.

During the early 1980s, the Japanese production costs became pricey due to the changing ratio of the dollar/yen. Production moved to Korea, and again the serial numbers are not an exact science as a dating mechanism. In 1993, a structure was developed where the number (or pair of numbers) following the initial letter indicates the year of production (i.e. "3" indicates 1993, or a "93" would indicate the same).

Some top of the line Epiphones were produced in the U.S. at either Gibson's Nashville or Montana facilities in the 1990s. These instruments are the only ones that correspond to the standard post-1977 Gibson serialization. Like Gibson numbers, there are 8 digits in the complete number, and follows the code of YDDDYNNN. The YY (first and fifth) indicate the year built. DDD indicates the day of the year (so DDD can't be above 365), and the NNN indicates the instrument's production ranking for that day (NNN = 021 = 21st guitar built). The Nashville facility begins each day at number 501, and the Montana workshop begins at number 101. However, in 1994, the Nashville-produced Epiphones were configured as YNNNNNNN: YY = 94 (the year) and NNNNNN is the ranking for the entire year.

**Information for this chart of Epiphone serial numbers can be found in Walter Carter's book *Epiphone: The Complete History* (Hal Leonard, 1995). Not only a fascinating story and chronology of the original Epiphone company and its continuation, but also an overview of product catalogs as well as serial numbers. Walter Carter serves as the Gibson Historian as well as being a noted songwriter and author. He also wrote *The Martin Book*, and co-authored several with expert George Gruhn including *Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars, Acoustic Guitars and Other Fretted Instruments*, and *Electric Guitars and Bases: A Photographic History* (All are available through GPI/Miller-Freeman books).**

**FENDER SERIALIZATION**

Serial numbers, in general, are found on the bridgeplate, the neck-

plate, the backplate or the peghead. From 1950-1954, serial numbers are found on the bridgeplate or vibrato backplate. From 1954-1976, the serial numbers are found on the neckplate, both top or bottom of the plate. From 1976 to date, the serial number appears with the peghead decal. Vintage Reissues have their serial numbers on the neckplate and have been in use since 1982.

The Fender company also stamped (or handwrote) the production date on the heel of the neck, in the body routs, on the pickups, and near the wiring harness (the body, pickup, and wiring dating was only done sporadically, during certain time periods). However, the neck date (and body date) indicate when the neck (or body) part was completed! Fender produces necks and guitar bodies separately, and bolts the two together during final production. Therefore, the date on the neck will generally be weeks or months before the actual production date.

When trying to determine the manufacturing date of an instrument by serialization, it is best to keep in mind that there are no clear cut boundaries between where the numbers began and where they ended. There were constant overlapping of serial numbers between years and models. The following are approximate numbers and dates.

1950	0001-0750
1951	0200-1900
1952	0400-4900
1953	2020-5030
1954	2780-7340
1955	6600-12800
1956	7800-16000
1957	14900-025200
1958	022700-38200
1959	31400-60600
1960	44200-58600
1961	55500-81700
1962	71600-99800
1963	81600-99200

In 1962, as the serialization count neared 100000, for one reason or another, the transition did not occur. Instead, an L preceded a 5 digit sequence. It ran this way from 1962 to 1965.

1962	L00400-L13200
1963	L00200-L40300
1964	L20600-L76200
1965	L34980-L69900

In 1965, when CBS bought Fender Musical Instruments, Inc., the serialization has come to be known as the F Series, due to an "F" being stamped onto the neckplate. This series of numbers went from 1965 to 1973. The approximate numbers and years are as follows:

1965	100001-147400
1966	112170-600200
1967	162165-602550
1968	211480-627740
1969	238945-290835
1970	278910-305415
1971	272500-380020
1972	301395-412360
1973	359415-418360

In early 1973, Fender stopped the practice of writing/stamping the production date on the heel of the neck (through 1982). The following are rough approximations for the years 1973 to 1976:

Early 1973 to Late 1976:	400000 series
Late 1973 to Late 1976:	500000 series
Mid 1974 to Mid 1976:	600000 series
Mid 1976 to Late 1976:	700000 series

In late 1976, Fender decided to move to a new numbering scheme for

their serialization. The numbers appeared on the pegheads and for the remainder of 1976 they had a prefix of 76 or S6 preceding a 5 digit sequence. In 1977, the serialization went to a letter for the decade, followed by a single digit for the year and then 5 to 6 digits. Examples of the letter/digit code follow like this: S for the '70s, E for the '80s, N for the '90s, etc.

1970s	<b>S</b>	(example) S8 - 1978
1980s	<b>E</b>	(example) E1 - 1981
1990s	<b>N</b>	(example) N2 - 1992

While the idea was fine, the actuality was a different matter. Instrument production did not meet the levels for which decals had been produced, so there are several overlapping years. **Sometimes several prefixes found within a single year's production.** Here is the revised table of letter/digit year codes:

1976	S6 (also 76)
1977	S7 and S8
1978	S7, S8, and S9
1979	S9 and E0
1980-1981	S9, E0, and E1
1982	E1, E2, and E3
1984-1985	E3 and E4
1985-1986	*No U.S. Production
1987	E4
1988	E4 and E8
1989	E8 and E9
1990	E9, N9 (by accident), and N0
1991	N0 (plus 6 digits)
1992	N2
1993	N3
1994	N4
1995	N5
1996	N6
1997	N7
1998	N8
1999	N9
2000	Z0
2001	Z1

**Serialization on Fender Japan Models**

Fender Japan was established in March, 1982, in a negotiation between CBS/Fender, Kanda Shokai, and Yamano Music. Instruments were built by Fuji Gen Gakki, initially for the European market. When the Vintage/Reissues models were offered in the early 1980s, a V in the serial number indicated U.S. production, while a J/V stood for Fender Japan-built models. For the first two years of Japanese production, serial numbers consisted of a 2 letter prefix to indicate the year, followed by five digits. In late 1984, this code was changed to a single letter prefix and six digits. Note the overlapping year/multi-prefix letter codes:

1982-1984	JV
1983-1984	SQ
1984-1987	E (plus 6 digits)
1985-1986	A, B, and C
1986-1987	F
1987-1988+	G
1988-1989	H
1989-1990	I and J
1990-1991	K
1991-1992	L
1992-1993	M
1993-1994	N
1994-1995	O
1995-1996	P

Dating a Fender instrument by serialization alone can get you within an approximate range of years, but should not be used as a definitive means to determine the year of actual production.

*(Fender Serialization overview courtesy A.R. Duchossoir; Later year production codes courtesy Michael Wright, Vintage Guitar Magazine)*

**FRAMUS SERIAL NUMBERS**

Framus serial numbers were generally placed on the back of the peghead or on a label inside the body. The main body of the serial number is followed by an additional pair of digits and a letter. This additional pair of numbers indicate the production year.

For example:

51334 63L =	1963
65939 70L =	1970

*(Serial number information courtesy Tony Bacon and Barry Moorehouse, The Bass Book, GPI Books, 1995)*

**GIBSON SERIALIZATION**

Identifying Gibson instruments by serial number is tricky at best and downright impossible in some cases. The best methods of identifying them is by using a combination of the serial number, the factory order number and any features that are particular to a specific time that changes may have occurred in instrument design (i.e. logo design change, headstock volutes, etc). There have been 6 different serial number styles used to date on Gibson instruments.

The first serialization started in 1902 and ran until 1947. The serial numbers started with number 100 and go to 99999. All numbers are approximates. In most cases, only the upper end instruments were assigned identification numbers.

YEAR	LAST #
1903	1150
1904	1850
1905	2550
1906	3350
1907	4250
1908	5450
1909	6950
1910	8750
1911	10850
1912	13350
1913	16100
1914	20150
1915	25150
1916	32000
1917	39500
1918	47900
1919	53800
1920	62200
1921	69300
1922	71400
1923	74900
1924	80300
1925	82700
1926	83600
1927	85400
1928	87300

YEAR	LAST #
1929	89750
1930	90200
1931	90450
1932	90700
1933	91400
1934	92300

## SERIALIZATION, cont.

1935	92800	1963	96601-99999
1936	94100	1967	000001-008010
1937	95200	1967	010000-042900
1938	95750	1967	044000-044100
1939	96050	1967	050000-054400
1940	96600	1967	055000-063999
1941	97400	1967	064000-066010
1942	97700	1967	067000-070910
1943	97850	1967	090000-099999
1944	98250	1963, 1967	100000-106099
1945	98650	1963	106100-108900
1946	99300	1963, 1967	109000-109999
1947	99999	1963	110000-111549

White oval labels were used on instruments from 1902 to 1954, at which time the oval label was changed to an orange color. On instruments with round soundholes, this label is visible directly below it. On f-hole instruments, it is visible through the upper f-hole. The second type of serial numbers used started with an *A* prefix and ran from 1947 to 1961. The first number is A 100.

YEAR	LAST #		
1947	A 1305	1963, 1967	111550-115799
1948	A 2665	1963	115800-118299
1949	A 4410	1963, 1967	118300-120999
1950	A 6595	1963	121000-139999
1951	A 9420	1963, 1967	140000-140100
1952	A 12460	1963	140101-144304
1953	A 17435	1964	144305-144380
1954	A 18665	1963	144381-145000
1955	A 21910	1963	147009-149864
1956	A 24755	1964	149865-149891
1957	A 26820	1963	149892-152989
1958	A 28880	1964	152990-174222
1959	A 32285	1964, 1965	174223-176643
1960	A 35645	1964	176644-199999
1961	A 36150	1964	200000-250335
		1965	250336-291000
		1965	301755-302100
		1965	302754-305983
		1965, 1967	306000-306100
		1965, 1967	307000-307985
		1965, 1967	309848-310999
		1965	311000-320149
		1967	320150-320699
		1965	320700-321100
		1965	322000-326600
		1965	328000-328500
		1965	328700-329179
		1965, 1967	329180-330199
		1965, 1967, 1968	330200-332240
		1965	332241-347090
		1965	348000-348092
		1966	348093-349100
		1965	349121-368638
		1966	368640-369890
		1967	370000-370999
		1966	380000-385309
		1967	390000-390998
		1965, 1966, 1967, 1968	400001-400999
		1966	401000-407985

When production of solid body guitars began, an entirely new serial number system was developed. Though not used on the earliest instruments produced (those done in 1952), a few of these instruments have 3 digits stamped on the headstock top. Some time in 1953, instruments were ink stamped on the headstock back with 5 or 6 digit numbers, the first indicating the year, the following numbers are production numbers. The production numbers run in a consecutive order and, aside from a few oddities in the change over years (1961-1962), it is fairly accurate to use them when identifying solid body instruments produced between 1953 and 1961. Examples of this system:

4 2205 = 1954  
614562 = 1956

In 1961 Gibson started a new serial number system that covered all instrument lines. It consisted of numbers that are impressed into the wood. It is also generally known to be the most frustrating and hard to understand system that Gibson has employed. The numbers were used between the years 1961-1969. There are several instances where batches of numbers are switched in order, duplicated, not just once, but up to four times, and seem to be randomly assigned, throughout the decade. In general though, the numbers are approximately as follows:

YEAR	APPROXIMATE SERIAL RANGE	YEAR	APPROXIMATE SERIAL RANGE
1961	100-42440	1966	408000-408690
1962	42441-61180	1966	408800-409250
1963	61450-64220	1966	420000-426090
1964	64240-70500	1966	427000-429180
1962	71180-96600	1966	430005-438530
		1966	438800-438925
		1965, 1966, 1968, 1969	500000-500999
		1965	501010-501600

1968	501601-501702
1965, 1968	501703-502706
1968	503010-503110
1965, 1968	503405-520955
1968	520956-530056
1966, 1968, 1969	530061-530850
1968, 1969	530851-530993
1969	530994-539999
1966, 1969	540000-540795
1969	540796-545009
1966	550000-556910
1969	558012-567400
1966	570099-570755
1969	580000-580999
1966, 1967, 1968, 1969	600000-600999
1969	601000-601090
1969	605901-606090
1966, 1967	700000-700799
1968, 1969	750000-750999
1966, 1967, 1968, 1969	800000-800999
1966, 1969	801000-812838
1969	812900-814999
1969	817000-819999
1966, 1969	820000-820087
1966	820088-823830
1969	824000-824999
1966, 1969	828002-847488
1966	847499-858999
1967	859001-880089
1967	893401-895038
1968	895039-896999
1967	897000-898999
1968	899000-899999
1968	900000-902250
1968	903000-920899
1968	940000-941009
1968	942001-943000
1968	945000-945450
1968	947415-956000
1968	959000-960909
1968	970000-972864

GIBSON'S F O N SYSTEM

In addition to the above serial number information, Gibson also used **Factory Order Numbers (F O N)** to track batches of instruments being produced at the time. In the earlier years at Gibson, guitars were normally built in batches of 40 instruments. Gibson's Factory Order Numbers were an internal coding that followed the group of instruments through the factory. Thus, the older Gibson guitars may have a serial number and a F O N. The F O N may indicate the year, batch number, and the ranking (order of production within the batch of 40).

This system is useful in helping to date and authenticate instruments. There are three separate groupings of numbers that have been identified and are used for their accuracy. The numbers are usually stamped or written on the instrument's back and seen through the lower F hole or round soundhole, or maybe impressed on the back of the headstock.

1908-1923 Approximate #s

YEAR	F O N
1908	259
1909	309
1910	545, 927
1911	1260, 1295

1912	1408, 1593
1913	1811, 1902
1914	1936, 2152
1915	2209, 3207
1916	2667, 3508
1917	3246, 11010
1918	9839, 11159
1919	11146, 11212
1920	11329, 11367
1921	11375, 11527
1922	11565, 11729
1923	11973

F O Ns for the years 1935-1941 usually consisted of the batch number, a letter for the year and the instrument number. Examples are as follows:

722 A 23  
465 D 58  
863 E 02.

Code Letter and Year

A	1935
B	1936
C	1937
D	1938
E	1939
F	1940
G	1941

Code Letter F O Ns were discontinued after 1941, and any instruments made during or right after World War II do not bear an F O N codes. In 1949, a four digit F O N was used, but not in conjunction with any code letter indicating the year.

From 1952-1961, the F O N scheme followed the pattern of a letter, the batch number and an instrument ranking number (when the guitar was built in the run of 40). The F O N is the only identification number on Gibson's lower grade models (like the ES-125, ES-140, J-160E, etc.) which do not feature a paper label. Higher grade models (such as the Super 400, L-5, J-200, etc.) feature both a serial number **and** a F O N. When both numbers are present on a higher grade model, remember that the F O N was assigned at the beginning of the production run, while the serial number was recorded later (before shipping). The serial number would properly indicate the actual date of the guitar. F O N examples run thus:

Y 2230 21  
V 4867 8  
R 6785 15

Code Letter and Year

Z	1952
Y	1953
X	1954
W	1955
V	1956
U	1957
T	1958
S	1959
R	1960
Q	1961

After 1961 the use of FONs was discontinued at Gibson.

When the Nashville Gibson plant was opened in 1974, it was decided that the bulk of the production of products would be run in the South; the Kalamazoo plant would produce the higher end (fancier) models in the North. Of course, many of the older guitar builders and craftsmen were still in Kalamazoo; and if they weren't ready to change how they built guitars, then they may not have been ready to change

how they numbered them! Certain guitar models built in the late 1970s can be used to demonstrate the old-style 6 digit serial numbers. **It is estimated that Gibson's Kalamazoo plant continued to use the 6 digit serial numbers through 1978 and 1979.** So double check the serial numbers on those 1970s L-5s, Super 400s, and Super 5 BJBs! It has come to light recently that the Kalamazoo plant did not directly switch over to the "new" 8 digit serialization method in 1977.

From 1970-1975 the method of serializing instruments at Gibson became even more randomized. All numbers were impressed into the wood and a six digit number assigned, though no particular order was given and some instruments had a letter prefix. The orange labels inside hollow bodied instruments were discontinued in 1970 and were replaced by white and orange rectangle labels on the acoustics, and small black, purple and white rectangle labels were placed on electric models.

In 1970, the words **MADE IN USA** was impressed into the back of instrument headstocks (although a few instruments from the 1950s also had *MADE IN USA* impressed into their headstocks as well).

Year(s)	Approximate Series Manufacture
1970, 1971, and 1972	100000s, 600000s, 700000s,
1973	900000s
200000s,	000001s, 100000s,
1974 and 1975	800000s and a few "A" + 6 digit numbers
300000s,	100000s, 200000s,
	400000s, 500000s, 600000s,
	800000s and a few A-B-C-D-E-F + 6 digit numbers

During the period from 1975-1977 Gibson used a transfer that had eight digit numbers, the first two indicate the year, 99=1975, 00=1976 and 06=1977, the following six digits are in the 100000 to 200000 range. *MADE IN USA* was also included on the transfer and some models had *LIMITED EDITION* also applied. A few bolt-on neck instruments had a date ink stamped on the heel area.

In 1977, Gibson first introduced the serialization method that is in practice today. This updated system utilizes an impressed eight digit numbering scheme that covers both serializing and dating functions. The pattern is as follows:

**YDDDYPPP**

**YY** is the production year

**DDD** is the day of the year

**PPP** is the plant designation and/or instrument rank.

The numbers 001-499 show Kalamazoo production, 500-999 show Nashville production. The Kalamazoo numbers were discontinued in 1984.

When acoustic production began at the plant built in Bozeman, Montana (in 1989), the series' numbers were reorganized. Bozeman instruments began using 001-299 designations and, in 1990, Nashville instruments began using 300-999 designations. It should also be noted that the Nashville plant has not reached the 900s since 1977, so these numbers have been reserved for prototypes. On Gibson acoustic serialization between 1989-2000, more research is under way regarding the format used.

70108276 means the instrument was produced on Jan.10, 1978, in Kalamazoo and was the 276th instrument stamped that day.

82765501 means the instrument was produced on Oct. 3, 1985, in

Nashville and was the 1st instrument stamped that day.

There are still some variances that Gibson uses on some instruments produced today, but for the most part the above can be used for identifying most instruments.

### **GRETSCH SERIALIZATION**

Before World War II, serial numbers were penciled onto the inside backs of Gretsch's higher end instruments. By 1949, small labels bearing *Fred Gretsch Mfg. Co.*, serial and model number replaced the penciled numbers inside the instruments. This label was replaced by a different style label, an orange and grey one, sometime in 1957. A few variations of this scheme occurred throughout the company's history, the most common being the use of impressed numbers in the headstock of instruments, beginning about 1949. Serial numbers were also stamped into the headstock nameplate of a few models. The numbers remain consecutive throughout and the following chart gives approximations of the years they occurred.

#### **APPROXIMATE**

SERIALIZATION RANGE	YEARS
001 - 1000	1939-1945
1001 - 2000	1946-1949
2001 - 3000	1950
3001 - 5000	1951
5001 - 6000	1952
6001 - 8000	1953
8001 - 12000	1954
12001 - 16000	1955
16001 - 21000	1956
21001 - 26000	1957
26001 - 30000	1958
30001 - 34000	1959
34001 - 39000	1960
39001 - 45000	1961
45001 - 52000	1962
52001 - 63000	1963
63001 - 78000	1964
78001 - 85000	1965

In the latter part of 1965, Gretsch decided to begin using a date coded system of serialization. It consists of the first digit (sometimes two) that identified the month; the second or third identifying the year, and the remaining digit (or digits) represented the number of the instrument in production for that month. Some examples of this system would be:

**997**                      **September, 1969 (7th instrument produced)**

**11255**                    **November, 1972 (55th instrument produced)**

On solid body instruments, impressed headstock numbers were used. In 1967, *Made in USA* was added. Hollow body instruments still made use of a label placed on the inside back of the instrument.

Around circa 1973, the label style changed once again, becoming a black and white rectangle with *Gretsch Guitars* and the date coded serialization on it. A hyphen was also added between the month and the year to help avoid confusion, thus:

**12-4387**                    **December, 1974 (387th instrument produced)**

**3-745**                      **March, 1977 (45th instrument produced)**

Contemporary Gretsch serialization beginning in 1989 utilizes 9 digits in a YYMMmmm(m)xxx format. YY indicates the last 2 digits of the year (i.e., 01 = 2001). M or MM indicates the month of the year (1-12). mmm(m) references the model number with either 3 or 4 digits (i.e., a 6136 reads 136). x(xx) refers to a 1-3 digit production count.

**GUILD SERIALIZATION**

Guild Serialization went through three distinct phases, and can be both a helpful guide as well as confusing when trying to determine the manufacturing date of a guitar. The primary idea to realize is that most Guild models use a separate serial numbering system for each guitar model - there is no "overall system" to plug a number into! While serial numbers are sometimes a helpful tool, other dating devices like potentiometer codes or dating by hardware may be more exact.

1952-1965: Between the inception of the Guild company in 1952 to 1965, the serialization was sequential for all models.

APPROXIMATE LAST NUMBER	YEAR
350	1952
840	1953
1526	1954
2468	1955
3830	1956
5712	1957
8348	1958
12035	1959
14713	1960
18419	1961
22722	1962
28943	1963
38636	1964
46606	1965

1966-1969: While some models retained the serialization from the original series, many models were designated with a 2 letter prefix and an independent numbering series for each individual model between 1966 to 1969.

Continued Original Serialization Series

APPROXIMATE LAST NUMBER	YEAR
46608	1966
46637	1967
46656	1968
46695	1969

The models that were numbered with the new 2 letter prefix started each separate serial number series with 101.

1970-1979: The following chart details the serial numbers as produced through the 1970s. There are no corresponding model names or numbers for this time period.

APPROXIMATE LAST NUMBER	YEAR
50978	1970
61463	1971
75602	1972
95496	1973
112803	1974
130304	1975
149625	1976
169867	1977
190567	1978
211877	1979

1979-1989: In 1979, Guild returned to the separate prefix/serial

number system. Serial numbers after the 2 letter prefix in each separate system began with 100001 (thus, you would need a serialization table for each model/by year to date by serialization alone). In 1987, a third system was devised. In some cases, the **Model Designation** became the *prefix* for the serial number. For example:

**D300041 D-30, #0041 (41st D-30 instrument produced)**

With acoustic models, you can cross-reference the model name to the serial number to judge the rest of the serialization; the resulting serial number must still be checked in the serialization table.

1990-Date: Guild continued with the separate prefix/serialization system. In 1994, only the Model Prefix and last serial numbers for each model were recorded; better records continued in 1995.

Serialization on currently manufactured Guilds (non-custom shop) through 2000 typically utilize a 2 character alphabetical prefix (denoting specific models), followed by 6 digits. Current alphabetical prefixes include: AA, AB, AD, AE, AF, AG, AK, CL, FB, and FC. Please check Guild's web site ([www.guildguitars.com](http://www.guildguitars.com)) for a cross reference listing of models and their assigned alphabetical prefixes.

Guild Custom Shop: The three Guild Custom Shop models (**45th Anniversary, Deco, and Finesse**) all use a completely different serial numbering system. Each instrument has a serial number on the back of the headstock that indicates the "which number out of the complete series". Inside the guitar there is a seven digit code: The first three numbers (starting with #500) indicate the production sequence, while the last four digits indicate the date of production (the 4th and 7th digit in reverse indicate the year, the 5th and 6th digits are the month). Note: Benedetto models made at the Guild Custom Shop in Nashville have a separate serial number system beginning with the letter N.

Guild has a series of charts available on their website ([www.guildguitars.com](http://www.guildguitars.com) - Ask Mr. Gearhead) to help date a Guild model during its different manufacturing periods. It is recommended that you refer to this information, as there are many charts needed for the individual model serialization. Through the years (and different owners of the company), some of the historical documentation has been lost or destroyed. However, these tables are some of the most comprehensive available to the public. They are up to date through Dec. of 1997.

**(Serialization reference source: Hans Moust, The Guild Guitar Book; and Jay Pilzer, Guild authority; additional company information courtesy Bill Acton, Guild Guitars)**

**IBANEZ MODEL NOMENCLATURE & SERIALIZATION**

IBANEZ MODEL NUMBERING SYSTEM

Ibanez offers a wide selection of models with a corresponding wide range of features. This means there are a lot of models and, of course, a lot of different model numbers to try and keep track of. Ibanez serial numbers never indicated the model number, and still don't. Most solid body Ibanez guitars and basses didn't feature model numbers until recently, and even then, only on Korean made instruments. On some semi-hollow models, some model numbers will appear on the label visible through the f-hole.

Here's how the Ibanez model numbers work (most of the time, of course, there are always exceptions - but for the Ibanez models commonly encountered, this system applies pretty consistently).

SERIES: the first in the model number designate the series: RG550BK, RG Series; SR800BK is a Soundgear, etc. Also, in the Artstar lines, AS indicates (A)rtstar (S)emihollow, AF indicates (A)rtstar (F)ull hollow.

FINISH: the last 2 letters designate the finish: RG550BK, Black finish; RX240CA, Candy Apple. **Exceptions:** finishes such as Amber Pearl and Stained Oil Finish use 3 letters: AMP, SOL, etc. (having offered so many finishes, Ibanez is running out of traditional 2 letter combinations!)

The numbers following the Series letters indicate 2 items:

## SERIALIZATION, cont.

### 1. Point of Manufacture

On solid body guitars and basses, the numbers 500 and above indicate Japanese manufacture: RG550BK, SR800BK, BL850VB, the numbers 400 and below indicate Korean manufacture: SR400BK, RX240MG, etc.

This system doesn't apply to hollow bodies, and many signature guitars. J of White Zombie's signature model, the IJ100WZ is made in Japan, as is the JPM100.

### 2. Pickup Configuration

On solid body guitars only, the last 2 numbers indicate pickup configuration:

20= two humbucking pickups with or w/o pickguard (ex: TC420MD)

30 = three single coils with or w/o pickguard (no current models)

40 = sin/sin/hum with a pickguard (ex: TC740MN)

50 = hum/sin/hum with a pickguard (ex: RG550BK)

60 = sin/sin/hum with no pickguard (no current models)

70 = hum/sin/hum with no pickguard (ex: RG570FBL)

**Exceptions:** Of course! For example, TC825 (which has 2 humbuckers and a pickguard). BL1025 (hum/sin/hum with a pickguard), etc.

### IBANEZ SERIALIZATION

Author/researcher Michael Wright successfully discussed the Ibanez/Hoshino history in his book, *Guitar Stories Volume One* (Vintage Guitar Books, 1995). Early serial numbers and foreign-built potentiometer codes on Japanese guitars aren't much help in the way of clues, but Ibanez did institute a meaningful numbering system as part of their warranty program in 1975.

Before 1987: In general, Ibanez serial numbers between 1975 to 1987 had seven digits, arranged **XYZZZZZ**. The letter prefix "X" stands for the month (January = A, February = B, etc. on to L); the next following two digits "YY" are the year. The last four digits indicate the number of instruments built per month through a particular production date.

An outside source indicated that the month/letter code prefix was discontinued in 1988, and the previous dating code was discontinued in 1990. However (or whatever), in 1987 the **XYZZZZZ** still appeared the same, but the new listing shifted to **XYZZZZZ**.

1987 and later: The opening alphabetical prefix "X" now indicates production **location** instead of month: F (Fuji, Japan), or C (Cort, Korea). The first digit "Y" indicates the year: As in 198Y - and as in 199Y. Bright-eyed serialization students will have already noticed that while the year is obtainable, the decade isn't! Because of this, it is good to have a working knowledge of which models were available approx. which time periods. All following numbers again are the production ranking code (**ZZZZZ**).

Mid 1997: Ibanez changed the format, and the second two digit after the alphabetical prefix indicate the last 2 digits of the actual year of production (i.e. F0003680 indicates guitar built in Fuji during 2000).

CE Designation: In late 1996, in addition to the serial number on the back of the headstock, Ibanez electric guitars and basses added the "CE" designation. This indicates that the product meets the electronic standards of the European Common Market, similar to our UL approval.

(Source: Michael Wright, *Guitar Stories Volume One*, Jim Donahue, *Ibanez Guitars*)

### MARTIN GUITAR SERIAL NUMBERS

YEAR	LAST #
1898	8348
1899	8716
1900	9128
1901	9310

1902	9528
1903	9810
1904	9988
1905	10120
1906	10329
1907	10727
YEAR	LAST #
1908	10883
1909	11018
1910	11203
1911	11413
1912	11565
1913	11821
1914	12047
1915	12209
1916	12390
1917	12988
1918	13450
1919	14512
1920	15848
1921	16758
1922	17839
1923	19891
1924	22008
1925	24116
1926	28689
1927	34435
YEAR	LAST #
1928	37568
1929	40843
1930	45317
1931	49589
1932	52590
1933	55084
1934	58679
1935	61947
1936	65176
1937	68865
1938	71866
1939	74061
1940	76734
1941	80013
1942	83107
1943	86724
1944	90149
1945	93623
1946	98158
1947	103468
1948	108269
1949	112961
1950	117961
1951	122799
1952	128436
1953	134501
1954	141345
1955	147328
1956	152775
1957	159061
1958	165576
1959	171047
1960	175689
1961	181297
1962	187384

1963	193327	8004-8036	1980
1964	199626	8037-8040	1981
		1041-1052	1981
YEAR	LAST #	1053-1075	1982
1965	207030	1076-1081	1983
1966	217215	ECLIPSE Bass models	
1967	230095	(124 total instruments made)	
1968	241925	3801-3821	1980
1969	256003	3822-3828	1981
1970	271633	3029-3062	1981
1971	294270	3063-3109	1982
1972	313302	3110-3118	1983
1973	333873	3119-3123	1984
1974	353387	EXPLODER Guitar models	
1975	371828	(65 total instruments made)	
1976	388800	7801-7806	1980
1977	399625	7007-7020	1981
1978	407800	7021-7052	1982
1979	419900	7053-7065	1983
1980	430300	EXPLODER Bass models	
1981	436474	(35 total instruments made)	
1982	439627	6801-6803	1980
1983	446101	6004-6013	1981
1984	453300	6014-6031	1982
1985	460575	6032-6035	1983
1986	468175	FLYING V Guitar models	
YEAR	LAST #	(52 total instruments made)	
1987	476216	5801-5812	1980
1988	483952	5013-5028	1981
1989	493279	5029-5045	1982
1990	503309	5046-5048	1983
1991	512487	5049-5052	1984
1992	522655	FLYING V Bass models	
1993	535223	(6 total instruments made)	
1994	551696	9001-9006	1981
1995	570434	M-80	
1996	592930	(64 total instruments made)	
1997	624799	4801-4808	1980
1998	668796	4809-4816	1981
1999	724077	4017-4031	1981
2000	780500	4032-4052	1982

(Source: Lon Werner, *The Martin Guitar Company*)

**MOONSTONE SERIALIZATION**

The most important factor in determining the year of manufacture for Moonstone instruments is that each model had its own set of serial numbers. There is no grouping of models by year of manufacture.

D-81 EAGLE

L001-L004	1981
L005-L011	1982

EAGLE (Electrics)

52950-52952	1980
52953-52954	1981
52955-52959	1982
52960	1983

EARTHAXE

(26 total instruments made)

0001-0013	1975
0014-0026	1976

ECLIPSE Guitar models

(81 total instruments made)

79001-79003	1979
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MOONDOLINS

T001-T002	1981
T003-T006	1983
T007	1984

VULCAN Guitar models

(162 total instruments made)

5027	1977
5028-5034	1978
107835-107838	1978
17939-179115	1979
179116-179120	1980
80121-80129	1980
80130-80134	1981
8135-8167	1981
8168-8185	1982
8186-8191	1983
7988-7991	1984

**VULCAN Bass models**

(19 total instruments made)

V001-V002	1982
V003-V016	1983
V017-V019	1984

**OVATION SERIALIZATION**

**Three Digit numbers (no letter prefix)**

006-319	1966
320-999	1967 (February - November)

**Four Digit numbers (no letter prefix)**

1000-	1967 (November) to 1968 (July)
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**Five Digit numbers (no letter prefix)**

10000-	1970 (February) to 1972 (May)
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**Six Digit numbers (1971 to Present, except Adamas models)**

000001-007000	1972 (May - December)
007001-020000	1973
020001-039000	1974
039001-067000	1975
067001-086000	1976
086001-103000	1977 (January - September)
103001-126000	1977 (September) to 1978 (April)
126001-157000	1978 (April - December)
157001-203000	1979
211011-214933	1980
214934-263633	1981
263634-291456	1982
291457-302669	1983
302670-303319	1984 [Elite models only]
315001-331879	1984 (May - December) [Balladeer models only]
303320-356000	1985 to 1986
357000-367999	1987
368000-382106	1988
382107-392900	1989
403760-420400	1990
421000-430680	1991
402700-406000	1992
446001-457810	1992
457811-470769	1993
470770-484400	1994
484401-501470	1995
501470-507000	1996
PENDING	1997
PENDING	1998

**Adamas Models Serialization**

Serialization for the Adamas models begins with number 0077 on September, 1977.

0077-0099	1977
0100-0608	1978
0609-1058	1979
1059-1670	1980
1671-2668	1981
2669-3242	1982
3243-3859	1983
3860-4109	1984
4110-4251	1985
4252-4283	1986
4284-4427	1987
4428-4696	1988
4697-4974	1989
4975-5541	1990

5542-6278	1991
6279-7088	1992
7089-8159	1993
8160-9778	1994
9779-11213	1995
11214-12000	1996
PENDING	1997
PENDING	1998

**Letter Prefix plus digits**

A + 3 digits	1968 (July - November)
B + 3 digits	1968 (November) to 1969 (February)
B + 5 digits	1974 to 1979 [Magnum solid body basses]
C + 3 digits	1969 (February - September)
D + 3 digits	1969 (September) to 1970 (February)
E + 4 digits	1973 (January) to 1975 (February) [solid bodies]
E + 5 digits	1975 (February) to 1980 [solid bodies]
E + 6 digits	1980 (late) to 1981 [UK II guitars]
F Prefix	1968 (July) to 1970 (February)
G Prefix	1968 (July) to 1970 (February)
H Prefix	1970 to 1973 [Electric Storm series]
I Prefix	1970 to 1973 [Electric Storm series]
J Prefix	1970 to 1973 [Electric Storm series]
L Prefix	1970 to 1973 [Electric Storm series]

*(Source: Walter Carter, The History of the Ovation Guitar. Information collected in Mr. Carter's Ovation Appendices was researched and compiled by Paul Bechtoldt)*

**RICKENBACKER SERIAL NUMBERS**

Rickenbacker offered a number of guitar models as well as lap steels prior to World War II, such as the **Ken Roberts Spanish** electric f-hole flattop (mid 1930s to 1940) and the 559 model archtop in the early 1940s. The company put production on hold during the war; in 1946, began producing an **Electric Spanish** archtop. Serialization on early Rickenbacker models from 1931 to 1953 is unreliable, but models may be dated by patent information. This method should be used in conjunction with comparisons of parts, and design changes.

In 1953, Rickenbacker/Electro was purchased by Francis C. Hall. The **Combo 600** and **Combo 800** models debuted in 1954. From 1954 on, the serial number appears on the bridge or jackplate of the instrument. The Rickenbacker serial numbers during the 1950s have four to seven digits. The letter within the code indicates the type of instrument (Combo/guitar, bass, mandolin, etc), and the number after the letter indicates the year of production:

Example: X(X)B7XX (A bass from 1957)

1961 to 1986: In 1961, the serialization scheme changes. The new code has two letter prefixes, followed by digits. The first letter prefix indicates the year; the second digit indicates the month of production.

PREFIX	YEAR
A	1961
B	1962
C	1963
D	1964
E	1965
F	1966
G	1967
H	1968
I	1969
J	1970

PREFIX	YEAR
--------	------

K	1971
L	1972
M	1973
N	1974
O	1975
P	1976
Q	1977
R	1978
S	1979
T	1980
U	1981
V	1982
W	1983
X	1984
Y	1985
Z	1986
A	January
B	February
C	March
D	April
E	May
F	June
G	July
H	August
I	September
J	October
K	November
L	December

In 1987, the serialization was revised, again. The updated serial number code has letter prefix (A to L) that still indicates month; the following digit that indicates the year:

DIGIT	YEAR
0	1987
1	1988
2	1989
3	1990
4	1991
5	1992
6	1993
7	1994
8	1995
9	1996

The following digits after the month/year digits are production (for example, L2XXXX would be an instrument built in December, 1989).

Rickenbacker is currently not disclosing the current system of serialization. If a collector or dealer needs a recent instrument dated, Rickenbacker invites individuals to contact the company through the Customer Service department.

### STROMBERG SERIALIZATION

This Boston-based instrument shop was founded by Charles Stromberg, a Swedish immigrant, in 1906. Stromberg generally concentrated on banjo and drum building, leaving the guitar lutherie to his son Elmer. Elmer joined the family business in 1910, and began building guitars in the late 1920s.

Total production of guitars reached about 640. The labels on the guitars were business cards, so the instruments can be dated (roughly) by the telephone number on the cards.

Bowdoin 1228R-1728-M	1920-1927
Bowdoin 1242 W	1927-1929
Bowdoin 1878 R	1929-1932
CA 3174	1932-1945 (In the late 1930s,
	the Blue shipping labels inside

the guitar body were either typewritten or handwritten)

CA 7-3174 1949-1955  
(Source: Jim Speros, Stromberg research)

### TAKAMINE SERIALIZATION

The eight digit serial number on Takamine instruments can be deciphered by breaking down the number into 4 groups of two digits, thus:

$$YYMMDDXX = (YY)(MM)(DD)(XX)$$

The first two digits (YY) indicate the year; the next two digits (MM) indicate the month; the third group of digits (DD) indicates the day of production; and the remaining two digits indicates the ranking in the number of instruments produced that day. If a nine digit serial number is encountered, assume that the last three digits indicate the production ranking.

Example: 91060979 indicates an instrument manufactured June 9th of 1991, and was the 79th instruments manufactured that day.

### TAYLOR SERIAL NUMBERS

In 1974, Taylor Guitars began a serialization system that uses the first two digits in the instrument's serial number to indicate the year the instruments was manufactured (for example, the year of 1977 = 77XXXX).

### THREET GUITARS SERIALIZATION

The serial number on Threet acoustic guitars consists of a letter followed by three (sometimes four) numbers. The letter indicates the model:

- A Parlor-size (similar to a traditional Model O)
- B A "large person's" Parlor-size (similar to a Model OO)
- C Larger, balanced sound Parlor-size (similar to a Model OOO)
- D Cross between a Model C and a Dreadnaught

The first two numbers indicate the year the guitar was started (and, hopefully, completed). The third (and occasionally fourth) number indicate the guitar's "rank" in that year's production. For example:

**C 964 = Model C built in 1996 4th Guitar Produced**

Keep in mind, Threet guitars are offered in both a *Standard* and *Deluxe* versions. Review the appointments to determine the level of construction, and watch for *Custom* level inlays as well.

(Source: Judy Threet, *Threet Guitars*)

### WASHBURN SERIALIZATION

The Washburn trademark was introduced by the Lyon & Healy company of Chicago, Illinois in 1864. While this trademark has changed hands a number of times, the historical records have not! Washburn suffered a fire in the 1920s that destroyed all records and paperwork that was on file; in the 1950s, another fire destroyed the accumulated files yet again.

When the trademark was revived yet again in 1964, the first production of Washburn acoustic guitars was in Japan. Washburn electric guitars debuted in 1979, and featured U.S. designs and Japanese production.

Production of Washburn guitars changed to Korea in the mid to late 1980s; a number of U.S.-produced **Chicago Series** models were introduced in the late 1980s as well. Serial numbers from 1988 on use the first two digits of the instrument's serial number to indicate the year the instrument was produced (1988 = 88XXXX). This process works for most, but not all, of the instruments since then.

Washburn Limited Editions feature the year in the model name. For example, D-95 LTD is a Limited Edition introduced in 1995. No corresponding serialization information is available at this time.

*(Washburn information courtesy Dr. Duck's AxWax)*

**YAMAHA SERIAL NUMBERS**

Yamaha instruments were originally produced in Japan; production switched to Taiwan in the early 1980s. Instruments are currently produced in the U.S., Taiwan, and Indonesia. It is important to recognize that Yamaha uses two different serialization systems.

Yamaha electric guitars and basses have a letter/number (2 letters followed by 5 numbers) code that indicates production date. The first two letters of the serial number indicate the year and month of production (the first letter indicates the year, the second letter indicates the month). Yamaha's coding system substitutes a letter for a number indicating year and month, thus:

CODE LETTER	MONTH or YEAR NUMBER
H	1
I	2
J	3
K	4
L	5
M	6
N	7
O	8
P	9
X	10
Y	11
Z	12

For example, an "H" in the first of two letters would be a "1", indicating the last digit of the year (1981 or 1991). An "H" in the second of two letters would also be a "1", indicating the first month (January). Like Hamer, the digits will cycle around every 10 years.

After the two letter prefixes, 5 digits follow. The first two digits represent the day of the month, and the three digits indicate the production ranking for that day. For example:

NZ19218                      December 19, 1987  
 (or 1997); #218.

The example's code should be properly broken down as N - Z - 27 - 428. The "N" in the first of the two letters would be a "7", indicating the last digit of the year (1987 or 1997). The "Z" in the second of the two letters would be a "12", indicating the 12th month (December). The two digit pair after the letters is the day of the month, the 19th. The final three digits indicate production ranking, therefore this imaginary guitar is the 218th instrument built that day.

Yamaha Acoustics and Acoustic Electrics contain 8 digit serial numbers. In this coding scheme, the first digit represents the last digit of the year (for example, 1987 = 7); the second and third numbers indicate the month (numbers 01 through 12); the fourth and fifth numbers will indicate the day of the month, and the final three digits will indicate the production ranking of the instrument.

This system works for most (but not all) of Yamaha products. If a serial number doesn't fit the coding system, Yamaha offers internal research via their website ([www.yamahaguitars.com](http://www.yamahaguitars.com)) - just email your request in.