

SERIALIZATION

POTENTIOMETER CODING: SOURCE DATE CODE

An Important Instrument Dating Breakthrough
developed by Hans Moust (author, *The Guild Guitar Book*)

Stamped on every potentiometer (volume and tone pots) is a six or seven digit *source code* that tells who made the pot, as well as the week and the year. The *source dating* code is an element of standardization that is administered by the Electronics Industries Association (EIA), formed in 1924. The EIA assigns each manufacturer a three digit code (there are some with one, two or four digits). Moust's research has indicated no source date codes on any guitar pots before the late 1940s, and no single digit year code after 1959 (6 digit source code).

It's fairly easy to crack the source code. The first three digits indicate the company that built the potentiometer. Some times these digits may be separated by a space, a hyphen, or a period. The most common company codes found are:

| | | | |
|-----|---------------|-----|-----------------|
| 137 | CTS | 304 | Stackpole |
| 140 | Clarostat | 134 | Centralab |
| 106 | Allen Bradley | 381 | Bourns Networks |

If the code is only six digits long, then the fourth digit is the year code (between 1947 and 1959). If the code is seven digits long, then the fourth and fifth digits indicate the year. The final two digits in either of the codes indicate the week of the year the potentiometer was built. Any final two digits with a code number over 52 possibly indicates a part number instead of a week of the year code.

When dating an instrument by the 'pot code', keep two things in mind: The potentiometers must be original to the piece (new solder, or a date code that is off by ten or more years is a good giveaway to spot replacement pots); and that the pot code only indicates when the potentiometer was built! If the pot is an original, it indicates a date that the guitar could not have been built before - so it's always a good idea to have extra reference material around.

Moust's research has indicated that virtually all Fenders from 1966 to 1969 have pots dated from 1966. Moust has speculated that when CBS bought Fender, they found a good deal on pots and bought a three year supply. Guild apparently had the same good fortune in 1979, for when Moust visited the factory they still had a good supply of '79 pots - which explains why every Guild since then has had similar dated pots!

Finally, a word of caution: not all potentiometer manufacturers subscribed to the EIA source code date, and early Japanese components did not use the international coding like the American and European builders. If the code does not fit the above criteria, don't *force it* and skew your dating results.

(Source: *George Gruhn and Walter Carter, Guitar Player magazine, October 1990*)

ALEMBIC SERIAL NUMBERS

Alembic began developing and installing custom electronics in 1969 as the company was just forming. Alembic continued to customize basses with their active electronics for players like Jack Casady and Phil Lesh, which lead to the creation of Alembic instruments. Every instrument the company has produced has a corresponding instrument file which contains the original work order (specifications), returned warranty, and any other relevant paperwork.

In general, the first two numbers in the serial number are the year the instrument was completed; the letter code designates the model. The final two to five digits indicate the individual instrument and its place in the overall Alembic production. Alembic started with the number 1 in 1972, and has progressed sequentially ever since. An "A" or "B" after the serial number indicates the rare occasion when a serial number has been duplicated.

On new instruments, the serial number is stamped on the truss rod cover and also in the electronics cavity (Epic and Orion models have the number stamped in the back of the peghead and in the electronics cav-

ity). On older instruments, the serial number is stamped directly on the ebony fingerboard below the 24th fret. Earliest Alembic models have serial numbers stamped on top of the headstock.

TOM ANDERSON GUITARWORKS SERIALIZATION

Tom Anderson spent a number of years building necks and guitar bodies before producing completed guitars. Outside of custom built specialties, 1987 was the first year that the volume began to resemble production numbers.

Although every guitar built is tracked in the company files, many are remembered by staff luthiers who had a hand in producing them. Engraved on the neck plate of each guitar is the date it was completed along with *MADE IN CALIFORNIA*.

An example of this would be: 12-21-92P, or 5-27-93A, or 9-15-95N. An A, N, or P lets you know if the instrument was completed in the A.M. (A), P.M. (P) or, if production is moving well, at approximately Noon (N).

B. C. RICH SERIALIZATION

Bernardo Chavez Rico learned his luthier skills from his father, Bernardo Mason Rico. When the B.C. Rich trademark was adopted, Rico built acoustic guitars for the first two years, and then switched to custom built solid body electrics. When production formally commenced in 1972, the first 350 guitars were numbered sequentially.

In 1974, a serial number code was devised. The five digit serial number was encoded YYZZZ, with the first two digits indicating the year and the last three indicating consecutive production. By the late 1970s, demand and production increased enough that the year number began ahead of the date. In 1980, the year digits were two years ahead - and by 1981, they were off by four years!

Currently, the American made B.C. Rich serialization does provide with numbers corresponding to the year, and quantity of guitars built in that year. For example:

953001995 (300th instrument produced)
960021996 (2nd instrument produced)

The serialization on the Import series models is for identification only, and does not depict the year of manufacture. B.C. Rich does maintain records that indicate the year of manufacture (and the manufacturer) if they are needed.

(Source: *Bernie Rich, President/Founder of B.C. Rich International; and Michael Wright, Vintage Guitar Magazine*)

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 45099 | 1999 |

* 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* (Center stream Publishing/Hal Leonard, 1994).

CARVIN SERIAL NUMBERS

Originally founded by Lowell C. Kiesel as the pickup-building L. C. Kiesel Company, Carvin has expanded through the years into a full line mail order company that offers guitars, basses, amplifiers, P.A. gear, and replacement parts. The company initially offered kit-built guitars, and by 1964 completed models.

The 2,000 to 4,000 instruments built between 1964 and 1970 did not have serial numbers. The first serial number issued in 1970 was number 5000, and numbers since then have been sequential. Serial numbers were first placed on the end of the fingerboard, and now appear on the neck plate.

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| # 5000 | 1970 (first number issued) |
| # 11000 - 13000 | 1980-1983 |
| # 13001 - 15000 | 1983-1984 |
| # 17000 - 20000 | 1985-1986 |
| # 22000 - 25000 | 1988-1989 |
| # 26000 - 33000 | 1989-1991 |
| # 35000 - on | 1992-date |

(Source: Michael Wright, *Vintage Guitar Magazine*)

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, I 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 business 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 business 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.

DANELECTRO SERIALIZATION

Danelectro serial numbers are usually located in the neck pocket, although they do also turn up in other hidden areas of the body. Most Danelectros carry a four digit code. The code pattern is *XYZ*: *XX* is the week of the year (01-52), *Y* is still a mystery (Batch code or Designator?), and *Z* is the last digit of the production years. As the *Z* number is duplicated every 10 years, model designation and features should also be used in determining the date. Some guitars built during the first nine weeks of each year (01 through 09, *XX* code) may not have the 0 as the first number.

There are two variations on this code. In late 1967, the *Coral* and *Dane* series were offered, and were numbered with a *ZXX* code. The other original models still maintain their four digit code. However, the *Convertible* model (a Pre-'67 series) was cosmetically changed in 1968 to a Dane-style headstock, and changed to the new three digit code.

(Serialization courtesy of Paul Bechtoldt and Doug Tulloch, Guitars from Neptune. This book is the definitive listing for models, specifications, and company information - plus it carries many examples of the company's advertising as a reference tool)

DEAN SERIALIZATION

Serialization for the *Made in the U.S.A.* instruments is fairly straightforward to decipher. The serial numbers were stamped into the back of the headstock, and the first two digits of the serial number are the year of manufacture. The following five digits represent the instrument number. Examples of this would be:

79 00619 manufactured in 1979
81 39102 manufactured in 1981

The imported Deans do not carry the stamped and year-coded serial numbers, and would have to be dated through configuration, headstock design, and other design factors.

EPIPHONE SERIAL NUMBERS

In 1917, Epaminondas *Epi* Stathopoulos began using the *House of Stathopoulo* brand on the family's lutherie 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 wer 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 |

| Number | Year |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 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):

| Number | Year |
|--------|--------------|
| 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 |

| Number | Year |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 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* |
| 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* |

| Number | Year |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 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* |

Between 1970-mid 90s, almost all Epiphones were made in either Japan or Korea. Most have a 7 digit serial number, and production records/statistics are not available currently for this time period.

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 Gibson's Kalamazoo, Nashville, or Montana facility since the mid 70s. 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 001 (as did Kalamazoo). However, in 1994, the Nashville-produced Epiphones were configured as YYNNNNNN: YY = 94 (the year) and NNNNNN is the ranking for the entire year.

Current Epiphones manufactured overseas typically utilize a 7 digit serial number, the first number being the last number of the year of manufacture. Many of these instruments have an alphabetical character designating the manufacturing facility (i.e., S3861789 refer to an instrument mfg. during 1993 by Samick, R5618265 indicates an instrument mfg. during 1995 by Aria.

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 Basses: A Photographic History (All are available through GPI/Miller-Freeman books)*.

FENDER SERIALIZATION

Serial numbers, in general, are found on the bridgeplate, the neckplate, 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 when 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 | S (example) S8 - 1978 |
| 1980s | E (example) E1 - 1981 |
| 1990s | N (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, and N0 |
| 1991 | N0 (American Series, plus 6 digits) |
| 1992 | N2 |
| 1993 | N3 |
| 1994 | N4 |
| 1995 | N5 |
| 1996 | N6 |
| 1997 | N7 |
| 1998 | N8 |
| 1999 | N9 |
| 2000 | Z0 |
| 2001 | Z1 |

V Prefixes (introduced circa 1982) designate Vintage Reissue Series. Relic Series instruments are denoted by an R prefix. A D prefix indicates Deluxe. M prefix designates Mexican Mfg. S prefix designates Signature model. For instance, a new Fender Subsonic with serial no. DZ0255356 indicates a deluxe instrument manufactured in 2000.

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 JV 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. The Japanese Fender production facility is now making instruments for the Asian marketplace only. 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 |
| 1996-1997 | RESEARCH PENDING |
| 1997-1998 | RESEARCH PENDING |
| 1998-1999 | RESEARCH PENDING |
| 1999-2000 | RESEARCH PENDING |

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)

G & L SERIAL NUMBERS

According to G & L expert Paul Bechtoldt, all production serial numbers started at #500, as prior numbers were reserved for special instruments or presentations. All G & L models have a date in the neck pocket of the instrument, for reliable dating. Most G & L instruments have both body and neck dating, leading to some confusion as to the actual building date. However, the final authority exists in the G & L log book - manually looking up the serial number of the instrument.

1980-1996: All G & L serial numbers are seven digits long, with the first digit being a letter prefix indicating a guitar ("G") system or bass ("B") system.

1997-Date: In 1997, all guitar models, L-1505 and L-2500 basses, changed to a six-digit sequence beginning with CL (in honor of founder Clarence Leo Fender), followed by four numbers.

The two guitar models to have their own prefix digits and numbering system were the Broadcaster ("BC") and George Fullerton Signature model ("GF").

First Recorded Serial Number For Each Year

| YEAR | GUITAR | BASS |
|------|-------------------------|---------|
| 1980 | G000530 | B000518 |
| 1981 | G003122 | B001917 |
| 1982 | G009886 | B008525 |
| 1983 | G011654 | B010382 |
| 1984 | G013273 | B014266 |
| 1985 | G014690 | B016108 |
| 1986 | G017325 | B017691 |
| 1987 | G020241 | B018063 |
| 1988 | G023725 | B019627 |
| 1989 | G024983 | B020106 |
| 1990 | G026344 | B021788 |
| 1991 | G027163 | B023013 |
| 1992 | G029962 | B024288 |
| 1993 | More research under way | |
| 1994 | " | " |
| 1995 | " | " |
| 1996 | " | " |
| 1997 | " | " |
| 1998 | " | " |
| 1999 | " | " |
| 2000 | " | " |

(Information courtesy Paul Bechtoldt, G & L: Leo's Legacy, Woof Associates, 1994. This book is a must-have for anyone interested in G & L instruments, as the book documents models, variations, and the company history.)

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 |
| 1929 | 89750 |
| 1930 | 90200 |
| 1931 | 90450 |
| 1932 | 90700 |
| 1933 | 91400 |
| 1934 | 92300 |
| 1935 | 92800 |
| 1936 | 94100 |
| 1937 | 95200 |
| 1938 | 95750 |
| 1939 | 96050 |
| 1940 | 96600 |
| 1941 | 97400 |
| 1942 | 97700 |
| 1943 | 97850 |
| 1944 | 98250 |
| 1945 | 98650 |
| 1946 | 99300 |
| 1947 | 99999 |

White oval labels were used on instruments from 1902 to 1954, at which time the oval label was changed to an orange color. On instru-

ments 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 |
| 1948 | A 2665 |
| 1949 | A 4410 |
| 1950 | A 6595 |
| 1951 | A 9420 |
| 1952 | A 12460 |
| 1953 | A 17435 |
| 1954 | A 18665 |
| 1955 | A 21910 |
| 1956 | A 24755 |
| 1957 | A 26820 |
| 1958 | A 28880 |
| 1959 | A 32285 |
| 1960 | A 35645 |
| 1961 | A 36150 |

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:

42205 = 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 |
|------------|--------------------------|
| 1961 | 100-42440 |
| 1962 | 42441-61180 |
| 1963 | 61450-64220 |
| 1964 | 64240-70500 |
| 1962 | 71180-96600 |
| 1963 | 96601-99999 |
| 1967 | 000001-008010 |
| 1967 | 010000-042900 |
| 1967 | 044000-044100 |
| 1967 | 050000-054400 |
| 1967 | 055000-063999 |
| 1967 | 064000-066010 |
| 1967 | 067000-070910 |
| 1967 | 090000-099999 |
| 1963, 1967 | 100000-106099 |
| 1963 | 106100-108900 |
| 1963, 1967 | 109000-109999 |
| 1963 | 110000-111549 |
| 1963, 1967 | 111550-115799 |
| 1963 | 115800-118299 |
| 1963, 1967 | 118300-120999 |
| 1963 | 121000-139999 |

| YEAR | APPROXIMATE SERIAL RANGE |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1963, 1967 | 140000-140100 |
| 1963 | 140101-144304 |
| 1964 | 144305-144380 |
| 1963 | 144381-145000 |
| 1963 | 147009-149864 |
| 1964 | 149865-149891 |
| 1963 | 149892-152989 |
| 1964 | 152990-174222 |
| 1964, 1965 | 174223-176643 |
| 1964 | 176644-199999 |
| 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 |
| 1966 | 408000-408690 |
| 1966 | 408800-409250 |
| 1966 | 420000-426090 |
| 1966 | 427000-429180 |
| 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 |

| YEAR | APPROXIMATE SERIAL RANGE |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 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 |
| YEAR | APPROXIMATE SERIAL RANGE |
| 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 |

| YEAR | F O N |
|------|-------|
| 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 random. 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 was 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 (though 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, 900000s |
| 1973 | 000001s, 100000s, 200000s, 800000s and a few "A" + 6 digit numbers |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Year(s) | Approximate Series Manufacture |
| 1974 and 1975 | 100000s, 200000s, 300000s, 400000s, 500000s, 600000s, 800000s and a few <i>A-B-C-D-E-F</i> + 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* were 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 may also indicate Kalamazoo production, 500-999 may also indicate Nashville production. The Kalamazoo numbers were discontinued in 1984.

On recently manufactured Gibson electrics, 5 or 6 digit numbers are also utilized on custom instruments. Also, there are some exceptions to these rules, including reissues. A '58 LP Reissue may be serial numbered 81XXX - the 8 is the model designator ('58 Reissue), the 1 references the last digit of the year of manufacture (2001, in this case), and the last 3 numbers (XXX) indicate the plant count. An example of a '59 LP Reissue serial number would be 91XXX.

All currently manufactured Gibsons (non-custom shop) are stamped with a hand arbor, and start at 300, and continue until production is finished that day. This hand stamp used to be reset daily at #300 for all the LP style headstocks. The other shapes (Flying V, T-Bird, Explorer, etc.) were started at 700.

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. Examples:

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.

Current mfg. ES-5 Switchmaster with ser. no. 22280003 indicates an instrument built on the 228th day (Aug. 15th) of 2000, and is instrument #3 of production rank.

00871595 indicates the instrument was built on the March 28th (87th day), 2001, and was the 95th instrument stamped that day in Nashville.

81136 indicates a 1958 Les Paul Reissue manufactured in 2001, and was the 136th instrument stamped that day in Nashville.

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 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.

Serialization Examples:

- 12-4387 indicates an instrument built in December, 1974 (387th instrument produced)
- 3-745 indicates an instrument built in 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.

A currently manufactured Country Club Model (Model No. 6196) with ser. no. 01319652 indicates it was built in March of 2001, the last 3 numbers of the model number are next - 196. 52 indicates the production count.

A Model No. 6121 Roundup with a ser. no. of 999121447 indicates it was built in Sept. of 1999, 121 represents the last 3 digits of the model number, and 447 is the 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.

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).

Guild has a series of charts available on their website (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*)

HAMER SERIALIZATION

Hamer serial numbers are fairly easy to understand, given that the first digit in the instrument's serial number is the last digit of the year the instrument was produced (1986 would be a 6, for instance). The use of a single digit means that those numbers will cycle every ten years (0 to 9); instrument production dates now have more relevance.

From 1974-1981, Hamer USA employed 2 separate serial numbering systems, one for custom instruments, and one for production models:

Custom Instruments: These instruments are easily recognized by the use of a 4-digit number stamped into the wood on the back of the peghead. The numbers ran from #0000 through #0680. All of the early Hamer USA Standards and 12-string basses, as well as a number of prototype instruments, were included in this serial numbering system.

Production Models: production models are stamped (initially with ink, later in the wood, on the back of the peghead) with either a 5 or 6-digit serial number. The first digit indicates the year that the instrument was built. The next 4 or 5 digits are sequentially stamped in order of production. For example, serial number 7 0001 was built in 1977, and was the first production model guitar built. Similarly, 0 1964 was built in 1980, and was the 1,964th production guitar built. The serial numbering sequence by decade is indicated below:

| | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1970s | 7 0001 - 9 1450 |
| 1980s | 0 1451 - 9 24192 |
| 1990s | 0 24193 - 9 50155 |
| 2000-present | 0 50156 - present |

(*Hamer Serialization courtesy Jol Dantzig & Frank Rindone Hamer USA*)

HOFNER DATING INFORMATION

The sequence of Hofner serial numbers do not provide an exact method for dating Hofner guitars. Hofners were available in Germany since 1949 (and earlier, if you take in the over 100 years of company history); but were not officially exported to England until Selmer of London took over distributorship in 1958. Furthermore, Selmer British models were specified for the U.K. only - and differ from those available in the German market.

However, research from author Paul Day indicated a dating scheme based on the pickups installed versus the time period. Keep in mind that there will be transitional models, and combinations do appear. Finally, a quick rule of thumb: Adjustable truss-rods were installed in necks beginning in 1960. Anything prior will not have a truss-rod cover.

| DATE | PICKUP STYLE |
|-----------|---|
| 1953-1959 | Six <i>star-slot</i> pole piece (built by Fuma) |
| 1957-1960 | Black, White, or Brown plastic, with plain tops. Ends can be square or oval. |
| 1960-1961 | Rectangular metal case with four black slits in the top. Hofner <i>diamond</i> logo. |
| 1961-1963 | Rectangular metal case, six slot-screw or six rectangular pole pieces. The Hofner <i>diamond</i> logo appears on many of these. |
| 1963-1967 | Rectangular metal case, six slot-screw and six rectangular pole pieces. |
| 1967-1978 | Rectangular metal case, a single central bar magnet, plus six small slot-screw pole pieces. |

Hofner then introduced a number of guitars based on Classic American favorites in the late 1960s on. These instruments used OEM pickups from Schaller, Shadow, and DiMarzio.

(Information courtesy Paul Day, and was featured in Gordon Giltrap and Neville Marten's The Hofner Guitar - A History (International Music Publications Limited, 1993). The Giltrap and Marten book is an overview of Hofner models produced between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, and a recommended read for those interested in Hofner guitars or British pop and rock from the 1960s)

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:

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)

MATSUMOKU SERIAL NUMBERS

(Includes various models from ARIA PRO II, VANTAGE, WASHBURN, WESTONE)

Any Matsumoku-produced instrument will have the first number as the identifier for the year, or possibly a two digit combination. Matsumoku stopped production in Japan in 1987, so an initial digit of "8" cannot be 1988 - the combination of the "8" plus the next digit will give the eighties designation.

The Matsumoku company built guitars for a number of trademarks. Although the Aria Company started their own "ARIA" guitar production in the 1960s, Matsumoku built guitars for them under contract from 1980 to 1987. Matsumoku also built guitars for **Vantage** between 1980 to 1986.

In 1979, the new series of **Washburn** electrics were designed in America, and produced in Japan by Matsumoku. After the success of supplying guitars for other companies' trademarks, Matsumoku marketed their own **Westone** instruments between 1981 to 1987. As Matsumoku stopped production in Japan in 1987, Westone production was moved to Korea.

(Dating information courtesy Tony Bacon and Paul Day, The Guru's Guitar Guide, Bold Strummer Ltd, 1990)

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 |
| 8004-8036 | 1980 |
| 8037-8040 | 1981 |
| 1041-1052 | 1981 |
| 1053-1075 | 1982 |
| 1076-1081 | 1983 |

ECLIPSE Bass models

(124 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 3801-3821 | 1980 |
| 3822-3828 | 1981 |
| 3029-3062 | 1981 |
| 3063-3109 | 1982 |
| 3110-3118 | 1983 |
| 3119-3123 | 1984 |

EXPLODER Guitar models

(65 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 7801-7806 | 1980 |
| 7007-7020 | 1981 |
| 7021-7052 | 1982 |
| 7053-7065 | 1983 |

EXPLODER Bass models

(35 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 6801-6803 | 1980 |
| 6004-6013 | 1981 |
| 6014-6031 | 1982 |
| 6032-6035 | 1983 |

FLYING V Guitar models

(52 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 5801-5812 | 1980 |
| 5013-5028 | 1981 |
| 5029-5045 | 1982 |
| 5046-5048 | 1983 |
| 5049-5052 | 1984 |

FLYING V Bass models

(6 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 9001-9006 | 1981 |
|-----------|------|

M-80

(64 total instruments made)

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 4801-4808 | 1980 |
| 4809-4816 | 1981 |
| 4017-4031 | 1981 |
| 4032-4052 | 1982 |
| 4053-4064 | 1983 |

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 |

MUSIC MAN SERIAL NUMBERS

The serial numbers found on the original Music Man/Leo Fender's CLF produced instruments ("pre-Ernie Ball") are not encoded in a system that indicates the production date, but such information can be found on the end of the neck. As with the earlier Fenders, the neck would have to be removed from the body to view this information.

The Ernie Ball Music Man serialization utilizes a numbering system that indicates the year through the first two digits (for example: 93537 = 1993).

PAUL REED SMITH SERIALIZATION

PRS regular production set neck 5 digit serialization is fairly easy to decipher: The first digit of the instrument's serial number corresponds to the last digit of the year (i.e., 199"X") the guitar was built. The rest of the numbers correspond to that guitar's production number off the line.

| Prefix Number | Years of Mfg. |
|---------------|---------------|
| 0 | 1990 or 2000 |
| 1 | 1991 or 2001 |
| 2 | 1992 |
| 3 | 1993 |
| 4 | 1994 |
| 5 | 1985 or 1995 |
| 6 | 1986 or 1996 |
| 7 | 1987 or 1997 |
| 8 | 1988 or 1998 |
| 9 | 1989 or 1999 |

Example: 7 2385 = 1987, 2,385th guitar built

However, just like the Hamer serialization, this number will cycle every ten years - so knowing when the model was available becomes critical. Keep in mind that the serial numbers from the 1980s will be a relatively low number; serial numbers from the mid-1990s will be much higher.

Example: 7 25385= 1997, 25,385th guitar built

Example: 050427 (McCarty Soapbar) = 2000, 50,427th guitar built

Example: 155765 (Custom Soapbar) = 2001, 55,765th instrument built

Before 1990, serial ranges were approximately 0001-0400 for 1985, 041-1700 for 1986, 1701-3500 for 1987, 3501-5400 for 1988, 5401-7600 for 1989, 7601-10100 for 1990 (start of 5 digit numbers).

PRS CE (Classic Electric) models have one extra number inserted between the first digit (year designator) and before the number of the guitar. They are numbered in sequence (1988 began with 0001, and 1999 ended at approx. 20,000).

Example: 9 CE19759= 1999, 19,759th guitar built

EG Models manufactured 1990-1995 have their own serial number range, approx. 0001-3300.

PRS bolt-on and set neck basses were manufactured 1989-1991, and also have their own serial number ranges - 0001-0200 for bolt neck, 0001-0800 for set neck. Additionally, swamp ash specials mfg. 1997-1999 have their own range beginning with 00001.

(Source: The PRS Guitar Book by Dave Burrell, Balafon Books)

PEAVEY SERIAL NUMBERS

While more musicians may be aware of Peavey through the numerous high quality amplifiers and P.A. systems they build, the company has been producing solidbody guitars and basses since 1978. Peavey serial numbers exist more for the company's warranty program than an actual dating system. According to researcher Michael Wright, the earliest serial numbers had six digits; by 1978 the company switched to eight digits. Peavey can supply the shipping date (which is within a few weeks of actual production) for the more inquisitive.

Replacement manuals are generally available for Peavey products. For further information, contact Peavey Electronics through the Index of Current Manufacturers located in the back of this book.

(Information courtesy Michael Wright, Guitar Stories Volume One)

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 |
| 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 |

PREFIX

| | |
|---|------------|
| C | March |
| D | April |
| E | May |
| F | June |
| G | July |
| H | August |
| I | September |
| J | October |
| K | November |
| L | December |
| M | January |
| N | February |
| P | March |
| Q | April |
| R | May |
| S | June |
| T | July |
| U | August |
| V | Septemberr |
| W | October |
| X | November |
| Y | December |

YEAR

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 |
| 0 | 1997 |
| 1 | 1998 |

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

In 1999, the system was changed to a number only system. The 2 digits by themselves are the year, and the first two from the 4-5 set being the week it was made. Example: 0012345 - this instrument would have been made in the 12th week of 2000. Example: a new Ricky Model 620-12 with serial number 0119659 indicates an instrument built in the 19th week of 2001. 659 indicates the internal production number.

(Information courtesy of Tommy Thomasson, Rickenbacker International Corporation.)

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 intro-

duced 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 = 88XXX). 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) - just email your request in.