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Dating Ampeg Amplifiers

Ampegs can be divided into six distinct groups for dating purposes: pre-1953, 1953 to mid-1965, early 1965 to 1969, 1969 to 1979, 1981 to 1984, and post-1984. Each group uses a unique serialization scheme that can be used to assist in dating the amps, but in many cases, it is the features and characteristics of the amps that determine the year of manufacture.

Electronic Industries Association (EIA) codes can also be very useful for giving clues as to an amp's age. These codes can be found on speakers, transformers, pots, capacitors, and multi-section electrolytic "can" caps. Of course, these codes are only applicable to original components, not replacement parts.

WARNING: Ampeg amplifiers, especially the high-powered amps such as the SVT and V-series, contain lethal voltages even when unplugged and turned off. Therefore, do not poke around in your old Ampeg if you are unfamiliar with amplifier electronics or their operation.

A brief summary of the EIA system follows.

Shortly after World War II, American electronic component manufacturers began to stamp a semi-standardized code into the parts they produced. The code contained information regarding the manufacture and date of production. These codes have been used on components including potentiometers (pots), transformers, capacitors, tubes, and speakers.

The code usually consists of 6 or 7 digits such as 137634 where the first two or three digits is the EIA code for the manufacturer (137 denotes CTS), the fourth digit and sometimes fifth digit denotes the year (in this case it could be 1956, 66, or 76), and the last two digits denote the week of the year. It is important to note that parts do not always contain EIA codes, especially those parts from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Some common manufacturer codes for parts used in Ampegs include:

- Speakers: Jensen (220), CTS (137), Eminence (67), Quam (270), Rola (285), Altec (391), Electro Voice (649)
- Capacitors: Pyramid (472), Cornell-Dubilier (34)
- Transformers: Acrosound (878), Stancor (138), Electrical Windings (682), Todd Electric Co. (926), Standard Electric Products (668)
- Pots: CTS (137), Stackpole (304)

Pre-1953

The Michael-Hull amplifiers can be narrowed down to a date of manufacture between 1946 and 1948. These amps used a serial number system that was not used by any Ampegs. Unfortunately, the serial

numbers are of little help for dating one of these pre-Ampeg models and EIA date codes on components were used sporadically during the early post WW-II years. The only date codes that seems to be readily available is found on the speaker magnet located under the bell cover.

The Ampegs made between 1949 and 1953 did not have serial numbers and must be dated in the same way as the Michael-Hull models, specifically, by finding the EIA date codes on pots, transformers, multi-section "can" capacitors, and speakers.

1953 through mid-1965

It appears that the serialization system used during this time period is date encoded which makes dating the amplifier rather easy. The serial numbers are 6 digits in length with the following pattern: YMMNNN, where Y denotes the year, MM the month, and NNN the Nth unit produced that month. The Nth unit, however, may not have started with 001. Ampeg may very well have used 100 or 101 as the starting point during slow production periods. Nevertheless, for dating purposes, the serial number provides adequate information during this period.

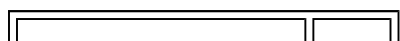
For example, a Duette with serial number 710201 was made in 1957 (7), during October (10), and was possibly the 201st amp made that month. A Super Echo Twin with serial number 404553 was made in 1964 (4), during April (04) and may have been the 553th amp made that month (553).

Caution is needed for dating amps from 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1960. The serial numbers from these years were duplicated in 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1965, respectively. Taking the example Super Echo Twin above, its serial number alone could denote April 1954 or April 1964. A Mercury with serial number 009054 could be from September 1960 or it could be from the second serial number system implemented in 1965. Luckily, it is very easy to determine which year the first digit denotes.

The key is the model and the cosmetics. For instance, the Super Echo Twin was made in 1964, but not in 1954. The M-12 Mercury circuit of 1960 used 6V6 power tubes, but the Mercury circuit of 1965 used 7591As. Likewise, an Ampeg from 1954 would not be covered in blue check vinyl whereas an amp from 1964 would have this covering. An Ampeg from 1960 would be covered in navy random flair vinyl whereas an amp from 1965 would be covered in blue check vinyl. Another check for a 1960 versus a 1965 or later serial number (i.e. numbers beginning with 0) is that the second and third digits of the number denote the month in the first serial number system. Therefore, a serial number where these two digits are greater than 12 must be from the second serial number system (1965 - 69). A final cross check with EIA dated components should remove any doubt about an amp made during the 1953 - 65 period.

Early 1965 through 1969

The second serial number system was implemented in January 1965 and used until the end of 1969. This system overlapped with the previous serialization scheme for a period of about 6 months. These are also 6-digit numbers, which appear to have been applied sequentially, but they are not date encoded. Enough information (serial numbers, model, date codes) has been gathered to prepare the following guide for dating by serial number. Note that the year associated with a range of serial numbers is very rough and will likely change as more information is gathered for refining the estimates. The EIA date codes of original components should be used to confirm an approximate date of manufacture.



Serial Number Range	Year
000001 to 020000	1965
020000 to 049000	1966
049000 to 075000	1967
075000 to 080000	1968
080000 to 092000	1969

1970 through 1979

The third serial number system was implemented in 1970. Not enough information was available to the authors to determine year of manufacture by serial number. An added variable is that during the Magnavox years, Ampeg may have used separate serial number systems for each model or for models that shared the same chassis like the VT-22 and V-4. Until such time that enough information is available to date 1970s Ampegs by serial number, the features of the amps from this period can be used and compared to the following table.

Feature	Years Used
Blue control panel graphics	1968 - 1972
Black control panel graphics with square corners	1972 - 1975
Black control panel graphics, horizontally split with rounded corners (solid state amps)	1973 - 1979
Black control panel graphics, horizontally split with rounded corners (tube amps)	1976 - 1979
Distortion control knob	1976 - 1979
White rocker switches (solid state amps)	1973 - 1979
White rocker switches (tube amps)	1976 - 1979
Black rocker switches	1968 - 1975
Metal "a" logo	1968 - 1972
Plastic "a" logo	1973 - 1979

1981 - 1984

The MTI-era amplifiers cannot be dated by serial number. Dating by EIA date codes is impossible

since the Japanese components do not carry EIA codes. However, all MTI-era Ampegs were made in the relatively short time period between late 1981 and 1984.

Post-1984

The modern Ampegs of the St. Louis Music era were all made after 1985. The amps made since 1988 have a 10-digit serial number which is encoded for model, country, date, and year. The serial number can be broken down as follows:

Digits 1, 2, 3 = Model

Digit 4 = Country Code where:

U = U.K.

D = domestic U.S.

W = worldwide

Y = Europe

Digit 5 = Year where:

A = 1988

B = 1989

C = 1990, etc.

Digit 6 = Month where:

1 through 9 = January through September

0 = October

A = November

B = December

Digits 7, 8, 9, 10 = serial number

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