

## POTENTIOMETER CODING: SOURCE DATE CODE

An important instrument dating breakthrough developed by Hans Moust (author, *The Guild Guitar Book*) is that 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 that there are no source date codes on any guitar pots before the late 1940s, and no single-digit year code after 1959 (six-digit source code).

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

<b>137</b>	<b>CTS</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>Stackpole</b>
<b>140</b>	<b>Clarostat</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>Centralab</b>
<b>106</b>	<b>Allen Bradley</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>Bourns Networks</b>

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 indicate 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 the pot code only indicates when the potentiometer was built! If the pot is an original, it indicates a date before which the guitar could not have been built - 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 similarly 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

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 and 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 on the back of the peghead and in the electronics cavity). On older instruments, the serial number is stamped directly on the ebony fingerboard below the 24th fret. The earliest Alembic models have serial numbers stamped on top of the headstock.

## ARIA/ARIA PRO II

Aria started using serial numbers in the mid-1970s, and models before this have no serial number. Several different schemes have been used for serialization. Guitars built between 1979 and 1987 may use either one of these formats: YNNNNN or YYNNNNNN. The first one or two digits indicate the year. A 79XXXXX would be a 1979 and a 2XXXXXX

would be a 1982. Some models built in Korea may use a year and week code for the first four digits.

Serial numbers after 1987 are unknown at this point. Keep in mind that several variations have been used and anything is quite possible.

**(Source: Michael Wright/Aria)**

## B. C. RICH

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 YZZZZ, with the first two digits indicating the year and the last three indicating consecutive production. By the late 1970s, they ran out of numbers and had to begin using serial numbers meant for the following year's production. 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 numbers which correspond to the year, as well as the quantity of guitars that were 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

To date, Robert Benedetto has completed over 750 musical instruments. 466 are archtop guitars, with the remainder being comprised of 51 violins, five violas, one classical guitar, two mandolins, 11 semi-hollow electrics, 209 electric solidbody 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 one 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 four- or five- digit serial number with configuration ##( #)YY. two (or three) digits ##( #) indicate ranking, beginning with #1 in 1968.

The last two digits (YY) indicate the 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:*

NUMBER	YEAR
0168 (#1)*	1968
0270 (#2)*	1970
0372	1972
0473	1973
0575-0676	1976
0777-1177	1977
1277-2778	1978
2879-4279	1979
4380-5580	1980
5681-7381	1981
7482-9582	1982
9682-10983	1983

NUMBER	YEAR
11084-11984	1984
12085-12885	1985
12986-13586	1986
13686-13987-A	1987
14087-16488	1988
16588-19189	1989
19289-22490-A	1990
22591-25091	1991
25192-28092	1992
28193-30293	1993
30393-32994	1994
33095-36595	1995
36696-39496	1996
39597-40697	1997
40798-4349	1998
43599-45199	1999
45200-46200	2000
46301-46601	2001

\* 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).**

### BIGSBY, PAUL

Bigsby serial numbers can be found on the guitars stamped down by the lower strap button, and on pedal steels near the leg attachment. Serialization corresponds with the date produced (month/day/year).

### CARVIN

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 up until the late 1990s were stamped on the jackplate. On models with rounded edges and no jackplates, the serial number was stamped into the end of the fingerboard unless it was maple. In that case, the number may be stamped inside the control cavity cover plate.

Carvin's serialization is sequential, but there appears to be no logical order in the way they are assigned. A TL60 built in 2002 has a serial number of 63663 while a Bolt built in 2000 has a serial number of 82398, and an LB70 bass built in 1998 has a serial number of 63094. The following chart of serial numbers contains several overlaps in numbers. The numbers recorded represent the lowest and highest numbers found for each year. More possibilities exist. Carvin suggests dating your guitar by certain features rather than the serial number. Refer to the Carvin Museum website for more information: [www.carvinmuseum.com](http://www.carvinmuseum.com).

YEAR	NUMBER
1970-1979	5000-10019
1980-1983	10768-15919
1984-1987	13666-25332
1988-1990	22731-25683
1991-1994	25359-42547
1995-1999	45879-81427
2000-PRESENT	56162-

(Source: Carvin Museum)

### CHARVEL

Charvel began using four-digit serial numbers in November, 1981, beginning with 1001. Guitars built previous to this have no serialization. In order to correctly identify the year of your guitar, check the

neckplate, body, and neck with the correct logo. The serial number is stamped onto the raised letter neckplate and runs to 5491. Plates with the number 5492 are considered non-authentic because several of these plates escaped the factory and were easy to forge. Five-digit serial numbers also appear occasionally. USA production ended in 1986. Current serial numbers are unknown at this time.

NUMBER	YEAR
1001-1095	1981
1096-1724	1982
1725-2938	1983
2939-4261	1984
4262-5303	1985
5304-5491	1986

(Source: Bret Dennis, [www.sandimascharvel.com](http://www.sandimascharvel.com))

### D'ANGELICO

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 objective of this list is to help identify the production of numbered guitars.

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 shippment), 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

1002-1073 1932-1934

#### Ledger Book One

1169-1456 1936-1939  
1457-1831 1940-1949  
1832-1849 1950

#### Ledger Book Two

1850-2098 1950-1959  
2099-2122 1960  
2123 1961

#### Second Loose Sheets

2124-2164 Dates not recorded

Again, it must be stressed 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 recommended to anyone seeking information on luthiers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto.

### D'AQUISTO

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 shipment), 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 objective of this list is to help identify the production of numbered guitars.

The D'Aquisto Ledger

NUMBER	YEAR
1001-1035	1965-1969
1036-1084	1970-1974
1085-1133	1975-1979
1134-1175	1980-1984
1176-1228	1985-1990

Beginning in 1988, serialization started with 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 hollowbody 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 recommended to anyone seeking information on luthiers John D'Angelico and James L. D'Aquisto.

## DANELECTRO

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 ten 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 for the *Made in the U.S.A.* instruments is fairly straightforward to decipher. The serial numbers were stamped onto 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:

NUMBER	YEAR
79 00619	1979
81 39102	1981
02 15268	2002

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. Contact Dean for more information on imported models.

*(Source: Dean Guitars)*

## EPIPHONE

**1935-1944:** Acoustic guitars were introduced in 1930, and were built in New York City, New York through 1953. Electric models were introduced in 1935. 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.

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

**1945-1950:** Between about 1945 and 1950, the number prefixes 15, 25, 26, 60, 75, and 85 were assigned to specific models. These were followed by three digits which were the actual "serial" number. Dating is unknown from the last numbers of the serial number.

NUMBER	MODEL
15	CENTURY HAWAIIAN
25	ZEPHYR SPANISH
26	ZEPHYR SPANISH
60	CENTURY SPANISH
75	ZEPHYR DELUXE
85	ZEPHYR DELUXE REGENT

**1950-1957:** 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 more accurate for use in dating.

NUMBER	YEAR
59000S	1950
60000S-63000S	1951
64000S	1952
NUMBER	YEAR
64000S-66000S	1953
67000S	1954
68000S	1955
69000S	1957

**1958-1961:** In May of 1957, Epiphone was purchased by CMI and became a division of Gibson. Gibson built Epiphone guitars in Kalamazoo from 1958 to 1970. Hollow body guitars had the serial number on the inside label, and prefixed with "A-", plus four digits for the first three years (note: this is different than the similar Gibson serialization). Electric solid body guitars had the serial number inked on the back of the headstock (Y XXX or Y XXXX) and the first number indicates the year: "8" (1958), "9" (1959), and "0" (1960) (note: this is similar to the Gibson serialization).

NUMBER	YEAR
A 1000S	1959
A 2000S	1959-1960
A 3000S-A4312	1960-EARLY 1961

**1961-1970:** In 1961, 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
100-42440	1961
42441-61180	1962
61450-64222	1963
64240-71040	1964
71041-96600	1962, 1963, 1964
96601-99999	1963
000001-099999	1967
100000-106099	1963, 1967
106100-108999	1963
109000-109999	1963, 1967
110000-111549	1963
111550-115799	1963, 1967
115800-118299	1963
118300-120999	1963, 1967
121000-139999	1963
140000-140100	1963, 1967
140101-144304	1963
144305-144380	1963, 1964
144381-149864	1963
149865-149891	1964
149892-152989	1963
152990-174222	1964
174223-176643	1964, 1965
176644-250335	1964
250336-305983	1965
306000-310999	1965, 1967

NUMBER	YEAR
311000-320149	1965
320150-320699	1967
320700-329179	1965
329180-330199	1965, 1967
330200-332240	1965, 1967, 1968
332241-348092	1965
348093-349100	1966
349121-368638	1965
368640-369890	1966
370000-370999	1967
380000-385309	1966
390000-390998	1967
400001-406666	1966
406667-409670	1966, 1967, 1968
409671-410900	1966
410901-419999	No Entries
420000-429193	1966
500000-500999	1965, 1966, 1968, 1969
501009-501600	1965
501601-501702	1968
501703-502706	1965, 1968
503010-503109	1968
503405-520955	1965, 1968
520956-530056	1968
530061-530850	1966, 1968, 1969
530851-530993	1968, 1969
530994-539999	1969
540000-540795	1966, 1969
540796-545009	1969
555000-556909	1966
558012-567400	1969
570087-570643	1966
570645-570755	1966, 1967
570857-570964	1966
580000-580080	1969
580086-580999	1966, 1967, 1969
600000-600998	1966, 1967, 1968 (LOW END)
600000-606090	1969 (HIGH END)
700000-700799	1966, 1967
750000-750999	1968, 1969
800000-800999	1966, 1967, 1968, 1969
801000-812838	1966, 1969
812900-819999	1969
820000-820087	1966, 1969
820088-823830	1966
824000-824999	1969
828002-847488	1966, 1969
847499-858999	1966, 1969
859001-895038	1967
895039-896999	1968
897000-898999	1967, 1969
899000-899999	1968
900000-901999	1970
910000-999999	1968

**1970-PRESENT (FOREIGN):** In 1970, production of Epiphone instruments moved to Japan. Japanese Epiphones were manufactured between 1970 and 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 for dating these instruments. 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"). Rules of thumb are, by nature, research of the model should be more thorough than just glancing at the label. Serial numbers from Japanese-made models are still unknown.

During the early 1980s, the Japanese production costs became pricey due to the changing ratio of the dollar to the yen. Production then moved to Korea where a different serialization system was used.

NUMBER	YEAR	TYPE
1000	1985	SOLIDBODIES
4000000S	1985	HOLLOWBODIES
4100000S	1985	HOLLOWBODIES
5060000S	1985	SOLIDBODIES
5080000S	1985	SOLIDBODIES
5090000S	1985	HOLLOWBODIES
5100000S	1985	SOLIDBODIES

Current Epiphones manufactured overseas typically utilize a seven- or eight-digit serial number, the first digit being the last one or two numbers of the year of manufacture, and the third and fourth digits being the week of manufacture. Many of these instruments have an alphabetical character designating the manufacturing facility:

#### China

BW	Unknown
DW	DaeWon
EA	Qing Dao
EE	Qing Dao
MC	Muse
SJ	Sae Jung
Z	Zaozhuang Saehan

#### Czech

B	Bohemia Musico-Delicia
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#### Indonesia

SI	Samick
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#### Japan

F	FujiGen
J/T	Terada

#### Korea

I	Saein
P/R	Peerless
S	Samick
U	Unsung

Examples: S3061789 refers to an instrument mfg. June, 1993 by Samick, R5068265 indicates an instrument mfg. during 1995 by Aria. S02104385 indicates a Samick model produced in October, 2002. Models produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s are more likely to have the eight-digit system.

#### Elite/Elitist Models:

Epiphone Elitist models utilize a different serialization system that consists of one letter and five digits (FYNNNN). F indicates the factory code, which will be either a T or an F as all Elitist models are built in Japan, the Y indicates the last number of the year, and the remaining four digits are sequential numbering. Example: T30765 is a 2003 Elitist built in the Terada factory and was the 765th instrument that year.

**1977-PRESENT (U.S.):** Some top-of-the-line Epiphones were produced in the U.S. at Gibson's Kalamazoo, Nashville, and Montana facilities since the mid-70s. Like Gibson numbers, there are eight digits in the complete number, and this number follows the code of YDDDYNNN. The YY (first and fifth digits) indicate the year it was 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. Example: 82303025 was built on the 230th day of 1983 and was the 25th instrument built at Kalamazoo that day.

**Source: Walter Carter, Epiphone: The Complete History, Walter Carter and George Gruhn, Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars.**

## FENDER

Serial numbers, in general, are found on the bridgeplate, the neckplate, the backplate, or the peghead. From 1950 to 1954, serial numbers are found on the bridgeplate or vibrato backplate. From 1954 to 1976, the serial numbers were found on the neckplate, either the top or the

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 was constant overlapping of serial numbers between years and models.

**1950-1954:** From 1950 to 1954, each guitar model had its own serialization group. Telecasters have different numbers than Stratocasters and P-Basses.

**TELECASTER/ESQUIRE/BROADCASTER/NO-CASTER**

NUMBER	YEAR
33-860	1950-1952
0005-0746	1950-1952
0748-1331	1951-1952
0161-0470	1951-1952
2911-5368	1951-1954

**STRATOCASTER**

UNDER 6000	1954
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**PRECISION BASS**

161-357	1951
299-619	1952
0001-0160	1952
0161-0470	1951-1952
0475-0840	1952-1953
0848-1897	1953-1954

**1954-1963:** In late 1954, the serialization became standard for all models. The numbers are still a bit random, but most of them can be grouped into general categories. The following numbers represent where most numbers will fall into categories. However, the lowest and highest numbers represent serial numbers that have dated to a certain year. In 1955, 1957, and 1958, a "0" or a "-" may precede the number.

NUMBER	LOWEST	HIGHEST	YEAR
0001-6000S	0001	10146	1954
7000-8000S	3152	10798	1955
09000-16000S	7895	16957	1956
17000-24000S	10604	28522	1957
25000-33000S	022526	40644	1958
34000-43000S	022878	51593	1959
44000-58000S	39993	66626	1960
59000-70000S	55531	77754	1961
71000-93000S	69520	96203	1962
94000-99000S	81977	99924	1963

**1962-1965:** In 1962, as the serialization count neared 100000, they did not expand to six digits. Instead, an L preceded a five-digit sequence. It ran this way from 1962 to 1965. A few examples exist from 1962.

NUMBER	LOWEST	HIGHEST	YEAR
L00001-L19000S	L00001	L60330	1963
L20000-L59000S	L08825	L92560	1964
L60000-L99000S	L23537	L99944	1965

**1965-1976:** In 1965, when CBS bought Fender Musical Instruments, Inc., the serialization came to be known as the F Series, due to an "F" being stamped onto the neckplate. This series of numbers ran from 1965 to 1976. The approximate numbers and years are as follows:

NUMBER	LOWEST	HIGHEST	YEAR
100000-110000S	100173	158977	1965
120000-170000S	112172	261343	1966
180000-210000S	156657	263115	1967
220000-251000S	204352	262774	1968

NUMBER	LOWEST	HIGHEST	YEAR
252000-291000S	224160	290835	1969
292000-298000S	278916	304089	1970
290000-344000S	261863	331031	1971
345000-370000S	258495	654030	1972
380000-530000S	316987	602615	1973
540000-590000S	417024	677199	1974
600000-656000S	595121	717257	1975
657000-660000S			1976
670000-700000S			1971-1976

A way to cross-check the serialization from 1973 to 1976 is to check the production dates on the neck.

NUMBER	YEAR
400000S	EARLY 1973 TO LATE 1976
500000S	LATE 1973 TO LATE 1976
600000S	MID 1974 TO MID 1976
700000S	MID 1976 TO LATE 1976

**1976-PRESENT (U.S.):** 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 in bold or S6 preceding a five-digit sequence. In 1977, the serialization went to a letter for the decade, followed by five or six digits with the first one indicating the last number of the year. For the most part, the number after the letter is the year, but it may bleed over into the following year. The letter code stands for the first letter of the decade: S for the '70s, E for the '80s, N for the '90s, and Z for the '00s. Some examples: E32575 is a guitar built in 1983, and N502587 is a guitar built in 1995 or 1996. Several exceptions exist in Fender's serialization - make sure to read the entire section for all models.

NUMBER	YEAR
760000S	1976, 1977
800000S	1979, 1980, 1981
1000000-8000000S	1976-1981
S100000-S600000S	1979-1982
S700000-S770000S	1977
S740000-S800000S	1978
S810000-S870000S	1979
S880000-S980000S	1980
S950000-S990000S	1981
E000000-E100000S	1979-1982
E110000-E120000S	1980-1983
E200000S	1982
E300000-E310000S	1983
E320000-E390000S	1984-1985
E400000S	1984, 1985, 1987
E800000S	1988, 1989
E900000S	1989, 1990
N900000S	1990
N000000S	1990
N100000S	1991, 1992
N200000S	1992, 1993
N300000S	1993, 1994
N400000S	1994, 1995
N500000S	1995, 1996
N600000S	1996, 1997
N700000S	1997, 1998
N800000S	1998, 1999
N900000S	1999, 2000
Z000000S	2000, 2001
Z100000S	2001, 2002
Z200000S	2002, 2003
Z300000S	2003, 2004
Z400000S	2004, 2005
Z500000S	2005, 2006
Z600000S	2006, 2007
Z700000S	2007, 2008
Z800000S	2008, 2009
Z900000S	2009

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 can be found within a single year's production. After 1991, the numbers became fairly standard and the letter and first digit prefix can be used accurately. Here is the revised table of letter/digit year codes:

CODE	DATE
S7	JAN. 1977-APR. 1978
S8	DEC. 1977-DEC. 1978
S9	NOV. 1978-AUG. 1981
E0	JUN. 1979-DEC. 1981
E1	DEC. 1980-JAN. 1982
E2	DEC. 1981-JAN. 1983
E3	DEC. 1982-JAN. 1985
E4	DEC. 1983-EARLY 1988
E8	1988-1989
E9	1989-1990
N9	1990
N0	1990-1991

**25 Prefix:** 25th Anniversary Stratocaster produced 1979 to 1980 25XXXXX.

**AMXN Prefix:** California Series electric guitars and basses, AMXN + six digits.

**C Prefix:** Collector's Series

**CA Prefix:** Stratocaster Gold, produced 1981 to 1983, CA + five digits.

**CB Prefix:** Precision Bass Special produced 1981, Jazz Bass Gold produced 1982, CB + five digits.

**CC Prefix:** Stratocaster Walnut produced 1981 to 1983, CC + five digits.

**CD Prefix:** Precision Bass Special produced 1982, CD + five digits.

**CE Prefix:** Precision Bass Special produced 1981, Black & Gold Telecaster produced 1981 to 1983, CE + five digits.

**CN Prefix:** Fender and Squier guitars produced in Korea, production dates and numbers unknown.

**CO Prefix:** Precision Bass Special produced 1982, CO + five digits.

**D Prefix:** Jazz Bass produced from 1981 to 1982, D + six digits.

**DN Prefix:** American Deluxe electric guitars and basses, produced 1998 to 1999, DN + six digits.

**DZ Prefix:** American Deluxe electric guitars and basses produced 2000-present, DZ + corresponding year (1 digit) + five or six digits.

**FN Prefix:** U.S.-built guitars and basses that are for export. Some examples may be found back into the U.S., FN + six digits.

**G Prefix:** The Strat produced 1980-1983, G + six digits.

**GO Prefix:** Precision Bass Special produced 1982, Stratocaster Gold produced 1982-1983, GO + five digits.

**I Prefix:** Limited number of guitars built for export only in 1989 and 1990. They feature Made in USA stamped on the heel of the neck, very few of these may be found in the U.S., one + six digits.

**LE Prefix:** Blonde Jaguars and Jazzmasters that were sold as a three-piece set with a Blonde Deluxe Reverb Amp, produced in 1994 only, LE + six digits.

**MN Prefix:** Mexican-made models produced in the 1990s.

**NC Prefix:** Squier Stratocaster Bullets, production and numbers unknown.

**SE/SN/SZ Prefix:** Signature Series guitars and basses, produced 1988-present. These serial numbers follow the same numbering scheme as most standard guitars. Examples: SE900056 is a Signature 1989, SN701025 is a Signature 1997, and SZ21752 is a 2002.

**T Prefix:** Tribute Series instruments.

**V Prefixes:** (introduced circa 1982) designate Vintage Reissue Series. These guitars have a VXXXXXX designation with the numbers only representing production number.

**VN Prefix:** Fender and Squier guitars produced in Korea, production dates and numbers unknown.

**XN Prefix:** FSR and '52 Telecasters.

Several variations of serial numbers have been used by Fender. More schemes may exist, especially from the custom shop and/or limited editions, etc.

**1982-PRESENT (JAPAN):** 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 two-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. After 1997, some of the letters were regurgitated. These should not be confused with earlier models, and the later models should have "Crafted in Japan" on the headstock.

NUMBER	YEAR
A + 6 DIGITS	1985-1986, 1997-1998
B + 6 DIGITS	1985-1986
C + 6 DIGITS	1985-1986
E + 6 DIGITS	1984-1987
F + 6 DIGITS	1986-1987
G + 6 DIGITS	1987-1988
H + 6 DIGITS	1988-1989
I + 6 DIGITS	1989-1990
J + 6 DIGITS	1989-1990
JV + 5 DIGITS	1982-1984
K + 6 DIGITS	1990-1991
L + 6 DIGITS	1991-1992
M + 6 DIGITS	1992-1993
N + 5 DIGITS	1995-1996
N + 6 DIGITS	1993-1994
O + 5 DIGITS	1997-2000
O + 6 DIGITS	1994-1995
P + 5 DIGITS	1999-2002
P + 6 DIGITS	1995-1996
Q + 5 DIGITS	2002-2004
Q + 6 DIGITS	1993-1994
R + 5 DIGITS	2004-2005
S + 6 DIGITS	1994-1995, 2005-2006
SQ + 5 DIGITS	1983-1984
T + 6 DIGITS	1994-1995
U + 6 DIGITS	1995-1996
V + 6 DIGITS	1996-1997

**1990-PRESENT (MEXICO):** Mexican instruments were first produced in 1990 with the Standard Series. Each Mexican serial number starts with an M followed by another letter (N=90s, Z=2000s), a number that indicates the last number of the year (1=1991 or 2001), and five or six additional numbers that indicate production rank. With the large number of guitars being produced in Mexico, there is some overlap and a few guitars each year will actually indicate the following year. For example, a guitar with the prefix MZ3 indicates 2003, but a few guitars may have actually been produced in 2004 due to production times, shipping times, etc.

NUMBER	YEAR
MN0	1990-1991
MN1	1991-1992
MN2	1992-1993
MN3	1993-1994
MN4	1994-1995
MN5	1995-1996
MN6	1996-1997
MN7	1997-1998
MN8	1998-1999
MN9	1999-2000
MZ0	2000-2001
MZ1	2001-2002
MZ2	2002-2003
MZ3	2003-2004
MZ4	2004-2005
MZ5	2005-2006
MZ6	2006-2007
MZ7	2007-2008
MZ8	2008-2009
MZ9	2009

Dating a Fender instrument by serialization alone can get you within an

approximate range of years, but this should not be used as a definitive means to determine the year of actual production. In order to date your guitar more accurately, it is necessary to date everything from the original parts.

**Source:** *A.R. Duchossoir; Michael Wright, Vintage Guitar Magazine, Walter Carter and George Gruhn, Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars, and FMIC.*

## FRAMUS

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

**Source:** *Tony Bacon and Barry Moorehouse, The Bass Book, GPI Books, 1995.*

## GIBSON

Identifying Gibson instruments by serial number is tricky at best, and downright impossible in some cases. The best method of identifying them is to use a combination of the serial number, the factory order number and any features that are particular to a specific time. (i.e. logo design change, headstock volutes, etc).

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 forty 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 forty).

This system is useful in helping to date and authenticate instruments. There are three separate groupings of numbers that have been identified and which 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.

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 forty). 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 FON. When both numbers are present on a higher grade model, remember that the FON 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.

**1935-1947:** The first production electric guitars appeared in 1935. These guitars picked up on the serialization, which was already established by the acoustic models. The serial numbers started with number 100 for acoustics and around 90000 for electrics. This system ran to 99999 for both acoustics and electrics. All numbers are approximate. In most cases, only the upper end instruments were assigned identification numbers. Serial numbers appear ink-stamped on a white paper label. FONs were first used in 1935. Other FONs may appear that aren't listed here that were produced during WWII. From 1935 to 1937, the letter appeared between the batch and instrument numbers (i.e. 722 A 23, 465 D 58, 863 E 02). The number is ink-stamped inside the guitar on the back. In 1938, the FON was changed to a two- or three-letter prefix before the batch and instrument numbers. The first letter indicates the year, the second indicates the brand (i.e. G for Gibson, K for Kalamazoo), and the third (if applicable) for electric. The FON is either ink-stamped on the label or on the back of the headstock.

## SERIAL NUMBERS

APPROX. LAST NUMBER	YEAR
92800	1935
94100	1936
95200	1937
95750	1938
96050	1939
96600	1940
97400	1941
97700	1942
97850	1943
98250	1944
98650	1945
99300	1946
99999	1947

## FACTORY ORDER NUMBERS (FON)

LETTER	YEAR
A	1935
B	1936
C	1937
D	1938
DA	1938
E(X, OR OTHER LETTERS)	1939
E	1941
F	1940
FA	1940
G	1941
H	1942

**1947-1961 (HOLLOWBODIES):** Gibson changed their serialization system once they reached 99999 and decided they did not want to go to a six-digit system. Instead, they added an A prefix followed by a three-, four-, or five-digit number. The new system started on April 28, 1947 with number A 100. The last number was used on February 21, 1961. From 1947 to early 1955, white oval labels were used. In early 1955, the label was changed to an orange oval. Serial numbers are on the label and FONs are ink-stamped on the inside back of the guitar. FONs consisted of a letter, four-digit batch number, and count number (i.e. Y 2230 21, V 4867 8, R 6785 15). FONs were discontinued after Gibson changed to the new serialization system in 1961.

## SERIAL NUMBERS

APPROX. LAST NUMBER	YEAR
A 1304	1947
A 2665	1948
A 4413	1949
A 6597	1950
A 9419	1951
A 12462	1952
A 16101	1953
A 18667	1954

## APPROX. LAST NUMBER YEAR

A 21909	1955
A 24755	1956
A 26819	1957
A 28880	1958
A 32284	1959
A 35645	1960
A 36147	1961
700-1000S	1947
1100-3700S	1948

## FACTORY ORDER NUMBERS (FON)

LETTER/NUMBER	YEAR
3700-4500S	EARLY 1949
2000S	LATE 1949
3000-5000S	1950
6000-9000S	1951
Z	1952
Y	1953
X	1954

## FACTORY ORDER NUMBERS (FON)

LETTER/NUMBER	YEAR
W	1955
V	1956
U	1957
T	1958
S	1959
R	1960
Q	1961

**1952-1961 (SOLIDBODIES):** When production of solidbody 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 three digits stamped on the headstock top. Sometime in 1953, instruments were ink stamped on the headstock back with 5- or 6-digit numbers, the first digit indicating the year, and the following digits indicating production numbers (Y NNNN or Y NNNNN). 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. Later models typically feature six-digit numbers. Examples of this system:

4 2205 = 1954

6 14562 = 1956

0 9865 = 1960

**1961-1970:** In 1961, Gibson started a new serial number system that covered all instrument lines. It consisted of numbers that were impressed into the wood. This is generally considered to be the most confusing out of all Gibson's serial number systems used between the years 1961 and 1970. There are several instances where batches of numbers are switched in order and duplicated, not just once, but up to four times, and seem to be randomly assigned throughout the decade. Labels inside hollowbody guitars were still an orange oval.

**Note:** If "MADE IN USA" is stamped in the back of the headstock near the serial number, the guitar is not from the 1960s, but the 1970s. In this case, please refer to the next section on serialization for 1970-1975 guitars.

NUMBER	YEAR
100-42440	1961
42441-61180	1962
61450-64222	1963
64240-71040	1964
71041-96600	1962, 1963, 1964
96601-99999	1963
000001-008009	1967
100000-106099	1963, 1967
106100-108999	1963
109000-109999	1963, 1967
110000-111549	1963
111550-115799	1963, 1967
115800-118299	1963
118300-120999	1963, 1967
121000-139999	1963
140000-140100	1963, 1967
140101-144304	1963
144305-144380	1963, 1964
144381-149864	1963
149865-149891	1964
149892-152989	1963
152990-174222	1964
174223-176643	1964, 1965
176644-250335	1964
250336-305983	1965
306000-310999	1965, 1967
311000-320149	1965
320150-320699	1967
320700-329179	1965
329180-330199	1965, 1967
330200-332240	1965, 1967, 1968
332241-348092	1965
348093-349100	1966

NUMBER	YEAR
349121-368638	1965
368640-369890	1966
370000-370999	1967
380000-385309	1966
390000-390998	1967
400001-406666	1966
406667-409670	1966, 1967, 1968
409671-410900	1966
410901-419999	No Entries
420000-429193	1966
500000-500999	1965, 1966, 1968, 1969
501009-501600	1965
501601-501702	1968
501703-502706	1965, 1968
503010-503109	1968
503405-520955	1965, 1968
520956-530056	1968
530061-530850	1966, 1968, 1969
530851-530993	1968, 1969
530994-539999	1969
540000-540795	1966, 1969
540796-545009	1969
555000-556909	1966
558012-567400	1969
570087-570643	1966
570645-570755	1966, 1967
570857-570964	1966
580000-580080	1969
580086-580999	1966, 1967, 1969
600000-600998	1966, 1967, 1968 (LOW END)
600000-606090	1969 (HIGH END)
700000-700799	1966, 1967
750000-750999	1968, 1969
800000-800999	1966, 1967, 1968, 1969
801000-812838	1966, 1969
812900-819999	1969
820000-820087	1966, 1969
820088-823830	1966
824000-824999	1969
828002-847488	1966, 1969
847499-858999	1966, 1969
859001-895038	1967
895039-896999	1968
897000-898999	1967, 1969
899000-899999	1968
900000-901999	1970
~903000-999999	1968

**1970-1975:** From 1970 to 1975 the method of serializing instruments at Gibson became even more random. All numbers were impressed into the wood and a six-digit number was 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 rectangular labels on the acoustics, and small black, purple, and white rectangular labels were placed on electric models.

In 1970, the words **MADE IN USA** were impressed into the back of instrument headstocks (though a few instruments from the 1950s also had this). The difference between a 1960s and a 1970s Gibson model is the "MADE IN USA" stamp on the back of the headstock.

NUMBER	YEAR
000000S	1973
100000S	1970-1975
200000S	1973-1975
300000S	1974-1975
400000S	1974-1975
500000S	1974-1975
600000S	1970, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975
700000S	1970, 1971, 1972



NUMBER	YEAR
800000S	1973, 1974, 1975
900000S	1970, 1971, 1972
6 DIGITS + A	1970
A + 6 DIGITS	1973, 1974, 1975
B + 6 DIGITS	1974, 1975
C + 6 DIGITS	1974, 1975
D + 6 DIGITS	1974, 1975
E + 6 DIGITS	1974, 1975
F + 6 DIGITS	1974, 1975

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, six-digit serial numbers. It is estimated that Gibson's Kalamazoo plant continued to use the six-digit serial numbers through 1978 and 1979. So double check the serial numbers on those 1970s L-5s, Super 400s, and Super 5 BJBs!

**1975-1977:** During the period from 1975 to 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.

NUMBER	YEAR
99XXXXXX	1975
00XXXXXX	1976
06XXXXXX	1977

**1977-JUNE 2005:** Between 1997 and late June or early July 2005, Gibson used the same serialization system on all standard-built guitars. This updated system utilizes an impressed, eight-digit numbering scheme that covers both serializing and dating functions. The Custom/Historic/Art divisions do not use this system. Certain models in the Standard series also do not follow this, either. Please refer to the end of the section for exceptions. 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.

In 1994, for Gibson's Centennial, they used a special serialization. Every serial number started with 94 followed by six digits, which were the production dates and number (YYNNNNNN).

The three PPP numbers 001-499 indicate Kalamazoo production from 1977 to 1984. The Kalamazoo numbers were discontinued in 1984 when the factory closed. The three PPP numbers 500-999 indicate Nashville production from 1977 to 1989.

All currently manufactured Gibsons (non-custom shop) are stamped with a hand arbor, and start at 300 or 500, and continue until production is finished that day. This hand stamp used to be reset daily at #300 or #500 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 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.

**03202652** means the instrument was produced on November 16, 2002 and was the 152nd instrument stamped that day (assuming they started at 500).

There are a few exceptions to this system.

**JULY 2005-PRESENT:** In early July 2005, Gibson altered their serialization system a bit. A modified nine digit system was introduced with a new batch number added to the previous system. The new system follows the format of **YDDDYBPPP**. The first through fifth

digits and the seventh through ninth digits all follow the old system, but a batch number was implemented to better keep track of production and allow for more than five hundred instruments to be produced in a day. At the beginning of each day, the sixth digit is reset to 0. Once the last three numbers reach 699, the batch number moves on to 1, and the last three digits are reset to 500. Examples: 028360612 indicates a guitar that was stamped on the 283rd day (October 10th) in 2006 and was the 112th guitar stamped that day. 001071520 indicates a guitar that was stamped on the 10th day (January 10th) of 2007 and was the 220th guitar stamped on that day (it was part of the second batch and the 20th guitar of the second batch - first batch was of 200 guitars).

**Centennial Year/Models:** 1994 is the most notable exception, with the first two numbers representing the year, so all models start with 94 and are followed by six digits. The Centennial models produced for the 1994 model year have an inked-on serial number that is six digits long. The serial number appears as YYYYMM. The first four represent the number produced. They all started on 1894, which represents instrument #1, and 1994 would be instrument #101. The last two digits indicate the month of the guitar released. A new model was released each month with a total of fourteen different models that includes two prototypes. The last two numbers will range from one to fourteen.

**Special Runs/Limited Editions:** Certain special editions in the 1970s and 1980s may feature serial numbers with six digits in the configuration of YY NNNN. The YY indicates the year and the NNNN is the instrument ranking.

**Les Paul Classic:** The Les Paul Classic features a five- or six-digit number like the models had in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The serial number works just like it did back then with the first number indicating the last number in the year of production. The following four or five digits are production rank and if there is only four digits there will be a space between the first and last four digits, but if there are five digits they will all appear together. Gibson used the five digit numbers through 1999, and in 2000 they switched to the six digit numbers. Also, in 1989 only, a four digit number was first used that started with 9. No "Made In U.S.A." stamp appears by the serial number either.

**CUSTOM SHOP:** Regular production Custom Shop guitars utilize a serialization system of CSYRRRR. CS stands for Custom Shop, the Y indicates the last digit in the year of production, and the following digits indicate the production ranking. Earlier Custom Shop models may use a Y9NNN or Y9NNNN (if the production run is higher than 1000 units in a year). The Y indicates the last digit of the year the guitar was built. 9 is assigned to every custom shop guitar, and the last three or four digits are production numbers. Example: CS31205 is a Custom Shop instrument produced in 2003 and was the 1,205th guitar built that year.

**Reissues:** Early Les Paul reissues produced between the late 1970s and 1993 should have an inked-on serial number on the back of the headstock. The first number should indicate the last year of the production. For example, 8 0358 would be a 1988. The Heritage Flying V, Moderne, and Chet Atkins CE produced between 1981 and 1983 will feature a serial number with a letter prefix followed by three digits. The letter may range from A through K, and the number started at 001. Most numbers finished at 099 and would move to the next letter. However, certain models do feature higher numbers than 100. The Heritage Series Explorer produced between 1982 and 1983 has a serial number that starts with 1 + 4 digits. These digits are strictly production numbers.

In 1992, the serialization of reissues became standard. The configuration of M YNNN is still in use by Gibson. The M indicates the model code, specifically the last digit of the year of the reissue. The Y indicates the last number of the year of the guitar, and the NNN are the production numbers. For example, 4 8256 indicates a 1954 Les Paul reissue built in 1998 and is the 256th instrument of the year. The following codes represent most of the reissues:

NUMBER	MODELS
2	1952 LES PAUL
4	1954 LES PAUL
6	1956 LES PAUL
NUMBER	MODELS
7	1957 LES PAUL
8	1958 LES PAUL, EXPLORER

NUMBER	MODELS
9	1959 LES PAUL, FLYING V
0	1960 LES PAUL

In 1997, Gibson reissued many of the 1960s models. A similar serialization system was used, but it is different than the 1950s reissues. The configuration consists of YYNNNM, where the YY is the last two years of the guitar's construction date, the NNN is the production number, and the M is the model code, specifically the last year of the reissue. For example, 021568 indicates a 1968 Les Paul Custom reissue built in 2002 and was the 156th instrument built that year. The following codes represent most of the reissues:

NUMBER	MODELS
1	SG CUSTOM/SG SPECIAL/LES PAUL
2	SG STANDARD
3	1963 FIREBIRD I
4	1964 FIREBIRD III
5	1965 FIREBIRD V/FIREBIRD VII
8	1968 LES PAUL CUSTOM

**HISTORIC ES MODELS:** Historic ES models use a slightly different system than the Custom Shop. The configuration consists of a letter prefix + MYNNN. The letter, which is usually an A or B, indicates that it is part of the Historic Collection, the M indicates the last year of reissue model, the Y indicates the last number of the year the guitar was built, and the final NNN digits are production numbers. For example, A-93012 is a 2003 1959 ES-335 with Dot inlays reissue and it was the 12th instrument produced that year. The following codes represent most of the reissues:

NUMBER	MODELS
2	ES-295
3	1963 ES-335 BLOCK INLAYS
4	ES-330
5	ES-345
9 W/ A PREFIX	1959 ES-335 DOT INLAYS
9 W/ B PREFIX	ES-355

**CARVED TOP MODELS:** On models with carved or arched tops the number will normally appear on an orange label. The serialization used on these instruments consists of a format YDDYRRR, which is very similar to Gibson's standard serialization system. The first and fifth digits indicate the last two years, the second, third, and fourth indicate the day of the year according to the Julian calendar, and the final three digits indicate the numbering sequence of carved/arched top instruments produced that day. In 2000, Gibson changed this system so every serial number starts with 2 instead of 0. Examples: 21364003 indicates a guitar stamped on the 136th day (May 16th) of 2004 and was the 3rd carved top model stamped that day.

**CUSTOM SHOP SIGNATURE MODELS:** Most Custom Shop signature guitars use a serialization system with the artists initials and the instrument production number.

The Gibson Les Paul Chambered Reissue (also known as the Cloud Nine) has a "CR" prefix before the serial number. This model was introduced in 2004.

**Source:** *A.R. Duchossoir, Gibson Electrics, The Classic Years and Walter Carter and George Gruhn, Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars.*

## G & L

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 and 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
YEAR	GUITAR	BASS
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

**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.**

## GRETSCH

The first Gretsch electric guitar appeared in 1940. Before World War II, 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.

**1940-1949:** Serial numbers were penciled onto labels on the inside backs of Gretsch's higher-end instruments. The number can usually be viewed from the bass side f-hole. Numbers were assigned consecutively, but little is known about year-to-year specifics.

APPROX. NUMBERS	YEARS
001 - 1000	1939-1945
1001 - 2000	1946-1949

**1949-1965:** The label changed to read: The "Fred Gretsch Mfg. Co." with the company's address in New York. There are two spots where the model is printed and serial number is written in. The serial number should be in red and the model number written in blue or black. The label could be viewed from the f-hole on hollowbody models. On solidbody models, the number was placed inside the electronic compartment either on the wood or on the control plate. Some models produced in the 1960s may have the number impressed into the back of the headstock.

APPROX. NUMBERS	YEAR
2000 - 3000S	1950
3000 - 5000S	1951
5000 - 6000S	1952
6000 - 8000S	1953
8000 - 12000S	1954
12000 - 16000S	1955
16000 - 21000S	1956
21000 - 26000S	1957
26000 - 30000S	1958
30000 - 34000S	1959
34000 - 39000S	1960
39000 - 45000S	1961
45000 - 52000S	1962
52000 - 63000S	1963
63000 - 77000S	1964
77000 - 85000S	1965

**1965-1972:** 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:

997September, 1969 (7th instrument produced)  
 11255November, 1972 (55th instrument produced)  
 70250July, 1968 (250th 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.

**1973-1981:** In 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:

12-4387December, 1974 (387th Instrument Produced)

3-745March, 1977 (45th Instrument Produced)

10-056October, 1980 (56th Instrument Produced)

**1989-2002:** Gretsch serialization beginning in 1989 utilized a nine digit format (YYMMmmm(m)xxx). YY indicates the last two digits of the year (i.e., 97 = 1997). M or MM indicates the month of the year (1-12). mmm(m) references the model number with either three or four digits (i.e., a 6136 reads 136). x(xx) refers to a one-to- three-digit production count. Examples: A currently manufactured Country Club Model (Model No. 6196) with ser. no. 01319652 indicates it was built in March of 2001, the last three 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 three digits of the model number, and 447 is the production count.

**2003-PRESENT:** When Fender bought Gretsch in 2003, they also implemented a new serialization system. This new format follows a two letter and eight digit serialization system (JTYMMNNNN). The first two letters should be JT indicating the Japan Terada factory, the first two numbers indicate the last two digits of the year (03 indicates 2003), the third and fourth digits indicate the month (08 indicates August), and the final four digits are a general numerical sequence that has no specific model numbering.

## GUILD

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 and 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 two-letter prefix and an independent numbering series for each individual model between 1966 and 1969.

Continued Original Serialization Series

### APPROXIMATE

LAST NUMBER	YEAR
46608	1966
46637	1967

### APPROXIMATE

LAST NUMBER	YEAR
46656	1968
46695	1969

The models that were numbered with the new two-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 two-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: D300041D-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.

**1990-2005:** 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 has a series of charts available on their website ([www.guildguitars.com](http://www.guildguitars.com)) 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 December 1997. All production of Guild electric guitars halted in 2005 when they moved to the Tacoma factory, so no serialization follows the new system.

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

## HAMER

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 to 1981, Hamer USA employed two 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 four-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 five or six-digit serial number. The first digit indicates the year that the instrument was built. The next four or five 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:

NUMBER	YEAR
7 0001-9 1450	1970S
0 1451-9 24192	1980S
0 24193- 9 50155	1990S
0 50156-	2000S

**Hamer Serialization courtesy Jol Dantzig & Frank Rindone Hamer USA.**

## HEARTFIELD

Serial numbers are comprised of a letter and five digits. The letter indicates the month the guitar was produced.

LETTER	MONTH
A	January
B	February
C	March
D	April
E	May
F	June
G	July
H	August
I	September
J	October
K	November
L	December

The following two numbers indicate the year.

NUMBER	YEAR
88	1988
89	1989
90	1990
91	1991
92	1992
93	1993

The following three numbers are the production number for that month. However, a different system was used at least once (mainly Talon models). Instead of a two-digit number to indicate the year, only a single digit was used. The digit indicated that last number of the year.

NUMBER	YEAR
8	1988
9	1989
0	1990
1	1991
2	1992
3	1993

The following three or four numbers are production numbers for that year.

## HERITAGE

Luckily, when Gibson moved to Nashville they brought the serialization system with them! Heritage uses a letter prefix followed by a series of numbers. The letter indicates the year in which the guitar was built and the following numbers are production numbers.

LETTER	YEAR
B	1985
C	1986
D	1987
E	1988
F	1989
G	1990
H	1991
I	1992
J	1993
K	1994
L	1995
M	1996
N	1997
O	1998

LETTER	YEAR
P	1999
Q	2000
R	2001
S	2002
T	2003
U	2004
V	2005
W	2006
X	2007
Y	2008

## HOFNER

The sequence of Hofner serial numbers does not provide an exact method for dating Hofner guitars. Hofners were available in Germany since 1949 (and earlier, if you consider 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

1953-1959

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 *diamond* logo.

1961-1963 Rectangular metal case, six slot-screw or six rectangular pole pieces. The Hofner diamond 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 from 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

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

The numbers following the Series letters indicate two 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) and BL1025 (hum/sin/hum with a pickguard), etc.

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.

**1975-1987:** In general, Ibanez serial numbers between 1975 and 1987 had seven digits, arranged **XYZZZZ**. 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, in 1987 the **XYZZZZ** still appeared the same, but the new listing shifted to **XYZZZZ**.

**1987-1997:** 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 198**Y** and 199**Y**. 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 in approximately which time periods. All following numbers again are the production ranking code (**ZZZZ**).

**1997-PRESENT:** In mid-1997, Ibanez changed the format, and the second two digits after the alphabetical prefix indicate the last two digits of the actual year of production (i.e., F0003680 indicates a 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 indicated that the product met the electronic standards of the European Common Market, similar to our UL approval.

For more information on individual Ibanez guitar models, refer to *Ibanez - The Untold Story*, by Paul Specht, Michael Wright, Jim Donahue, and Pat Lefferts. This book features all of the history about Ibanez and features individual model listings. It may be easier to date the guitar from the production time that it was produced.

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

## MARTIN

Martin electric guitars were only produced between 1961 and 1968, and again in 1979 until 1982; however, a different system was used for the second run of electrics. For a complete listing of serial numbers, please refer to the *Blue Book of Acoustic Guitars*.

NUMBER	YEAR
181297	1961
187384	1962
193327	1963
199626	1964
207030	1965
217215	1966

NUMBER	YEAR
230095	1967
241925	1968

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

## MATSUMOKU

(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 and 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 and 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*)

## MICRO-FRETS

Micro-Frets produced less than 3,000 guitars and basses. As in the case of production guitars, neck plates with stamped serial numbers were pre-purchased in lots, and then bolted to the guitars during the neck attachment. The serial numbers were utilized by Micro-Frets for warranty work, and the four-digit numbers do fall roughly in a usable list. This list should be used for rough approximations only.

NUMBER	YEAR
1000-1300	1967-1969
1323-3000	1969-1971
3000-3670	1971-1974

## MOONSTONE

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.

NUMBER	YEAR
<b>EAGLE (Electrics)</b>	
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

NUMBER	YEAR
<b>EXPLODER Guitar models</b>	
(65 total instruments made)	
7801-7806	1980
7007-7020	1981
7021-7052	1982
7053-7065	1983
<b>EXPLODER Bass models</b>	
(35 total instruments made)	
6801-6803	1980
6004-6013	1981
6014-6031	1982
6032-6035	1983
<b>FLYING V Guitar models</b>	
(52 total instruments made)	
5801-5812	1980
5013-5028	1981
5029-5045	1982
5046-5048	1983
5049-5052	1984
<b>FLYING V Bass models</b>	
(6 total instruments made)	
9001-9006	1981
<b>M-80</b>	
(64 total instruments made)	
4801-4808	1980
4809-4816	1981
4017-4031	1981
4032-4052	1982
4053-4064	1983
<b>MOONDOLINS</b>	
T001-T002	1981
T003-T006	1983
T007	1984
<b>VULCAN Guitar models</b>	
(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
<b>VULCAN Bass models</b>	
(19 total instruments made)	
V001-V002	1982
V003-V016	1983
V017-V019	1984

## MUSIC MAN

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 (PRS)

PRS regular production set neck five-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, 2000
1	1991, 2001
2	1992, 2002
3	1993, 2003
4	1994, 2004
5	1985, 1995, 2005
6	1986, 1996, 2006
7	1987, 1997, 2007
8	1988, 1998, 2008
9	1989, 1999, 2009

**SET-NECK MODELS:** If a PRS guitar has a set-neck the serial number will appear on the headstock, and the the following chart will be useful in further determining the year or production. Examples: 7 2520 is a 1987, 5 22512 is a 1995, and 2 71927 is a 2002. This chart is based only on approximates.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
0001-0400	1985
0401-1700	1986
1701-3500	1987
3501-5400	1988
5401-7600	1989
7601-10100	1990
10101-12600	1991
12601-15000	1992
15001-17900	1993
17901-20900	1994
20901-24600	1995
24601-29500	1996
29501-34600	1997
34601-39100	1998
39101-44499	1999
44500-52199	2000
52200-62199	2001
62200-72353	2002
72354-82254	2003
82255-92555	2004
92556-103103	2005
103104-	2006

**CE MODELS:** If a PRS guitar has a bolt-on neck, the serial number will appear on the neckplate, and the the following chart will be useful in further determining the year or production. The format follows closely to the set neck models except either a 7 on earlier models or a CE on later models separate the year digit and the following production rank. Examples: 174425 would be a 1991, 7 CE16274 would be a 1997, and 2 CE24510 would be a 2002. This chart is based only on approximates.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
0001-0270	1988
0271-1830	1989
1831-3200	1990
3201-4540	1991
4541-7090	1992
7091-8820	1993
8821-10700	1994
10701-13000	1995
13001-14680	1996
14681-17130	1997
17131-19580	1998
19581-20749	1999
20750-21599	2000
21600-23199	2001
23200-25389	2002
25390-26399	2003
26400-27900	2004
27901-29377	2005
29378-	2006

**EG MODELS:** EG bolt-on models follow the same style as the CE models, except a 5 or an EG separates the year and production number. Examples: 0 50415 is a 1990 and 5 EG3261 is a 1995. This chart is based only on approximates.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
0001-0920	1990
0921-1290	1991
1291-2070	1992
2071-2870	1993
2871-3190	1994
3191-3300	1995

**SA (SWAMP ASH) MODELS:** Swamp Ash models also follow the same style as the CE and EG models, except an 8 or an SA separates the year and production number. Examples: 7 800356 is a 1997 and 4 SA02196 is a 2004. This chart is based only on approximates.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
00001-00410	1997
00411-00760	1998
00761-00969	1999
00970-01179	2000
01180-01399	2001
01400-01899	2002
01900-02099	2003
02100-02287	2004
02288-	2005

**SE MODELS:** On the SE line, only the year can be identified by the serial number that is indicated by a letter prefix. The following numbers are production ranking, and currently there is no information on them. Examples: A10948 is a 2000 and G05279 is a 2006.

PREFIX LETTER	YEAR
A	2000
B	2001
C	2002
D	2003
E	2004
F	2005
G	2006
H	2007

**BASSES:** PRS basses also follow the same style of serialization that the guitars do. Set neck basses built between 1986 and 1991 will have a serial number on the back of the headstock that has a number indicating the year followed by a 9 that indicates a set-neck, and four more digits that indicate production ranking. Examples: 8 90305 is a 1988 and 1 90775 is a 1991.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
0001-0230	1986/1987
0231-0350	1988
0351-0680	1989
0681-0730	1990
0731-0800	1991

Bolt-on basses built between 1989 and 1991 will have a serial number on the neckplate that has a number indicating the year followed by a 4 that indicates a bolt-on neck, and four more digits that indicate production ranking. Example: 0 40050 is a 1990.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
0001-0030	1989
0031-0140	1990
0141-0200	1991

Electric basses built between 2000 and 2004 will have a serial number on the headstock that has a number indicating the year followed by the prefix EB that indicates an electric bass, and five more digits that indicate production ranking. Examples: 0 EG00056 is a 2000 and 3 EB00486 is a 2003.

SERIAL # RANGE	YEAR
00007-00072	2000
00073-00199	2001
00200-00422	2002
00423-00501	2003
00502-	2004

**Source:** The PRS Guitar Book by Dave Burrluck, Balafon Books and [www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com).

## PEAVEY

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.

**Information courtesy Michael Wright, Guitar Stories, Volume One.**

## RICKENBACKER

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, they 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-letter 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
PREFIX	MONTH
A	January
B	February
C	March
D	April

PREFIX	MONTH
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	September
W	October
X	November
Y	December

**1987-1998:** 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. It is unknown what was used for 1997 and 1998.

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).

**1999-PRESENT:** The numbering/lettering system was replaced by two digits that indicate the last two numbers of the year (99=1999, 02=2002). Rickenbacker has a serial number decoder on their website, and readers are encouraged to use this for more specific identification.

*Information courtesy of Tommy Thomasson, Rickenbacker International Corporation.*

## TOM ANDERSON GUITARWORKS

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.

Serial numbers follow one of these two formats: 06-05-99 or 06-05-99A. Anderson's website [www.andersonguitars.com](http://www.andersonguitars.com), features a search engine that reports the specifications on every guitar Anderson has made. This is the best way to identify an Anderson guitar.

## WASHBURN

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 = 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

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 (two letters followed by five 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 ten years.

After the two letter prefixes, five 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 - 19 - 218. 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 twelfth 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 eight-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) 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 them your request.