

Rarity, One Man's Observations and Thoughts

by

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Mirror, mirror on the wall, which is the rarest one of all?

There always seems to be interest about the rarity of the various models made by High Standard. For the earlier pistols, Charlie Petty's book provides some insight to rarity through the published quantities by model. Often people assume that a gun is rare simply because they haven't seen one. More than a few collectors have commented that the MODEL HD is rarer than Petty's book suggests because they are not often seen. Absent any persuasive proof, I will stick with Petty's numbers. Although the numbers found in Petty's book may not be exactly correct, based on my own causal observations of the factory records, I feel that any error is so small that it is unlikely that the error would change a gun's ranking in a rarity list.

The process of counting each catalog number in the factory records is a monumental undertaking. I have counted the numbers for catalog numbers for just the "G" prefix serial number pistols and the "SH" prefix serial number pistols. It is an interesting but tiring experience. I have not yet checked my figures with John Currie's figures but I expect they will be close and any difference is probably not worth the effort required to resolve it. In my opinion, rarely will the inevitable errors in counting all the different catalog numbers have significant impact on a High Standard gun's rarity ranking. The exception where I feel it would be important to go back and count or recount the times a catalog number appears in the factory records is where: 1) for some reason the original count indicates a potential of true rarity, 2) a relatively small difference in count difference would make a significant change in a gun's rarity ranking and 3) there is some reason to suspect the original count.

One of the problems with High Standard gun rarity is that there is not enough data to base rarity information on the number of surviving guns or ideally, by the number of surviving guns by condition like the coin collectors do. We simply have not advanced to the point where that data is available through shared resources. At this time the best we might hope for would be an indication of rarity based on production quantities as determined from counting the catalog numbers in the factory records. However this is not necessarily a good representation of the rarity today since we have no idea what percentage of guns originally produced have survived, let alone in what condition. The best we could do would be to set up a chart with the catalog number representing the gun and three columns of rarity - "Production" rarity, "Speculated Survivor" rarity, and "Known Survivor" rarity. I doubt that any given group of High Standard collectors could reach consensus in the second column with or without knowing the first column's numbers and I believe it will be a long time if ever before we could compile a known survivor file for the third column that had sufficient data to have any meaning. So, for now, we may have to be satisfied with relative rarity being suggested by the catalog number counts - the counts of the guns shipped.

In my opinion the surviving percentage will vary by the type of gun and the model. I would suggest that the rare "US" prefix black powder Bicentennial revolvers have a high survivor percentage. Likewise, other commemorative guns probably have a high number of survivors. However, I have observed a relatively high percentage of the commemorative pistols that have become separated from their presentation cases. The cheaper guns are less likely to have high survivor percentages even though the actual survivor numbers may remain high because the cheaper guns were generally manufactured in greater numbers

Some of the guns had finishes or features that compromised their ability to survive in a pristine condition. The colored revolvers had a finish that did not stand the test of time very well and so the number of survivors with an excellent finish is not likely to be very high. The early revolvers which did not have the spring return ejector generally have blemishes on the frame where the user closed the cylinder without pulling the ejector closed. Other guns simply weren't properly cared for or were well used with a resulting loss of original finish.

Over the years in coin collecting there have been and still are several rarity scales for indicating the rarity of known coins. Generally these scales apply to known surviving coins. Q. David Bowers, a noted coin dealer, coin collector, and author of coin collecting books, has in the past recommended a Universal Rarity Scale (URS) that is not only suited for use with coins but with any collectable. Bower's scale is basically a binary scale that has some rounding for convenience or ease of use.

The Universal Rarity Scale

URS-0	None known	URS-11	501 to 1,000 known
URS-1	1 known, unique	URS-12	1,001 to 2,000 known
URS-2	2 known	URS-13	2,001 to 4,000 known
URS-3	3 or 4 known	URS-14	4,001 to 8,000 known
URS-4	5 to 8 known	URS-15	8,001 to 16,000 known
URS-5	9 to 16 known	URS-16	16,001 to 32,000 known
URS-6	17 to 32 known	URS-17	32,001 to 65,000 known
URS-7	33 to 64 known	URS-18	65,001 to 125,000 known
URS-8	65 to 125 known	URS-19	125,001 to 250,000 known
URS-9	126 to 250 known	URS-20	250,001 to 500,000 known
URS-10	251 to 500 known		Etc.

The chart can be calculated for any quantity but as a practical matter, for High Standard it could end at URS-19 since the largest number of any catalog number falls within that range. There are 16 catalog numbers URS-17 through URS-19. The word "known" in the chart should probably be changed, for High Standards at this time, to "produced" since we don't know the numbers of survivors. As you can see from the URS scale, a 50% survivor rate would only raise a gun one level on the scale and a 25% survivor rate would only raise it two positions on the scale.

To my knowledge only the High Standard hand guns have been counted by catalog number. The early rim fire rifles and shotguns were not serialized and so do not appear in the factory serial number log which makes rarity determination for these guns impossible.

Although Petty's figures do not distinguish between numbers produced with the different barrel lengths, there is certainly interest along these lines. Unfortunately the early High Standard factory records make no indication of barrel length and it is not until the late 1940's when High Standard went to unit record type records and assigned a catalog number to each model and variation that this information became a part of the records. From the lever name series through the 102 series change in design series generally resulted in a new catalog number. After the 102 series they did not generally change a catalog number with the change in design series number. They did change the catalog numbers with the deletion of the accessories during the 106 series.

Likewise, the factory records do not indicate the takedown types found on the early models. So rarity for the different takedowns is pure speculation although the duration of production and the relative numbers of all guns made during that same period suggests what the relative rarities for a particular takedown might be.

By manipulating the qualifying criteria, it is possible to change the relative rarity of a gun. Dividing the total number for a single model into the variations created by specifying the barrel length, takedown type, grip type, etc., can define varieties which are certainly more rare but are still of unknown rarity ranking at least for the early pre catalog number guns.

Other variations such as differences in roll marks, design series numbers, trim color (finish), serial number format, etc., can also be used to subdivide the various models in to smaller more rare groups. However, since there were no changes in catalog numbers for most of these changes, the degree of difficulty for ever determining a rarity number for these variations is much greater than simply counting the catalog numbers because one must count the catalog numbers between two serial numbers which cannot be determined independently from the factory records. These transition points will only be determined through sharing data observed in our own collections and in the files at shows or in come cases where the serial number is available at auctions.

The later guns, beginning at the time when the unit records keeping system was employed, and all later guns, do have catalog numbers indicated and so the relative rarity can be determined through great effort. Unfortunately there are again variations in

the design and markings of the guns which are not represented by a change in catalog number. For some of the later guns there is not a change in catalog numbers when the design series changed. i.e. the change from the 102 series to the 103 series did not result in a change in catalog number for the models and their variations. Therefore we cannot determine from the factory records the quantities of a specific variation of a particular model. All we can determine is the totals for the entire number of a variation by catalog number for a model excluding series changes.

Several members have asked about the numbers of 10" SUPERMATIC TROPHYs by series but those quantities are not available directly from the factory records. To establish a reasonable quantity by series, it will be necessary for the collectors to share data for the transitions from one series to the next because often this data is not available in the factory records. Experience has taught me that there is often no exact transition serial number but that generally there is an overlap of the earlier models with the later models. So, shared data is the only hope in solving this puzzle.

For example, if you use Petty's number of 1200 for the first Olympic, this model would be a URS-12. If you subdivide the 1200 into the numbers for each catalog number - 9040 for the 4.50" barrel, 9041 for the 6.75" barrel and 9042 for the combination with both barrels - some variations are rarer than others. My count shows that there are probably closer to 1300 first Olympics which does not change the above number of URS -12. However, rarity by the individual catalog numbers tells a different story: the 9040 would be a URS-11, the 9041 a URS-10, and the 9042 a URS-7.

In fact there are two different variations of the first Olympic frame, one for the straight backed magazine and one for the humped back magazine. The straight back magazine was the original design and was not produced for very long making the three variations for the first Olympic with the straight back even rarer. Unfortunately there is no different catalog number to show the change and only an estimate of the transition of point for this change can be used to estimate rarity. My educated guess is that the straight back 9040 is a URS-6 the straight back 9041 is a URS-1 and the straight back 9042 is a URS-1

Likewise, placing qualifications on the criteria for specifying which guns are included for a group's URS number can greatly affect the results. If for example you asked the URS number for the first Olympics shipped in 1976 you find that the results yield a gun with a URS-1 rating. Perhaps this is not a meaningful criteria and perhaps it has little interest to most collectors but it would be one way to wiggle the selection criteria to show a gun to have a very low URS number.

One of the difficulties in determining rarity was not knowing what some of the catalog numbers found in the records were. I had a listing of catalog numbers from Charlie Petty that he got from the factory while he was there doing his research. I had another later version of that list from the John Hintlian collection. There were a lot of catalog numbers in the records that were not on the list. Then one day while I was researching an inquiry about a Sears revolver I found that the gun in question had one of the unknown catalog numbers. Looking through the Sears catalogs, I found that a lot of these previously unknown catalog numbers found in the factory records were for Sears

guns and that even though High Standard had their own catalog numbers for some of these Sears guns, High Standard was using the Sears catalog numbers in their records. Other catalog numbers that were not on High Standard's list turned out to be Western Auto revolvers. There are several catalog numbers that are still not known to me as to what they are and whether or not they represent specials for another company or contract. Finding details about the Kroyden guns would undoubtedly resolve some questions about what some of the presently unknown catalog numbers represent.

Rarities created by factory errors are another class of rarity. Examples are guns which have omitted or inverted roll marks. Consecutively numbered guns are also somewhat rare but not all collectors find this rarity appealing. Another rarity would be two or more guns with the same serial number and with the same catalog number (doubles or triples). Of even greater rarity would be guns with the same serial number and different catalog numbers from same design series i.e. one Sport King and one Field King or with the same serial number and from different design series i.e. one revolver and one pistol. These are examples of great rarity to be sure but this kind of error is not even as rare as some planned models. I view these errors as having more of novelty appeal than rarity appeal.

Another factor that is relevant to collectables is desirability, the interest factor. Interest factor is a term used at times to indicate just how much demand a particular gun might have. A variety with a very high interest factor would be in high demand, with several hundreds of collectors desiring the variety. A medium interest factor may indicate that the variety is desired by dozens of collectors and a low interest factor might indicate that the gun is sought by just a handful of collectors. Unfortunately the Interest Factor cannot be quantified easily, if at all.

The interest factor, combined with the rarity, help to determine the value of a certain gun. However, condition (the eye appeal of the gun) is also a major contributing factor.

As a gun variety becomes better known, the interest factor may rise as demand increases. This may cause the price or value of certain guns to increase without any change in the estimated quantity available. On the other hand, if a large quantity of a variety becomes known or if a previously speculated quantity is shown to be significantly low, the value of that gun may decrease as the supply outstrips the demand. A combination of condition, supply and demand almost always dictates the price or value of a particular gun.