

## Schrade Knife Identification

It would be virtually impossible for me, or anyone else for that matter to list all of the thousands and thousands of patterns, special and limited editions, private special factory orders, and variants that were produced by Imperial, Ulster, Schrade Cutlery, Schrade Walden, Imperial Schrade, and Imperial Stag. Or the associated companies of George Schrade Cutlery and so forth. While I will endeavor to be as thorough and comprehensive as possible at this time, the listings here will necessarily be incomplete. New information is still being discovered almost daily, and no doubt will be for some time.

Therefore, it behooves the collector to learn the basic patterns and materials, identifying marks, packaging and sheaths, and to maintain an updated reference library, either in a special loose leaf binder, or a database. I use both and sometimes even that is not enough!

Helpful materials include (but are not limited to) periodicals with reviews and advertisements, photographs of examples with as much detail as possible, and old catalogs. This is in addition to the available volumes by Levine, Clemente, Langton, Russell, and Voyles. Special books also exist showing some of the variations of tangstamps. Foremost should be the actual knives in your collection and the collections of friends.

Keep records of the subtle differences you see. Some may be errors salvaged from the scrap bins or from storage for sale to employees in the company stores, and some may be special factory orders with different materials and design details. Quite a few samples and prototypes have hit the market which never went into production, and which were never intended to be released to the public by Imperial Schrade, and tons of parts went out the door after the liquidation.

Knife parts have become a genre of their own among collectors. Raw, semi finished, and finished blade blanks, unmounted shields, and even some of the original factory scrimshaw and tang stamping dies were salvaged from the closed factory and make for excellent interesting and unique historic displays of the cutler's arts. They can also be fodder for counterfeiters, but few of the modern Schrade knives are worth the time required for the small return. This may not be the case in the future.

Handle materials for most patterns can vary widely. While the production Old Timers and Uncle Henrys are basically the same materials throughout their productions, some variance in colors may be found, particularly in the UH series. Several different base materials and accent dyes were tried over the years, and an occasional knife will be found with all base color showing, and no accent dye at all, or all accent dye showing. These seem to have gained unofficial nicknames of "buckskins" and "blackies". In the original dye process, the dye intensity varied as the dye became weakened and the operators judged dye times by experience, rather than McBeth color density analysis and film build samples.

In late 2002 or early 2003, a significant manufacturing process change was begun. Previously, all of the covers (scales) were molded in the Ellenville factory from tan or cream base material as slabs, then batch dyed with the brown accent color. They were then placed in a die that cut the

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slabs to exact length and punched the pin holes. When the covers were mounted and glazed (finished) flush with the bolsters on the ends, the tan or cream base material showed abutting the bolsters. With the new process, the covers were molded to length with the holes in place, then dyed. These new covers can be spotted because the ends next to the bolsters are dyed, and a thin brown line is formed at the joint. While all assembly and finish work still took place in Ellenville, the covers themselves were imported ready to assemble, saving molding, cutting and dying steps. Knives with these new style covers include all of the 2004 anniversary issues, both in the Centennial tins, and the dual shield editions, as well as all regular 2003 / 2004 production. All of the 24OTX was produced using this process with the new molded scales, but of course the black delrin required no dye step. Other patterns were scheduled for the same process change such as the 108OT, 807UH, and 834UH, so a few of those may be seen with similar characteristics, but there were, as with any major process change, problems encountered which were being worked out on the 34OT while the other patterns were mostly assembled with the older style covers in the traditional manner. It is uncertain how many of these other patterns were produced using the new covers. Probably sample amounts of 200 or less, if any. I have noted a 33OT in my collection which used the new covers. Yet another late change was the use of robotics in the glazing process. What had been a hand/eye operation was automated on the 8OT, 34OT, and 108OT in the last year or so of production, though you will not likely see the difference in the finished product. If anything, you will probably see more conformity.

Schrade made a running change from the traditional 1095 carbon steel blades in the Old Timer series to 420 stainless in the late 1990's. Then in the last few years of production, the blade grind of the Sharpfinger was changed from the historic flat ("plain" in Schrade talk) grind to a hollow grind. Looking at both my own collection and my photo archives, this change is very noticeable. The grind line at the ricasso became a pronounced arc with the hollow grind, evident in any decent photographs, and easily seen when the knives are held in the hand. The reason I was given for the change was that it was less expensive to produce, required no dedicated tooling and, in the eyes of some, increased the perceived value of the knife.

Almost all new knives and some old knives / patterns were changed (Clip hanger, Old Timer Classics) to be hollow ground.

As a manufacturing engineer, my experience and judgement tells me that it was also probably an easier operation to perform with automation, the earlier knives likely being individually hand ground (hand/eye operations are more costly and less exact). Some blanks I have seen to support this supposition by the fact that they appear to be "setup pieces", where operators were adjusting the vises that held the blanks to get the two sides evenly ground. Doing this operation with automation may actually have been slower, but my experience has shown me that one operator can run two or more machines simultaneously, and if the machines are properly adjusted by set-up machinists, far less skilled operators are able to feed them, inspect the parts, and monitor them. This is where cost savings comes in, as well as less human error resulting in lowered scrap rates.

These are just a few selected late examples of engineering changes that can help the observant collector distinguish between broad production run dates.

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Tangstamps can be another pretty obvious clue. While most people who collect Schrades are aware of the company name change in mid 1973 from Schrade Walden to Schrade Cutlery Corp., few have taken the time to really study the tangstamp placements and text styles. I have identified several different stamps in many patterns, particularly the fixed blade Old Timer series. While the dies were quite durable, they did wear and had to be replaced, just as the dies used on coins at the U.S. Mint. Anyone familiar with coin collecting will know that a coin bearing markings of a rare die can spell a vast increase in value and collectability. It is not so farfetched to think that this may some day be the case with Schrade knives. Already the oldest knives have a following of tangstamp collectors. With the newer Schrades (1960's-2004) clues exist which allow dating these variances into definable time frames, at least insofar as the more major changes are concerned.

Identifying original Schrade knives has taken on a whole new dimension with the introduction of the new Chinese copies being manufactured there for the new owner of the trademarks, copyrights, and patents, Taylor Brands LLC, aka Taylor Cutlery, and knives being produced by Bear and Son and Camillus under contract from Smokey Mountain Knife Works which has acquired license rights to some of the trademarks from Taylor. It behooves a serious collector to learn the differences between these copies and the originals. All I have seen so far do have discernable differences if one takes the time to inspect them. I do not consider them to be Schrades as defined in the parameters of this discourse.

All genuine Schrade knives were produced prior to the auction in October, 2004. Well over one hundred patterns and variants exist so far, not counting pattern copies adapted and produced by other companies under their own brand names. Some of these are interesting in their own right, such as the Sharpfinger pattern produced by United Cutlery based on the 152OTX prototype and made in their U.S. Arrowhead factory. It is not a big leap of the imagination to think a new genre of Schrade collectibles will spring from the post-Schrade pattern productions by these other American companies. At least they readily mark them with their own brands and identify these new production knives as such.