

History of Lowden model designation

This is the story that explains how George told back in 2004 while watching 'Top Gear' with the very funny Jeremy Clarkson going on (as only he can) about different badges on cars made in the same factory. In this case he was talking about the Lotus factory! Then he went on about model numbers with Porsche and succeeded in confusing us all, which was the object of the exercise I guess.

Just over 40 years ago George was a young guitar maker unfamiliar with most things to do with guitars and especially in the wider guitar market. Martin was a famous guitar maker but Gibson was his favourite. After he designed and build some Mahogany and Rosewood guitar models the big question came along: what do we call them? While George liked the idea of using names such as Gibson sometimes did like the 'Dove' and 'Hummingbird' models he was not given to poetic creativity and thus had a hard time finding any names that made him happy.

After a while he came up with the idea to use the wood species as a name. The first idea was to use the wood used for the back and sides to identify each model. So for example the "M" was chosen for all Mahogany guitars and "R" for all Rosewood guitars... but "M" sounded like a motorway (freeway) to him and "R" sounded like a car. Back to at the drawing board the idea came to use botanical name of the back and side wood? So that would have meant that mahogany would be 'S' for Swietenia and Indian Rosewood would be 'D' for Dalbergia. George didn't like the designation 'D' for obvious reasons and so plumped for the second part of the botanical name for Indian Rosewood: 'Dalbergia Latifolia' so all Indian rosewood models became 'L' for Latifolia.

This wasn't entirely satisfactory either because what would to do when referring to Brazilian Rosewood guitars 'Dalbergia Nigra' (neither D nor N sound right) so it was decided to just name all Rosewood guitars 'L' and all Mahogany guitars 'S'

This name designation was used up until the early nineties when the production company which I gave a license to build according to my quality and technical standards - changed all the model numbers to be prefixed with a letter denoting the shape and size. His original design notes that were used to train the luthiers in the small Japanese factory in 1980 show that he refers to the body shape as "Original Lowden'. It is most likely that is where the "O" name came from.

Therefore the following would provide pretty close comparisons between old and new:

- The old S10 became the new O10
- The old S22 became the new O22



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- The old L25 became the new O25
- The old L32 became the new O32 etc etc

In the early eighties George designed a new mid-sized shape guitar voiced originally for flat-picking. This model was denoted by adding an "F" after the model number. An S 27f was the mid-sized Mahogany model, the L27F was the Rosewood version.

The numbers were to denote the amount of inlays and the selected grade of wood used on each model. The reason the numbers were chosen was to avoid numbers widely used by other companies for example 18, 28, 45 etc.

So in theory the wood used on the 25s and 32s and 38s was from the better cuts, but in practice as George is very particular anyway with wood selection. The woods used on all models are of a very high standard. Indeed, for example, soundboard wood which is perhaps not exactly cut on the 1/4 and is therefore missing some medullary ray figure, sometimes is the ideal choice if you are looking for extra warmth and bass response. Wood which is cut perfectly on the 1/4 will be stiffer and therefore will tend to favour superb clarity and definition but may not always be quite so loud for example as the very best soundboard wood.

Regarding the amount of inlays: The 10 would denote the most simple wood inlays and bindings, 22 would denote more decorative bindings, 25, 32, 35 and 38 progressively more inlays.

The letter designations for different woods also explains why there were a few models which came out with strange numbers like G23 (this was because of the botanical name for Ovankol). Then of course the licensee company changed all that, and began to use the O, F and S prefix's with the numbers referring not only to the grade of wood and the amount of inlays, but the species of wood as well.

After that George started adding top wood to the model designation too. So an O model in the 35 series that is built with Tasmanian Blackwood and Red Cedar is nowadays called an F35 TBLK/RC.

That's the story of how it started and now you can hopefully understand and decrypt the older model designation and understand why an F35 K-AS means that we have an F-model with Koa back and sides and an Alpine Spruce top.