

## How About a Date?

### Breakthrough Research Smooths Rough Road for Gruen Wristwatch Collectors

By Mike Barnett and Barry Cooper

If you've collected Gruen watches for any length of time, you know how difficult it is to determine -- at least with any degree of accuracy -- just when a specific model of Gruen was made.

There is precious little information "out there," unlike many other popular brands such as Hamilton, Rolex, Omega, Elgin and others. These and other brands have volumes of material and definitive movement serial number listings that allow for precise dating down to the year, and in some instances even the MONTH, in which a given specimen was manufactured.

Not so for Gruen, being the "orphan child" without a birth certificate because of a rather complicated method of serializing their movements, the records for which have been long lost, and most likely destroyed.

Curiously, the process for dating the earliest Gruen wristwatches -- from about 1915 to 1935 or so -- is probably the easiest because of the limited number of movements that Gruen had available, and the resulting relatively small number of specific models. The wonderful Gruen Guild Book that the company put out between 1929 and about 1931 (and widely available online) is arguably close to a "Masterbook" of Gruen watches, particularly *wristwatches* made up to that time period.

But from about the mid 1930s to 1958 (when Gruen ceased production of watches at their factory in Cincinnati), the number of movement calibers exploded, and the serializing of those movements took on byzantine characteristics that make Egyptian hieroglyphic look like a Kindergarten reading primer by comparison.

For most collectors, this is frustrating. But, ironically for some, it is a great source of fun and fascination, as the process of dating a given specimen often involves piecing nuggets of information together from far-flung resources. The chance to play the starring role in your own mini version of CSI (a popular crime show on the CBS Television Network in case you've been living in a cave for about the last decade or so) is irresistible to some.

Yes, there are bits of information scattered here and there. Certainly, the movement dating chart developed by Gruen collector Charlie Cleves, of Bellevue, Ky., almost 30 years ago was a good start, and pointed many collectors in the general vicinity as far as dating a given specimen. Beginning in the mid 1990s, with the advent of eBay and other online venues, collectors have been able to piece together additional dating information through the posting of individual vintage advertisements. All of which has resulted in a greater refinement of the original "Cleves Chart." (And that effort continues.)

The past two or three years have yielded more tools for collectors to work with, but the results of all these efforts have proven painstaking and piecemeal at best, as information and clues are scattered among a variety of paper publications and online resources, the latter of which must surely put the number of sources into the dozens if you count discussion websites.

There is still is no *single comprehensive source* for dating Gruen watches, especially those produced after the mid 1930s.

That is, until now.

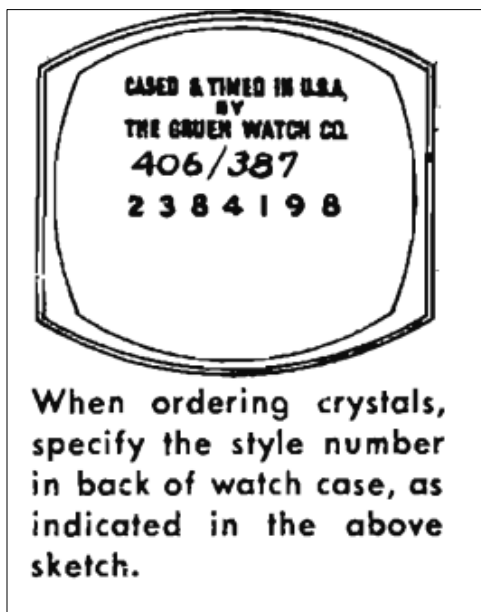
By studying literally thousands of Gruen watches, and developing techniques for dating and identifying model names (and recording every detail about each watch) we believe we have reached a significant breakthrough that will help Gruen wristwatch collectors more definitively pinpoint the age of a given specimen.

In ongoing research into Gruen watch dating techniques, Gruen researchers log everything stamped onto the watch, inside of the case, and look for a match in vintage advertising. This is the standard labor involved in collecting the basics. It is from raw data such as this that patterns begun to emerge if you collect enough of it. One of the items to record is the pair of numbers stamped into the back of most Gruen watches, the Caliber and Style Number. While studying this data, a pattern emerged. The Style Numbers consistently increased over time. It's a simple observation, but an important one.

This article, and our identification tables and charts below, are the result of months of research and testing. We used several methods to date and validate the date of Gruen watches – this article will focus on using the Style Number, a term Gruen coined in the 1947 *Gruen Crystal Catalog*. It must be stressed that the dates we derived using Style Numbers are approximations, providing the earliest date a watch model was made. It is not meant to date the specific year a watch was manufactured.

As most Gruen collectors know, there is typically a pair of three-digit numbers stamped on the inside back of their watch case, usually in the format of CCC-SSS or SSS/CCC. The majority of Gruen wristwatches have the caliber and then the Style Number (CCC-SSS). Figure 1 is from the 1947 Gruen Crystal Catalog and defines Style Numbers.

Some cases do not contain a Caliber & Style Number pair. Older models and some round-shaped models may have only a single three-digit number. Swiss and solid gold cases sometimes do not have the numerical pair as well. These watches are not valid candidates for using the Style Number dating method detailed here.



**Figure 1 - Gruen Style and Caliber Number Definition from the 1947 Crystal Catalog**

Looking closer at the numbers, one of these numbers is the caliber of the movement for that specific watch. By matching the caliber number stamped on the movement with that stamped on the case, collectors can verify that the correct movement is in the watch. If you don't feel comfortable removing the back of your watch to read the Style Number, take it to a skilled watchmaker.

The second three-digit number is the Gruen Style Number; in the example in Figure it is "387". Gruen stated in their Crystal Catalog and 1948 Material Catalog that Style Numbers are paired with specific watch crystals. Generally speaking, the Caliber and Style Number pairs are uniquely assigned to one particular Gruen watch model. However, there are some

instances, where the Style numbers were used for multiple models. This happened most often during the early Curvex years when many of the Curvexes had a very similar shape. It makes sense two similar watches would use the same crystal and thus have the same Style Number. These differing wristwatches are problematic and create situations where the Style Number's date is earlier than the watch's correct date of availability. How to identify these situations is explained later.

We limited our work to wristwatches created from 1935 to 1956. The result of the research produced the *Style Number Dating Table* (Figure 2) which was created by identifying as many watches for each year. The data from the Style Date Table is shown graphically in Figure 3. Perhaps not evident in the

table, the graph visually shows which years Gruen made more watch models, or assigned more Style Numbers, than others.

To create the Style Number Dating Table, the goal was to find at least three watches *introduced* per year. The primary method of identifying a watch's *initial date of production or availability* was through the use of magazine advertisements. If a watch matched the advertisement illustration, that watch's Style Number was associated with the year of the advertisement. This technique of identifying watch model names and date of initial availability was also utilized to create the "*Gruen Watch Model Identification Guide - Volume 1*" written by Mike Barnett. (Watch for *Volume 2*, to be published later this year.)

After several watches were found in a given year, and its surrounding years, a range of Style Numbers could be approximated for that year. These were the data points used to create the table. The Style Number column indicates the lowest Style Number of a watch introduced in the associated year.

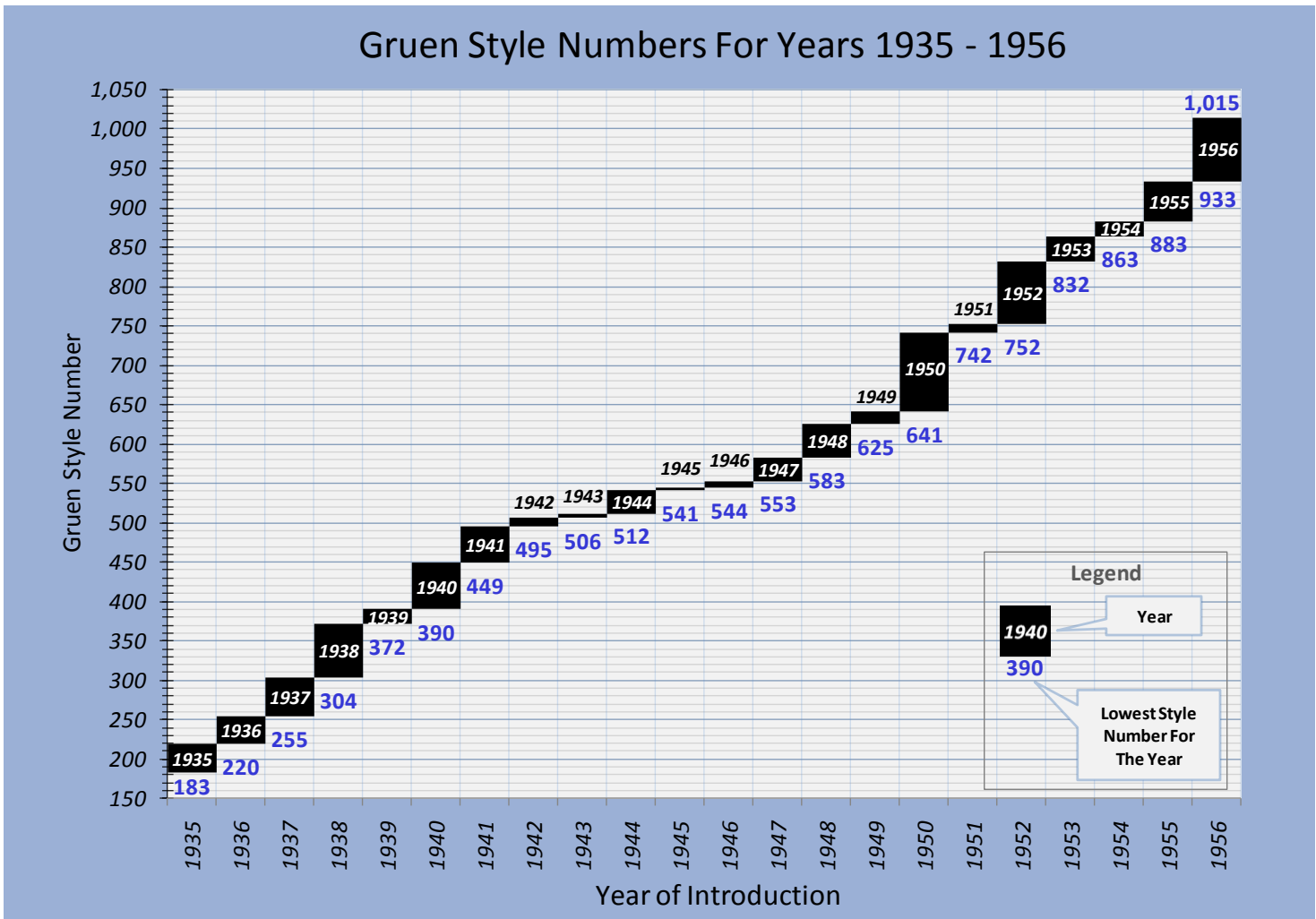
<b>First Style Number of Year</b>	<b>Year of Introduction</b>
183	1935
220	1936
255	1937
304	1938
372	1939
390	1940
449	1941
495	1942
506	1943
512	1944
541	1945
544	1946
553	1947
583	1948
625	1949
641	1950
742	1951
752	1952
832	1953
863	1954
883	1955
933	1956
1,015	1957

**Figure 2 - The Style Date Table**

We cross-checked our dates utilizing all watch dating methods available to us. The cross-checking was limited to a subset of watches for which the additional methods were valid. One such method was provided by Gruen historian Jack Wood, an active Gruen Forum member, contributor, and Gruen researcher. His dating method, currently "in press", is based on the serial numbers of cases manufactured by the Wadsworth Case Company. He found that for wristwatches that used Wadsworth manufactured cases, the date a specific watch was manufactured is tied directly to the serial number of its case. Another verification method utilizes the movement's serial number. This too is a relatively new technique, and is limited to the 405, 410 and 420 caliber families. A full description of dating via

movement serial numbers can be found on the website GruenWristwatches.com. Both of these techniques, using Wadsworth case serial numbers and movement serial numbers, pinpoint a watch to its specific date of manufacture, but are also approximations.

For years in which no watches could be identified, we relied on watch crystal catalogs. These catalogs show the highest Style Number in use for the year the catalog was published. Seventeen crystal catalogs were utilized in this project including those from the GS, Rocket, and Perfit companies.



**Figure 3- Style Number/Date Chart**

*There are anomalies to the Style Number dating method!* The Gruen Company was not always consistent in its assignment and use of new Style Numbers, particularly in the years around World War

II. We identified several anomalies but undoubtedly there are others that savvy Gruen collectors will find and share with the community.

We found some Style Numbers were paired with different movement calibers, but the watch model remained the same. We called this a model "*movement migration*". Over time Gruen changed the movements in a watch model. They maintained the correct labeling in the case by changing the caliber number while leaving the Style Number the same. The 1951 "Submarine" model shown in figures 4 and 5 is a good example of this migration from one movement to another. Some Submarine models have the identification 421-725 indicating a caliber 421 movement is utilized while others marked with 426-725 indicate a caliber 426 .



**Figure 4 - Gruen "Submarine" model**



**Figure 5 - Submarine watch model "migration" shown in the case back**

To help determine when Style Numbers were reused or when a watch model show evidence of “movement migration”, we developed a Style Caliber Table shown in Figure 6 by capturing data from many crystal catalog. The first column lists each Style; the numbers to the right are the movement calibers that are used for that Style. Again, looking at the Submarine model we see that it has a Style Number of 725. In the Style Caliber Table, calibers 421 and 426 are shown to the right of Style 725.

The Style Number re-use anomaly can be at least recognized by using the Style Caliber Table. If a watch's Style Number indicate a date that is prior to the date the movement itself was introduced, then clearly that style number has been used previously. Take for example the Style Number 498. Figure 6 shows six different calibers of movements that used that number. One such movement is the caliber 335 that began production in 1948. The Style Number of 498 indicates the year of introduction for the watch was 1942, but this clearly cannot be the case for watches with caliber 335 movements. When in doubt, check the Style Caliber Table to ensure a Style Number re-use hasn't occurred.

In approximately 1956 the Style Numbers broke the 999 barrier. While we show 1,015 as the end Style Number for the year 1956, the Style Numbers stamped in the cases will not be a 4-digit number. Much like a 3-digit odometer, the number rolls over and started over again as a 3 digit number padded with



zeros on the front end. For example, the Style Number we reference as 1,002 will have a case that is stamped with a Style Number of 002. That particular watch is stamped with 422-002, or 002-422

The Style Caliber Table proved to be a distraction while we were doing our research because there is such a wealth of data that can be mined from it. For example, the lifespan of a movement can be approximated by finding the lowest and highest Style Numbers associated with that movement caliber. To do this the caliber to investigate is chosen, its lowest and highest Style Numbers are found in the Style Caliber table and these Style Numbers are then looked up in the Style Date table to determine the dates of the lowest and highest Styles. You'll find that it is the lady's movements that have the longest lifespan as well as having more Style Numbers than the men's watches.

We hope that our contribution will help Gruen collectors learn more about their watches and perhaps motivate them to help piece together other missing parts in the Gruen puzzle. Our work provides the date of initial production which is the first step in solving the many mysteries that await those that are curious enough to seek more information. Be careful though, that curiosity found in some Gruen collectors turn collectors into obsessed researchers.

Credit should be given to the early Gruen pioneers Roy Ehrhardt, Charles Cleves, and more recently, Bruce Shawkey. Mr. Cleves' work was a springboard from which we could research, providing initial manufacturing dates of Gruen movements. A special thank you is owed to Bruce Shawkey for his riveting introduction outlining the history of Gruen research and encouragement. And to Jack Wood, a hard-working Gruen researcher and historian that has consistently given much to the Gruen community. We were able to use his recent work to help validate our findings. And the ever-growing GruenWristwatches.com Forum members for providing motivation and sharing their passion and watches with the Gruen community.

Style	Calibers						
183	311						
184	685						
185	165						
186	353						
190	325						
191	465						
192	325						
193	465						
194	700						
196	165						
197	355						
199	700						
201	676						
202	311						
205	455						
207	355						
210	907						
213	455						
214	675						
215	455						
216	455						
217	485						
218	467						
220	165	167					
221	167						
222	165						
223	165						
224	485						
225	325						
226	325						
227	325	355	500				
228	311	330					
229	915	917					
230	915						
231	465						
232	465						
233	465						
234	917						
235	917						
238	300						
239	300						
240	355						
241	355						
242	307						
243	300						
244	485						
246	485	501					
247	123	325					
248	580						
250	917						
251	531						
252	531						
253	531						
254	501						
255	311						
257	501						
258	501						
259	280						
260	311						
261	280						
262	290						
263	465						
264	465						
265	465						
266	165	501					
267	487						
268	697	698					
269	280						
270	280						
271	311	330					

272	350	520					
273	311	400C					
274	270						
275	115	215	216	270	215SS	270SS	
276	270						
278	206	217	501				
279	280						
280	330						
281	300						
282	300						
283	581	704	704SS				
284	270						
285	270						
286	270						
287	330						
288	330						
289	400						
290	500	877	500DD				
291	520						
292	330						
293	330						
294	300						
295	330						
296	275	500	501	500C			
297	300						
298	400						
299	400	542					
300	416						
303	271						
304	330						
305	400						
308	330						
309	580	581					
310	270						
320	270						
321	270						
322	270						
323	700	704					
324	500	501	500C				
326	270						
334	330						
335	280						
336	700						
337	700						
338	270						
339	330						
340	355	500	355C				
350	270						
351	401	501	501C				
352	401						
353	350						
354	520						
355	520						
356	330	355	355C				
357	215	270					
358	704						
359	168						
360	582						
361	270						
362	300						
363	280						
364	400	400C					
365	406						
366	406	406SS					
367	167						
368	280						
369	355	355C					
370	355	355C	401C				
371	917						
372	401	410	581	582	704		
373	406						

374	405						
375	300						
376	355	355C					
377	405						
378	210						
379	400	400C					
380	210	211	210SS				
381	410	410C					
382	210						
383	410	410C					
384	210	211	216				
385	211	211SS					
386	210	211	430	210SS			
387	211	405	406	426			
388	405						
389	411	411C					
390	411	411C					
391	406						
392	405						
393	330						
394	406	406SS					
395	405	405SS					
396	405						
397	211						
398	210						
399	211						
402	405						
403	406						
404	411	411C					
408	410	410C					
409	168	500	501				
411	211						
413	405						
414	406						
415	300	531					
416	531						
417	330	430					
418	270						
419	400	401					
420	401	401C					
421	211						
422	210	211					
423	210						
424	300						
425	210						
426	210						
427	210	211					
428	211						
429	290						
430	290						
431	290						
432	290						
433	290	411					
434	290						
435	290						
436	290						
437	290						
438	290						
439	290						
440	430						
441	211						
442	411	411C					
443	411	411C					
444	212						
445	211						
446	405						
447	405	406					
448	440						
449	440						
450	440						
451	405	405SS					

452	350						
453	211						
454	430						
455	430						
456	430						
457	430						
458	405						
459	406						
460	406	406SS					
461	430						
462	210	211					
463	210						
464	405						
465	230	405	420	425			
466	210	211	215	216	266	211SS	216SS
467	431						
468	431						
469	435	436					
470	405						
471	405						
472	431						
473	430	435					
474	435						
475	330						
476	330						
477	406						
478	291						
479	290	291					
480	406	425					
481	411	411C					
482	410	401C					
483	211						
484	210						
485	291						
486	405						
487	410						
488	411						
489	430						
490	435						
491	350						
492	500	500C					
494	410	410SS					
495	405						
496	410	410SS					
497	411	411SS					
498	335	422	430	435	440	3351	
499	440						
500	501						
501	290						
502	290						
503	290						
504	290						
505	290						
506	290						
507	210						
508	211						
509	290	291					
510	290						
511	405						
512	406						
513	469						
514	290						
515	290						
516	290						
517	290						
518	210	211					
519	210						
520	290						
521	290						
522	210						
523	405	425					

524	406						
525	210	211	210SS	211SS			
526	400	400C					
527	420	421					
528	420	421					
529	421						
530	335	430	435	3351			
531	210	210SS					
532	211						
533	210	211	215	210SS	211SS		
534	420	421	420SS				
535	420	420SS					
537	275	290					
538	290						
539	290						
540	290						
541	440						
542	290	335					
543	290						
544	440						
545	210						
546	210						
547	210	211	216	210SS			
548	350						
549	290						
550	290						
551	270	290					
552	425SS						
553	425	426					
554	425						
555	420	420SS					
556	440						
557	421						
558	335	430	3351				
559	210						
561	210	210SS					
562	385						
563	421	430	435				
564	385	425	426				
565	420	428					
566	425						
567	425	426					
568	426	440					
569	210	275	290				
570	295						
571	385						
572	210						
573	210	211					
574	440						
575	440						
576	440						
577	440						
578	440						
579	275	430	2751				
580	295						
581	275	2751					
582	210						
583	420	421					
584	440						
585	430	440					
586	385						
587	430						
588	275	3351					
589	210						
590	470	475					
591	425						
592	425						
593	275	421					
594	275						
595	210						
596	275	420	421				

597	370						
598	420	421	425				
599	335	435					
600	370						
601	370						
602	370						
603	335						
604	275						
605	380	385					
606	335	3351					
607	370						
608	285						
609	285						
610	370						
611	460	470					
612	275						
613	435						
614	425						
615	370						
616	210	215					
617	275						
619	215	275					
620	210						
621	425						
622	210	215	216				
623	430	435					
624	210	211					
625	370	435					
626	430						
627	3351						
628	275						
629	425						
630	420	651	3351				
631	335						
632	420						
633	421						
634	275	425					
635	335						
636	425	426					
637	335	3351	3551				
638	275						
639	420						
640	475						
641	440						
642	370						
643	370						
644	285						
645	210						
646	285						
647	3351						
648	210						
649	430	475	480				
650	370						
651	3351						
652	425	435	3351				
653	421						
654	421						
655	275						
656	210						
657	335	3351					
658	210	215	216				
659	435	3351					
660	415	416					
661	275						
662	370						
663	285						
664	285	423	432	423A			
665	275						
666	275	430					
667	275	335					
668	275						

669	290						
670	210	215	216				
671	275	275					
672	435	3351					
673	210	210SS					
674	430	435	3351				
675	215	216					
676	370	415	460				
677	415	430					
678	275						
679	421						
680	335	3351	3551				
681	430						
682	415						
683	215						
685	210						
686	210						
688	420	422	460	422SS			
689	335						
690	335	3351					
691	415						
693	210						
694	430						
695	285						
696	370						
698	215	215SS					
699	475						
700	335	3351					
701	215						
702	215						
703	335	3351					
704	3351						
705	335	3351					
706	370						
707	370	440					
708	275						
709	335	3351					
710	3351						
711	435	3351					
712	435						
713	425						
714	275						
715	335	3351					
716	370						
717	460						
718	415	470	3351				
719	415	430					
720	415	416					
721	216						
723	335	3351					
724	275						
725	421	426					
726	475						
727	215						
728	275						
729	480						
730	215	216					
731	275						
732	415						
733	460						
734	275						
735	275	2751					
736	480						
737	3351						
738	3351						
739	415	480					
740	335	3351					
741	335	3351					
742	480						
743	275	2751					
744	475	480					

745	275						
746	215						
747	370	430	435				
748	275	2751					
749	275						
750	370						
751	480						
752	335	3351					
753	370	440					
754	215	216					
755	480						
756	335	3351					
757	275						
759	275						
760	370						
761	480						
762	335	3351					
764	415						
766	422						
767	462						
768	460	462					
769	480						
770	4803						
771	3351						
772	416	422					
773	370						
774	415						
776	335	3351					
777	335	3351					
778	480						
779	360						
780	480						
781	480						
782	275						
783	270	275	3351				
784	215						
785	275	285					
786	215						
788	480						
789	415						
790	435						
791	3351						
792	215	415					
793	415						
794	415						
795	416						
797	440						
798	3351						
799	422						
800	460						
801	3351						
802	335	3351					
804	415						
807	3351						
808	422						
809	335	3351					
810	415	416					
811	216						
812	215	216					
813	430	435	480				
814	480						
815	415						
816	335	3351					
820	3351						
821	370						
822	415						
824	415						
826	480						
827	415						
828	285						
829	415	416					

830	275						
832	415						
833	3351						
835	275	2751					
836	415						
837	275						
838	415						
839	215						
840	215						
841	275	2751					
842	275	2751					
843	275	2751					
844	275	2751					
847	275	2751					
850	2751						
852	3351						
853	275	2751					
854	3351						
857	275						
858	275						
860	270	2751					
862	415						
863	415						
864	415						
865	215						
870	275						
873	275						
875	235	2351					
876	435						
877	275						
878	216	415					
879	370						
880	480						
881	462	462SS					
882	370						
885	335	3351					
886	480	480SS					
887	480						
888	275	2751					
889	275						
890	462	480					
891	430	435					
892	215						
893	215						
894	275						
895	335	3351					
897	415						
899	480						
900	335	3351	3353				
901	335	435	3351	3351SS			
903	275	2751					
904	275	2751					
905	275	2751					
907	275	2751					
908	275						
909	275						
910	335	3351					
911	235	2351					
912	362						
914	490SS						
917	422	462					
918	480						
919	275	2751					
920	2751						
924	215						
925	215	285					

926	275	2753					
930	275						
931	215	462					
939	215						
940	215						
941	215						
942	480						
943	275						
944	275						
945	215	275					
950	215						
951	285						
952	215						
953	215						
961	275						
970	275	2751					
976	217						
977	215	216					
978	215	220					
979	215	275					
980	275						
981	462						
984	275						
986	275						
988	275						
991	215						
997	275						
998	422						
999	435	439					
1002	422						
1003	422	423					
1010	275	2751					
1013	275						
1015	211	215	415				
1017	215						
1019	275						
1020	215						
1025	673						
1027	787						
1032	215						
1035	215						
1042	215						
1049	215						
1050	275	2753					
1056	215						
1061	422						
1062	422						
1064	2753						
1070	275						
1076	215	3353					
1079	2753						
1085	673						
1099	215	225					
1116	215						
1156	215						
1158	215						
1176	215						
1199	278						
1231	278						

Figure 6 - Style Caliber Table