

Rare As A Pouch Clip¹!

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Finding a rare “lost gem” in a flea market gives an adrenalin rush that modern on-line auctions can never match. But what makes a slide rule rare is not straightforward as “rare” can turn out to be a simple pouch clip.

What makes something rare?

Rare comes from the Latin “rarus” and for non-meat eaters, means very uncommon or scarce [1]. However, my late and great collector friend, Herman van Herwijnen², once memorably said: “*The 7th double is worth nothing!*”

Herman’s sentiment reflects how production numbers and availability have a telling impact on how rare an item is. For example, personal favourites of mine - 50, 60 and 100cm desktop slide rules - only amounted to less than 5% of all the slide rules ever made. Even when production numbers are known (most are not) it is not always a reliable indicator of how rare an item might be. Besides commissioning special purpose slide rules, companies like Shell, Dow Chemical and many others used “limited edition” company-branded slide rules as promotional and advertising aids. Well-known examples are the Sami & Etani designed and marketed pocket-sized model 28N and “wallet” model 600 (with a “pull-out” for reference tables) plastic discs from the Japanese manufacturer; Concise.

Geography and national preferences clearly also play a role. Keuffel & Esser (K&E) slide rules are more readily available in the United States than their European cousins such as Faber-Castell and Nestler. Some slide rules (or scales) were produced for specific trades or special uses. Being for “niche markets” not many were ever made. Finally, natural wastage (how many offices “skipped” their slide rules when mechanical calculators came in?) means anything of any real age is special and sought after. Any rule with the scales incised in solid mahogany or boxwood would be a great find, especially if the gauge marks [2] show it pre-dates later versions e.g. pre-Imperial (1826) MD and MB Winchester gauge marks on alcohol rules [3].

However, for some collectors what makes something rare or desirable is simply a question of personal preference. The discerning collector who only collects “new in box” (NIB) would be uninterested in any slide rule “slightly used and without its box” regardless of how rare the item might be.

The “R-Factor”

With the popularity and accessibility of on-line auctions such as eBay®, the maximum price (as distinct to value) for anything is largely determined by what someone is mad enough to pay for it - eBay® even has a category: “[Buy](#) > [Everything Else](#) > [Weird Stuff](#) > [Totally Bizarre](#)”! But there is a link between how rare a slide rule is and the price it is likely to fetch. Thomas Russo included a “price guide” in his book on office machines [4] but more universal and practical is the rarity/price classification table, or the “R-factor”, Herman van Herwijnen included with his DVD Slide Rule Catalogue [5]:

COMMON	<i>4 out of every 5 collectors has one, can be bought at flea markets</i>
R	<i>1 out of every 5 collectors has one, may come up for sale once/month</i>
RR	<i>1 out of every 25 collectors has one, only come up for sale once/year</i>
RRR	<i>Very rare, only one or two collectors are known to have one and it may be several years before one comes up for sale</i>
RRRR	<i>Extremely rare, examples are usually only found in museums and are unlikely ever to come up for sale</i>

Fig. 1: Table of “R-factors”

¹ Derived from the saying: “As scarce as hens’ teeth”

² Member of the Oughtred Society “Hall of Fame” as winner of the Oughtred Society Award in 2003

As rare as a pouch clip!

It is getting harder to find bargains or long-lost “gems” at flea markets. However, except for plastic “school versions” produced in their thousands, it is difficult to turn down any undamaged slide rule if it is priced at just a couple of Euros. I often use such buys to improve the overall condition of my collection - replacing an inferior version or “mixing and matching”, e.g. replacing or mending a cursor.

One such recent purchase was a 1937³ A.W. Faber Castell (F-C) model number 63/39 12.5cm⁴ pearwood and celluloid veneer pocket slide rule. Although complete, the basic A | B | C | D System Rietz layout and split veneer did not make it immediately endearing. I was attracted to it because it still had the original instruction sheet (in Swedish) and came with a good quality stitched brown leather pouch. Only much later, after the slide rule had hung around on my desk for a couple weeks, did the shiny metal pouch clip start to strike me as odd.

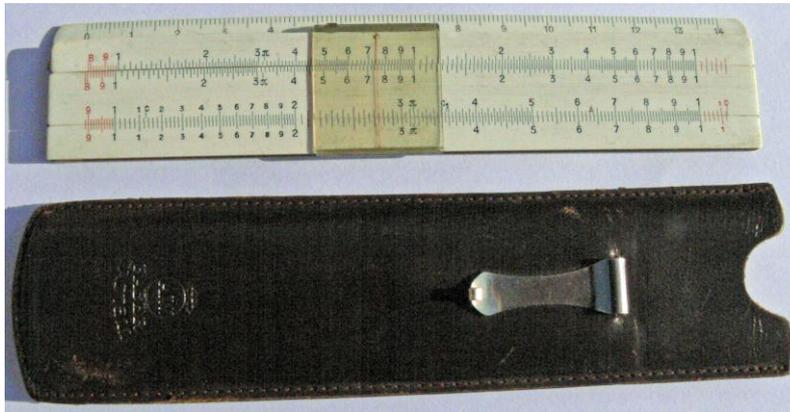


Fig 2: 1937 Faber-Castell 63/39

At first I wondered if the clip was a “home-made” addition - the shiny metal of the clip was in sharp contrast to the brown leather of the pouch. However, on closer examination, the clip had clearly been professionally made and finished off with a glued patch on the inside the pouch to make sure the clip mounting did not damage the slide rule. As the pouch was embossed with the distinctive “A.W.” logo and F-C name, it clearly belonged to the rule. So, why had I not noticed such clips before? Going through my own collection I could only find four other examples of pouch clips and none of these were made by F-C. The “*R-factor*” on my F-C 63/39 was starting to go up.

How rare are pouch/shirt clips?

Having discovered that, at least in my collection, pouches with clips were uncommon, made me think: “*Just how rare are they?*” The few clips I had found were on pouches for pocket-sized slide rules. Since such rules were often carried in shirt pockets, the clip would have made sure the slide rule did not accidentally fall out.

My initial interest was confined to F-C pouches with clips but it quickly expanded to cover other manufactures:

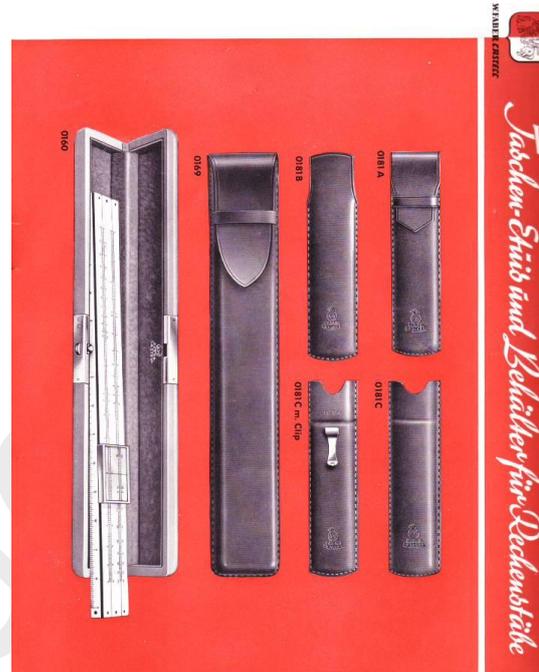
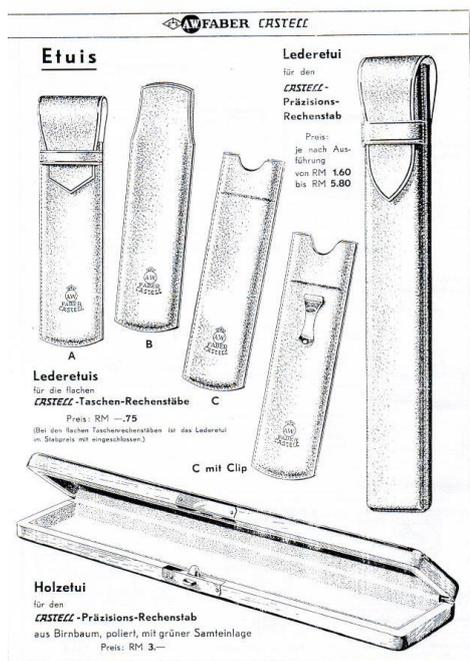
³ Code stamped “37” in the veneer on the back in the lower left-hand corner

⁴ All lengths expressed as scale lengths

FABER-CASTELL

With one exception, F-C never provided pouches with clips as standard for any of their pocket-sized slide rules [6]. The exception is the post 1945 12.5cm Novo-Duplex 62/82N pocket slide rule for special export orders. The accompanying stitched “Saffianleder” green leather pouch even had the bare metal clip covered in leather – a “RRRR” rare collector’s item.

The earliest reference to an F-C pouch with clip is as a special order accessory in the 1934 catalogue. It was listed as a Model D alongside three other conventional types of pouch (A, B, and C) for pocket slide rules. The same four types also appear in the much more extensive and lavish 1/500 catalogue from 1940. Interestingly each of the four pouches could be bought for 0.75 German Marks (RM).



Figs 3 & 4: Pages from 1934 and 1940 Faber-Castell Catalogues

Significantly, apart from the Model D with the metal clip, all the other types of pouch were offered as “standard” with the various pocket slide rules sold by F-C. Since the Model D was only ever sold as a special order item and is virtually unknown, it was most likely an unsuccessful marketing idea.

ARISTO

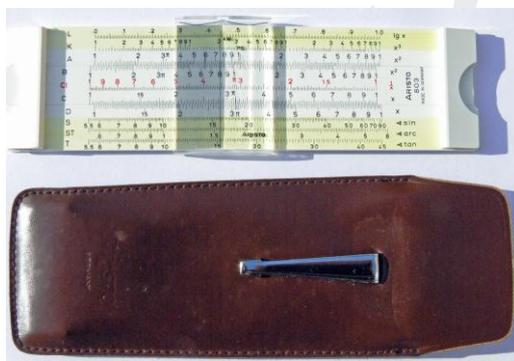
Continuing its rich Dennert & Pape heritage, Aristo manufactured a large assortment of slide rules. The Aristo name and trade mark was introduced in 1936. The catalogues from the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s all show various pouches but none with a clip [7]. A new Type C, with a leather covered clip for pocket slide rules, appears for the first time in the catalogue from 1960.

The new pouch was offered as an optional (no extra charge) alternative to the standard, Type O, pouch. Then strangely the Type C “disappears” and does not appear in any other catalogue from the 1960’s. Instead a redesigned pouch with clip reappears in the 1970 catalogue. Although still known as Type C, the clip is now all metal and costs 0.90 (DM) more than the standard Type O pouch. The price difference rose to 1.30 (DM) in 1973.



Figs 5 & 6: Pages from 1960 and 1973 Aristo Catalogues

The three known examples (so far) were all made in the Geretsried factory and date from the last 10 years before Aristo stopped production in 1978. The earliest pouch with clip example, is an Aristo 89 from 1968⁵ I recently bought off eBay®. Later examples are:



Figs 7 & 8: 1971⁶ Aristo 10cm MonoRietz 803 & 1976⁷ 10cm Puck 810

Although metal and mounted in a similar fashion as F-C, the Aristo clip is different. It is shinier and turned under (rather than turned up) at the end. However, this refinement may just be because of the finishes readily available 30 years after the F-C example was made. Although Aristo only offered pouches with clips in their later years of production, they are still worth looking out for.

⁵ Code stamped "3FE5" in the plastic on the back in the left hand corner
⁶ Code stamped "3LR4" in the plastic on the back in the left hand corner
⁷ Code stamped "3LF1" in the plastic on the back in the left hand corner

KEUFFEL & ESSER

Famous for their popular “cowboy” style belt loops it is perhaps not altogether surprising to find that K&E also produced brown and “dirty orange” stitched leather pouches⁸ with clips. But unlike F-C, the K&E catalogue from 1962 clearly shows that K&E provided a brown leather pouch with a leather-covered clip as standard for all their 5 inch pocket slide rules. K&E may well have offered such pouches before 1962. The earliest reference to pocket slide rules being sold with a leather pouch as standard, appears in their 1954 catalogue but unfortunately a clip is neither mentioned nor shown. The 1962 catalogue also shows that replacement/extra pouches with clips could also be bought as accessories for \$2 (USD).



Figs 9 & 10: Pages from 1962 and 1976 Keuffel & Esser Catalogues

As shown by the 1976 catalogue, once introduced, K&E continued to offer pouches with clips as standard right up to the time they stopped production. Two of the many examples that must exist:



Fig 11 & 12: Keuffel & Esser 5 inch Deci-Lon and 5 inch 4181-1

⁸ American manufactures and/or suppliers tended to call them “sheathes”

Because from at least the early 1960's K&E provided pouches with clips as standard for their pocket slide rules, their R-factor is "Common."

PICKETT & ECKEL

Unfortunately the company published very few catalogues and therefore examples are virtually unknown [8]. Pickett & Eckel (P&E) sold their pocket slide rules with either a simple black leather pouch or a brown leather pouch with a leather-covered clip. I found examples with pouch clips in their N-300/400/600/700 series, a model N4, several N1006s (T and ES models) and an early 1950's model 300.



Figs 13 & 14: Pickett & Eckel N4 10/5 inch "twin pack" and an early 6 inch model 300

The earliest example is the model 300 from my own collection. Having grooved stator rails (as distinct from a grooved slide) it was manufactured between 1950 and 1955 [9]. Shortly afterwards the "ES" suffix for "eye saver" yellow was added. As the N1006 ES example shows, P & E also combined their unique "pull-out" tab with a pouch clip.



Figs 15: Pickett & Eckel 6 inch N1006 ES

Interestingly, excluding pictures in catalogues, I found more examples of P&E pocket slide rules with pouch clips than any other manufacturer. So their R-factor for pouches with clips must also be considered "Common."

DIETZGEN

Like P&E, Dietzgen catalogues and other supporting material were always scarce. The "Framed Full Vision" design of the cursor means the one modern example of a pouch with a clip I found was manufactured post 1951 [10]:



Fig 16: Dietzgen 5 inch Union 1776

This plastic rule has a sewn brown pouch with a metal clip. Noticeably, being metal, the clip mirrors the style of F-C and Aristo. However, it is known that after World War II Dietzgen obtained some of its slide rules from F-C and in particular, many of the 17nn series [8]. So, perhaps F-C also provided the pouches with clips? This would explain why Dietzgen did not follow other US-based suppliers and opt for leather covered clips.

HEMMI/POST and RICOH/SIC

Discovering the provenance of slide rules from Japanese manufactures is notoriously difficult [11]. HEMMI Keisanjaku manufactured most of the bamboo slide rules sold by the American company; POST. Some of their 4 and 5 inch pocket slide rules came with a brown leather pouch that had a leather-covered clip.



Figs 17 & 18: Post 4 inch 1444-3 and 5 inch 1461

RICOH of the San-Ai Group is credited with manufacturing the bamboo slide rules sold by the American company; SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT COMPANY (SIC). It seems only a limited number of models were sold but a 1961⁹ mini pocket slide rule out of my collection has a brown leather pouch (with striking “Hemmi-style” yellow stitching) and a leather-covered clip.



Fig 19: 1961 SIC 4 inch 4030 mini pocket slide rule

⁹ “1961” printed on the back of the rule

Perhaps significantly, the Japanese examples of pouches with clips that I have found are all rebadged slide rules presumably made for the American market. Could this have been done in response to pouches K&E and P&E were providing in the 1960/70's?

LENINGRAD¹⁰

The post-war Cyrillic ГОСТ (GOST) followed by the State Standard Number is one of the few reliable indicators that a slide rule originates from the former Soviet Union [12]. The example found has "GOST 5161-57" stamped on the back of the pocket slide rule. A second code on the back of the rule, 1969, suggests the year of production was 1969 and C was the logo of the Leningrad factory.



Fig 20: 1969 12.5cm Leningrad pocket slide rule

The stitched black leather pouch is embossed with a logo – the Cyrillic letters “C” and “P” either side of two crossed hammers, with a third Cyrillic letter “H” underneath. Crossed hammers are associated with mining and perhaps more significantly in this case, they are probably the emblem of the “Ministry of Coal Industry” of the former Soviet Union [13]. The bare metal clip clearly follows the style of the European examples. Its F-C design and tell-tale “D.R.P.” (Deutches Reichs Patent) stamped into the metal clip once again showing that many of the former Soviet Union linear slide rules are identical in “look and feel” to comparable Faber rules.



Figs 21 & 22: 1937 metal clip of the F-C alongside the 1969 metal clip of the Leningrad

Despite being produced in several locations, the better quality slide rules from the Soviet Union era were not made in large numbers.

Conclusions

Normally, the sheer scale and diversity make cross-manufacturer comparisons tortuously difficult. However, focusing only on a niche element, pouches with clips, gave an unexpected glimpse into the how some well-known manufactures/suppliers may have responded to competitor influences and market trends.

From the 1950's pouches with leather-covered clips for both mini and standard size pocket slide rules appear a particular favourite of the American market. Surprisingly, apart from the four European examples, no other examples with a non-American connection appear to exist. By contrast, all four European examples have metal clips – albeit the one Dietzgen example does not conform to this trend unless it was supplied by F-C. The earliest example of a pouch with a clip is the 1937 F-C 63/39 and as F-C never issued pouches with clips as standard, they and possibly their counterparts from the former Soviet Union, are the “RRR” rare ones collectors should look out for.

¹⁰ Now known as St. Petersburg

“Clasp” the opportunity!

My aim, in a light-hearted way, was to show how rarity is more subjective than scientific and not always obvious. So, take the opportunity to check your own collections – who knows, you may find that you have a rare item you never knew you had!

Acknowledgements

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- **Roger Shepherd:** for images of K&E and Aristo pouches with clips.

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