

Winchester Model 94



ugh the word ‘classic’ has been overworked extensively, this one is the real deal.”

be had with a choice of barrel lengths: 20, 24 or 26 inches. It had the same shorter magazine, pistol grip and curved lever. It was listed in the Winchester catalog from 1933 to 1957. The .219 Zipper was introduced in 1938. This was a hot little high velocity number that unfortunately could not achieve best accuracy in a lever-action rifle. This chambering was discontinued in 1941, but was sometimes offered as late as 1947.

The high cost of manufacturing rifles in the old ways was vexing Winchester management. In 1964, at serial number 2,700,000, new manufacturing methods were introduced in an effort to cut costs. The receiver was cast rather than forged. Cast and stamped internal parts, pins rather than screws, cheaper bluing methods, plastic rather than steel buttplates and stained birch stocks caused indignant broadsides from the public and pre-1964 Winchester values climbed. About 95 percent of the parts for these new-fangled rifles would not interchange with the older ones. About 1972, in response to growing public criticism, the company began to react with much-needed improvements. But the old plant in New Haven, Connecticut, was still not a model of efficiency and it became harder for the company to maintain a profit. In August of 1981, after a massive machinists strike, the New Haven plant was sold by Winchester's parent Olin Corporation to a group of former Winchester employees who adopted the name U.S. Repeating Arms Company (USRAC). Olin then licensed this organization to make Winchester products. In 1981, I bought a Model 94 that was produced just before this change, and it's one of the last true Winchester-made examples. It carries a serial number in the 4,969,000 range and differs in many details from the rifle illustrated, a 1952 model with a serial number of about 1,888,000.

In 1983 a major change was implemented, and by 1984, all Model 94s were being produced with an “angle eject” configuration. This caused the ejected cartridge case to be thrown to the side rather than straight up. The modification permitted over-the-bore scope mounting which was not practical with the original design. Still, USRAC strug-

gled to keep sales up and costs in line. USRAC filed for protection from bankruptcy in 1986 and was reorganized under new management and with new capital in 1988.

A large variety of commemorative Model 94s were made beginning in 1964, with special finishes, configurations and stampings or engraving. Some of these were assembled and finished in Canada for the Canadian market.

Documented milestones in the history of the Model 94 include the presentation of the one-millionth production gun to President Calvin Coolidge in 1927, serial number 1,500,000 to President Truman in 1948, and number two million to President Eisenhower in 1953. Number 2,500,000 came off the line in 1961 and number three million in 1967. Number 3,500,000 was made in 1971 and was auctioned in 1979 for \$18,000. Number four million came out in 1974, five million in 1981, and number 5,500,000 in 1988.

To help avoid frivolous lawsuits, a cross-bolt “lawyer safety” was incorporated in 1992, and an accompanying rebounding hammer introduced. Public outcry over the damaged esthetics and doubtful utility of this arrangement forced a change to a more unobtrusive sliding tang safety in 2002. Still unable to keep its head above water, USRAC finally called it quits, stopped all production and closed the 140-year-old New Haven plant in 2006. That left Winchester's manufacturing options for the Model 94 adrift for a while. In 2010, Winchester announced that some fancy grade and very expensive Model 94s would be produced to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Oliver Winchester's birth. These first Model 94s since the New Haven plant closing were produced in Japan. In 2011, more affordable Model 94 “sporters” and “short rifles” also started production there. These all have tang safeties. The old Model 94 has resurfaced once again, although it's no longer made in the U.S.A. It's not quite the same as the original rifle, but still conforms closely to Browning's enduring design. The old '94 is a true classic that refuses to die after well over 100 years of existence and demand.

