
White Sewing Machines

White was, next to Singer, perhaps the largest and best known of the US sewing machine companies. Unlike Singer, they did not offer many different models, or change models very often. Their engineering was extremely good, and their products stood the test of time. They introduced their VS machine in the late 1870's and manufactured it with minor improvements into the early 1900's. They introduced a new model, the Family Rotary, or FR, which was a very well designed and strong machine, in the late 1890's and manufactured this design, with some variations, up until WW II.

Unfortunately, there is nowhere near as much information on the White Company as on Singer. The company was founded by Thomas White, who had some prior experience in sewing machine manufacture. He located in Cleveland, Ohio (down a main street from where I lived as a child, actually). The company was formed in 1876. White was a large and prosperous company, giving Singer a run for their money. White took over the Domestic and King sewing machine companies and eventually became White Consolidated Industries. They ceased manufacturing in the United States sometime after WWII, probably the late 60's or early 70's. After that their machines were made in Japan.

The White machines found today are very usable. There is one serious consideration as to the VS machines... the shuttle and bobbin are very unique. The shuttle has a post in it, and the bobbin has a hollow core. The bobbin is loaded into the shuttle by sliding onto the post. These shuttles and bobbins are not available and somewhat difficult to find. Should you locate and consider a White vibrating shuttle machine, be sure it has its shuttle and a bobbin or two.

The White FR or Family Rotary is the most common White. They are a truly outstanding machine. If you find a good one, don't pass it up. One caution on this model... I always tell people that "White is Singer spelled backwards...". Everything about the White is the reverse of the Singer... the handwheel rotates away from you instead of toward you, and the thread rolls off of the bobbin in the favored, or easy, direction, not cutting back over a lip as on Singer round bobbins. One of the more common "help" calls on Treadle On is from new White owners who can't get their machine to stitch because they are trying to make it turn the same direction as a Singer.

White owned their own forests and operated their own cabinet factories, rather than contracting this out. They were noted for having the highest quality of cabinets. Their library table and Martha Washington sewing cabinet model electrics are classics, as is the Mission or Arts and Crafts treadle.

Captain Dick

A Gallery of Whites



This is the most common White FR treadle cabinet. This one has been refinished. Normally, the word "White" is spelled out in twig shaped pieces of wood on the front panel. Commonly, pieces of this are broken or missing. This is often referred to as the



The most common, or standard, White Family Rotary head. Generally, the decorative decals around the plate are the same over the years, but the arm decal may vary

"Twigs Cabinet"



This is an earlier White VS hand crank. White hand cranks are pretty rare. It appears that White did not export to the extent that Singer did, and the big market for hand cranks was overseas.



White FR cast in decoration variation, crinkle finish



This and the next two are of the bronze, or sometimes copper/bronze, finish FR. This is often found in the magnificent library table. I'm trying to get a picture of that piece of furniture.



This is an earlier, fancier White FR cabinet, actually similar to the older VS cabinets.

A Fiddle-Based White



This beauty was submitted by Linda in Va. Beach, who says there are several Onions who have them. I don't... waahhh! :^(

White Numbers/Years

The White company (still in business) has some serial number records and will date machines. Their record and numbering system is/was not as organized as Singers, so there are some problems. However, we are assembling a record of known dates to provide a rough comparison ability.

The following White numbers were verified through the company. You will note that there are irregularities in the stated sequences. Neither we nor the company have any explanation for this. Hopefully, you can use the list for a quick check on the age of your White. If you call the Husqvarna/Viking/White company at 1 800 446-2333, they will date your machine for you.

VS - the White VS was introduced in 1876. Books credit it through the 1880's but White records show it continuing into the 1900's. VS I has round tension on upper arm. VS II came out in the 1880's. The tension was by means of a nut on the machine head, but had no dial. VS III came out in the 1890's and had the tension dial, similar to the FR models.

1163248 this number is from the 1800's. White records start in 1900
 1368882 1903
 1759040 1915
 1800124 1919

Family Rotary - The Family Rotary, or FR, came out in the 1890's, and in various models continued well into the 1930's. FR serial numbers were used on badge machines as well as those labeled "White".

FR 140336 pre-1900

FR 127544 1906 (Note: It has been reported that #s 105200 - 194000 are all 1906. This conflicts with the report on #140336, above, but such conflicts are common.)

FR 238519 1908

FR 256000 1909
FR 329999 1910
FR 233914 1914

FR 2294605 1913
FR 2230955 1913
FR 2339124 1914
3 FR 2339124 1914 - per White, the "3" in front of the FR has no significance as to date
FR 2567602 1917
FR 2636433 1917
FR 2611632 1917
FR 2637707 1917
FR 2793214 1918
FR 2865473 1920
FR 7155341 1921 FLORENCE ROTARY
FR 7156168 1921 FLORENCE ROTARY
FR 7157866 1921 FLORENCE ROTARY
FR 75156168 1921 DOMESTIC ROTARY
FR 29533555 1922

FR 3009969 1923

FR 3020193 1923

FR 3020912 1923

Cast In Decoration Variation

White offered some FR's with cast in decoration, rather than decals. These were introduced in 1928 and were all electrics. You can substitute an earlier FR handwheel and put them in a treadle. Some were a lovely copper/bronze color, and some had a black krinkle finish. I believe the bronze ones were earlier than the krinkle finish. The bronze were offered in a beautiful cherry library table of quite good size. The entire top lifted off to expose the machine, which was then tilted up for use. It is one of the most beautiful of all sewing machine furniture pieces.

1X990 1929

31X18031 date

A White Fable

Once upon a time, there was a young English lord named Prince. He was a bit of a wastrel, and was in serious danger of losing the family fortune. While traveling in America, he noticed a White sewing machine. "This machine," he said to himself, "is magnificently designed and made, and very attractive. I believe that if I were to import these to England in large numbers, I could market them at a tidy profit."

He decided that he wanted to be in complete control of his operation, which he viewed on a very large scale. He contracted with the White company for a tremendous number of machines, and purchased his own fleet of ships to transport them to England. He even purchased land and built seven new docks in a port on the English Channel.

It is quite possible that Lord Prince's plans might have worked. Unfortunately, the ships with the first load of machines ran into a terrible storm just as they were making port, and were thrown up on the steep shores at a spot ever after known as "the White Cliffs of Dover". All were lost. All of the unfortunate entrepreneur's money had been invested in the scheme, and he lost almost everything... even the family estate. All that was left was the land and docks, and thereafter, he was known as the Prince with no Whites and the seven Wharves.

Some More Whites of Special Interest



White Peerless 3/4 size hand crank. These lovely little VS machines came in three generations of models, varying by the tension system and the hand crank installation. This is the last version, with the same tension system as the final version of the White VS full size and the White FR. Uses the same odd bobbin with the shaft in it that the VS does.



One of the most sought after White treadles, the Mission or Arts and Craft Style. This came with the FR machine in it.



While an electric machine, this was one of the most beautiful pieces of sewing machine furniture ever offered. It usually contains one of the cast-indecoration, or embossed, FR's. This model was called the Mt. Vernon. White had their own forests and furniture factories and was noted for the quality of their cabinets. They made lots of cabinets and cases for other manufacturers.