

Can't We Improve ORCA, ORCA n We?

A number of ORCA n s have expressed concern recently that the club has been heading in the wrong direction for the last year or so.

The major concern is that the membership and, by extension, the Board of Directors have forsaken any interest in "older" reels and have begun to overemphasize the collecting of spinning reels. Some of these members do not feel that relatively new, mass-produced spinning reels deserve the overwhelming attention that they believe the club has lavished on them recently. Some of them point to our last year's association with DACA, presumably a hotbed of spinning-reel enthusiasm, as evidence of this misguided attention.

There is no question that recent issues of *The Reel News* have contained a preponderance of articles on spinning reels. I'm forced to confess that I have contributed to the alleged imbalance with an article on spinning reels that were "recent" when I started collecting but which are now forty- to fifty-years old. However, as I have no serious interest in collecting what I consider "recent," mass-produced spinning reels, I feel qualified to respond to the members' concerns described above.

Perhaps most important of all, worrying about whether or not a thirty-year-old reel is worthy of a collector's interest is simply snobbish. Yes, there's probably some age threshold below which a reel is just "used," not "old," but a recent heated email discussion among Board members demonstrated clearly that no one has defined that threshold. So it's unfair for members to voice a concern about an alleged overemphasis that is based solely

on the age of the reels being discussed.

One of the major differences between more recent reels and those "worthier" reels of the more distant past is that most of the reels made during the last seven decades were produced in vast numbers by factories equipped for mass production. It would seem that a reel that was produced by the hundreds of thousands is less worthy of a collector's interest than one hand-made by the dozens a century or more ago. Well, folks, let's not confuse a reel's ability to generate mechanical or historical interest with its collector value. Based on laws of supply and demand, the mass-produced reels will continue to attract relatively low prices, in spite of the fact that many were made with novel, often clever, mechanical features that may, ultimately, represent breakthroughs in reel design.

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Of course, some of those features could just as easily represent evolutionary dead ends, but that hardly makes them less interesting. In short, even mass-produced reels, inexpensive or not, can provide fascinating insights into reel development.

There is little question that most of the more highly "collectible," mass-produced reels of more recent decades are prized more for their scarcity than for their high quality of construction. Models of common, mass-produced reels that happen to have been made briefly in uncommon sizes, color variants, and other "mutant" reels have attracted much attention and high prices. Is this a problem? The now-desirable Orvis reels from 1880 or so

were, in my view, junk when they were made. In contrast, the ubiquitous Tri-Part may have been the best reel ever built for the money, but it's dirt-cheap today. And as for size differences, just take a peek at what a No. 0 Meek & Milam costs compared with a No. 3. The point is that collectors are applying the same "rules" to newer reels that collectors have applied to the "old" ones.

Assuming that the dissident members' views are not based on snobbery, we should respond to their valid concerns that ORCA is publishing a lot of articles on fixed-spool reels to the exclusion of conventional reels, which are generally considered as representative of the "older" machines. The older reels are, of course, considered more worthy of our attention. The fact that patented fixed-spool reels date back at least to 1875 and have been manufactured and used continually since then seems relevant here. That date is only nineteen years more recent than that of the earliest known American reel patent. Yes, antique collectors are always hunting for ever-more-ancient pieces, but we can hardly turn up our noses at fixed-spool reels simply because the latest versions are sold at K-Mart these days.

My response to the members who are despairing of "too many spinning reel articles" is to point out that articles in *The Reel News* don't appear out of thin air. They are written by collectors who have a deep interest in their collecting targets and who have exerted the energy to do a little research and to share their results with us.

Our esteemed Editor publishes the articles submitted by members, and, fortunately for ORCA, he also does enough research of his own so that he can continue to write many articles on the older reels that interest him and our "concerned" members. I estimate that our Editor has written at least half the articles on old, conventional reels that have appeared in print during the last couple of years. The reason for this phenomenon is simply that those members whose interests do not include spinning reels are not submitting enough articles to the Editor. *Someone has to write the articles!*

No one has to worry that ORCA is racing off in the wrong direction, wherever that may be. During the last couple of years, the Board of Directors has worked hard to facilitate nominations for Officers and Directors, to "democratize" the club by liberalizing the avenues through which members can campaign for change, and to formalize the planning of annual conventions. A comparison of our constitution with that of three years ago will confirm that view. In addition, the Board continually explores means of enticing more members to become more active in what has become a broader range of activities. But let's not forget that *the Board is responsible only for ensuring that the club remain an adequate forum for those who happen to be interested in collecting reels. It does not, and it should not, influence the collecting interests of its members.*

If you're still awake, you may have noticed that this little essay has changed from an argument over what is collectible to a plea for more of you ORCAns to get more actively involved with the club. It's unfair to judge a club solely on the basis of its latest swap meet or the most recent issues of its magazine. If you have reel information to share, **WRITE AN ARTICLE**. If you want to see more conventions or conventions nearer your home, **PROPOSE A CONVENTION SITE**. If you have complaints about club policies, **RECOMMEND SPECIFIC CHANGES**. Finally, if all else fails and you remain dissatisfied with the way that ORCA is run, **RUN FOR OFFICE, OR AT LEAST VOTE**. The club will continue to grow and improve only if its members are there to nurture it.

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The above message was written by ORCA Director and Honorary Member Steve Vernon. It was heartily approved by all the ORCA Officers and Directors