

CLUTCH CHATTER

SPORTLITES

By Ron Ehrenhofer, Chicago

When I started the restoration of my first "Sportlite" a few years ago, I found the available information very limited. My quest to discover what the "original" "Sportlite" was like eventually led me to Unity Manufacturing Company, in Chicago.

Unity Manufacturing was very helpful when I brought in my "Sportlite." One of the vice-presidents took me around and introduced me to all the "old timers" in the plant. Unfortunately, as is often the case, Unity moved its factory and plant shortly after World War II, and most of the material pertaining to the Model "A" era "Sportlites" was lost in the shuffle. However, I was able to put together a few pieces, and I would like to share what I have learned with my fellow restorers.

The name "Sportlite" was a trade name for a spotlight manufactured by Unity during the Model "A" period. (This trade name was also used for many years before and after the Model "A" era). Two types of "Sportlites" were manufactured during the four years of "A" production. The early style light was produced through 1928, and the later style was produced from early 1929 to 1934 (no exact production dates are available).

Both style lights were available in three sizes: the 5½" "Junior," the 6" "Standard," and the 6½" "DeLuxe." The Ford dealers generally carried the 5½" Junior model, and the larger lamps were primarily used on larger cars. A larger light could have been used on a Ford, but this would have required a special order. Other spotlights, in addition to Unity's, were available for the Model "A," but not officially through Ford dealerships. Unity "Sportlites" were carried by Chevy dealers as standard optional equipment.

In order to better relate to you the information I have on the "Sportlite," I will describe to you the later style (1929 to 1934) lamp and point out how it differs from the earlier style. When reading the text, remember, "Sportlites" must look like the accompanying photographs to be correct.

Lamp Shell — The most distinguishing differences between the early and late style "Sportlites" was found in the lamp shell (Fig. 1). The main difference is the bulb focusing adjustment. The later style is screw slotted, and the early is a knurled knob. The other distinguishing features are that the nameplate was moved from the bottom to the top of the shell, and the lense ring was flush with the shell on the later style lamp.

Nameplate — The nameplate on the later style contained no "Ford" markings or model number, and the last patent date was 1929 (Fig. 2). It is located on the top of the lamp

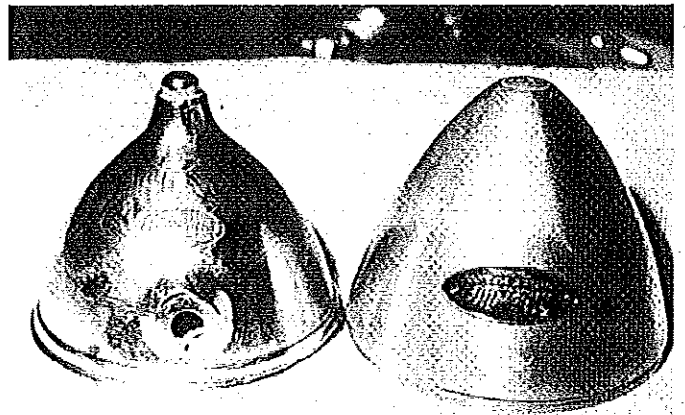


FIG. 1



FIG. 2

shell. All indications lead me to believe that the nameplate was a type of "satin chrome" (Butler) finish with polished letters and border. There is no indication that the background was ever painted black, as is most often seen on "Sportlites" today. It certainly never was plain brass. However, I cannot document these findings, and any further information would be welcomed.

The earlier "Sportlite" nameplate was stamped in brass and was never plated. It is located between the knurled adjustment lamp knob and the lamp base. The last patent date was 1921, and no model type is found on this plate either.

Reflector — The reflectors are interchangeable for all years.

Socket — Sockets are the same for all four years.

Bulb — The standard bulb is a #1133, 32CP 6-8V, and it carried a metal shield to help create a "spot" (Fig. 3). The shield is a gun metal blue finish. Other bulbs were available at this time without shields but were not standard for these lamps (see drawing).

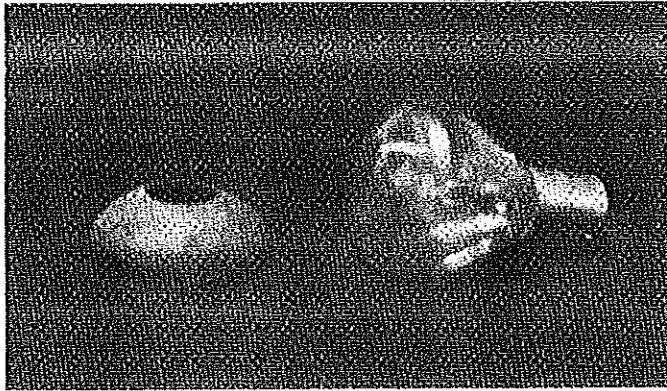


FIG. 3

Lense — The lenses are interchangeable for all "A" years.

Ring — The later style differed from the early type in cross section; the later style is shown in Fig. 4.

Ring Screw and Nut — The ring screw and nut were the same all four years.

Lamp Housing Casting — The lamp housing casting differs from the earlier models in that it was a heavier casting (both white metal die castings) with a shorter slot for the friction lock (Fig. 5). The friction lock has one round head and one slotted hex screw. The early style has two philister head screws for the friction locks. All screws have lock washers. No parts are interchangeable between 1928 and 1929 to 1934 models.

Shaft Lengths — There are three shafts or tubing: the inside tube (the gears attach to it); the intermediate shaft, and the outside brass tubing (chrome). The lengths of these shafts for the "A" are as follows:

Inside shaft — 11-1/2" long, 9/32" O.D.

Intermediate — 9-7/8" long

Outside tubing — 7-11/16" or 8-7/16"

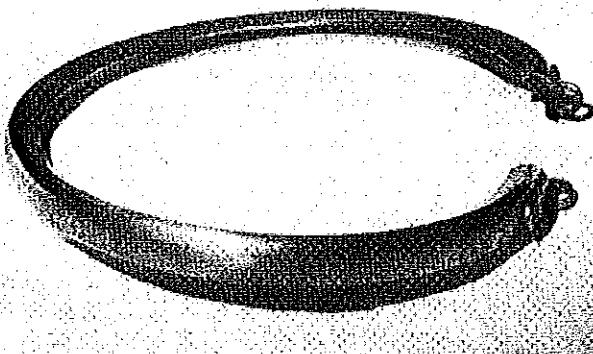


FIG. 4

Do not be alarmed if your lengths do not match these figures. Other sizes were available on special order for other lamps. Do not try and interchange parts from one lamp to another unless they are the same length.

Handle Housing Casting — The handle housing casting differs from the earlier style in that instead of a friction lock, it has a wedge lock (Fig. 6). The later style is also a heavier casting.

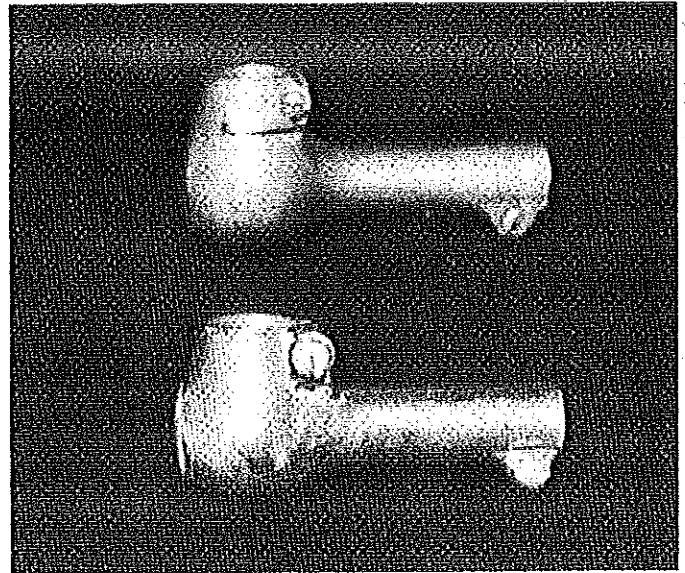


FIG. 5

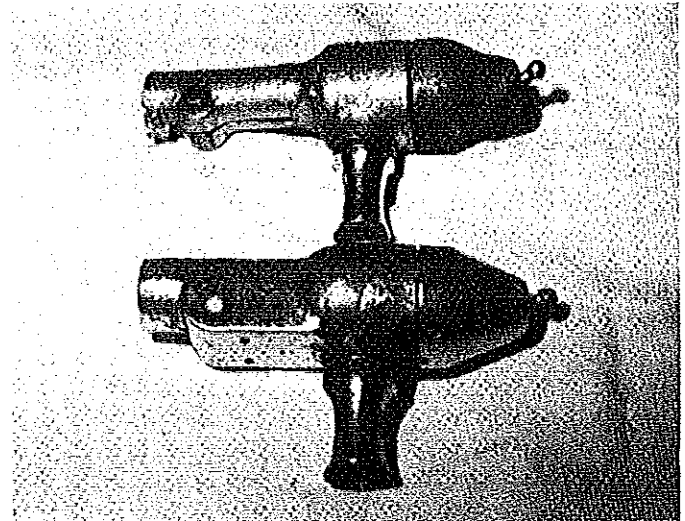


FIG. 6

Switch Cap — The switch cap differs in shape, and the later style has a locating notch on the bottom. The toggles are interchangeable, as are the switches and wires.

Wire — The wire in a "Sportlite" is an armored cable (Fig. 7). The switch end of the wire is stripped and tinned. The headlamp end of the wire has no armor cover once inside the shell but is still insulated. The end of this wire has a fitting which pushes into the socket retainer. All years are the same.

The Ball — Only a couple of things are known about the ball. One is that the "standard" ball was black with a 1/8"

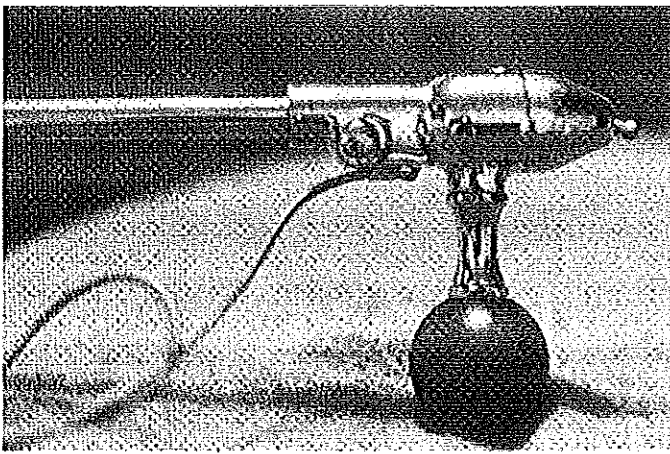


FIG. 7

convex groove around its center, (see Fig. 7 and drawing). This ball was also available in different colors. It is believed that other types of balls (including a marble type) were available, but this cannot be documented at this time. It is believed the early light had the same ball, but I cannot document this either.

Brackets — The "Sportlite" was sold with closed car brackets to hold it on the car, and several types were available for the "A," depending on the body type. Page 588 of the Ford Service Bulletins illustrates the different types of brackets (Fig. 8). With each bracket came a template used for drilling the holes in the body (Fig. 9). The open cars, of course, needed no template. Although no bracket is shown for 1928-29 open cars, it is believed one was available from Ford, but it cannot be proven at this time.

Plating — All indications show that all lamps during "A" production were chrome-plated. The same lamp used in 1928 may be found nickle-plated since this lamp also was used during the mid 20's. The exact date when Unity changed from nickle to chrome plate is not known, but it is believed to be around the beginning of "A" production, according to the "old timers" at Unity.

Restoring a "Sportlite" — Assuming you have acquired a genuine "Sportlite" or the makings of one for your car, there are a few pitfalls I want to warn you against. In disassembling the parts, be careful not to apply too much pressure to weak castings, for they break easily.

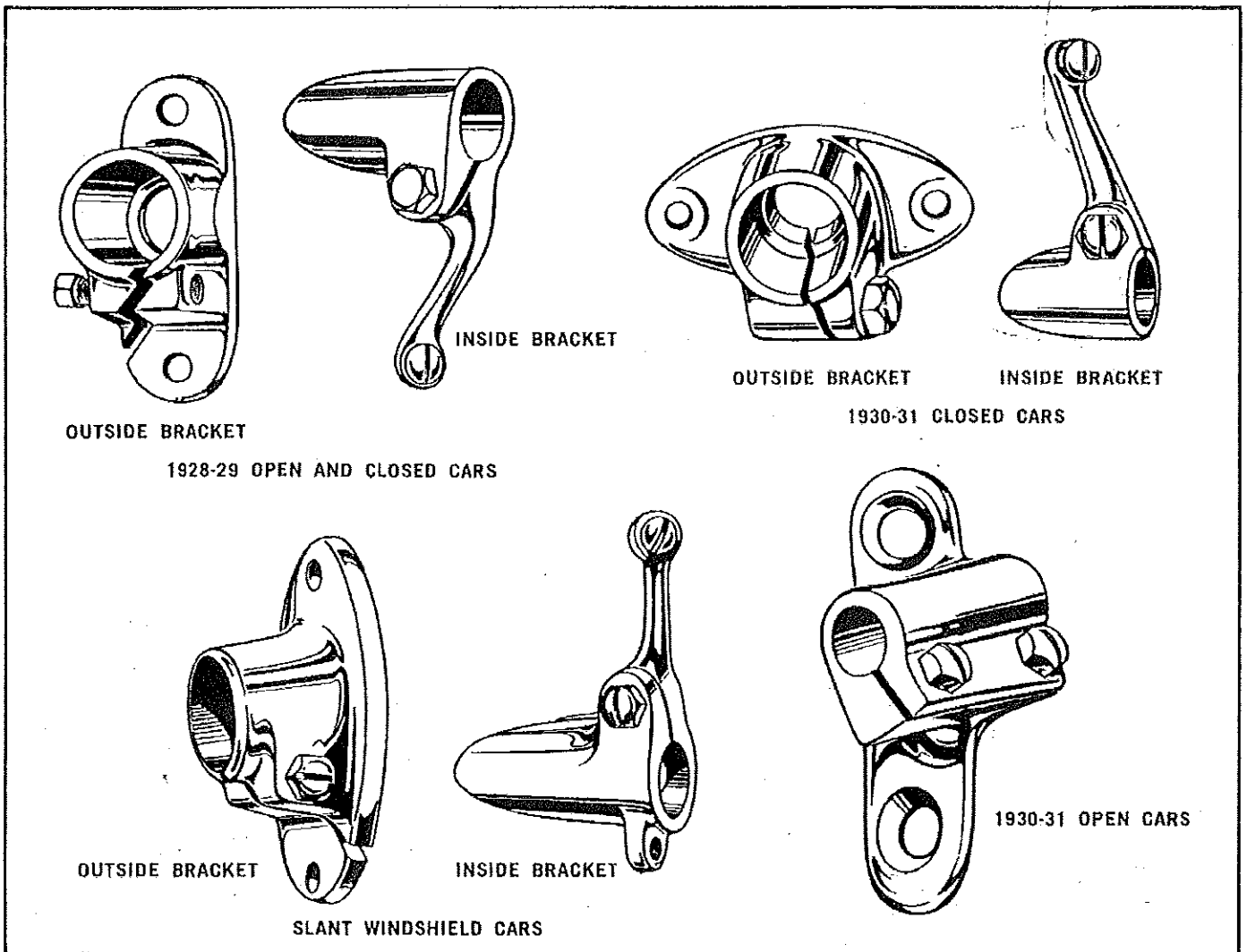


FIG. 8-A

