GRADES OF L.C. SMITH SHOTGUNS

Hunter Arms Company, Fulton, New York

1913-1945 Grades

In 1913, The Hunter Arms Company redesigned all of the grades of L.C. Smith shotguns. One of their catalogs from that year said that the old grades would be manufactured to order during 1913 only, and that the new grades would be carried in stock. The previous combination of numbers and names for grades was replaced by names only. The grade is marked on the water table of the receiver. In many cases, FIELD is written out for that grade, while letters are more commonly used for other grades (e.g., “I” for Ideal, “S” for Specialty, etc.). The name of the grade is usually roll-stamped or engraved on the top of the right barrel. The mechanical construction of all receivers was the same, but the engraving and finish on the inside of the locks varied. Frames and lock plates were case hardened on all of the grades.

FF Grade Hammer

The Hunter Arms Company continued to produce hammer shotguns until 1932. In 1917, the catalog described the F Grade as having Royal Steel barrels in 12 or 16 gauge for $22.

The FF Grade had Damascus Steel barrels in 10 gauge for $25. After 1919, only Royal Steel barrels were available. Fulton, Fulton Special, and Hunter Special shotguns were manufactured by the Hunter Arms Company. They were box lock shotguns, did not carry the L.C. Smith name, and are not classified as L.C. Smith shotguns. The Fulton was introduced in 1915 to meet a market demand for inexpensive shotguns created by poor quality imported shotguns. It was priced at $18, and the Futon Special sold for $25 in 1916.

Hunter Special

The Hunter Special was introduced in 1937 to reach the low end market and to improve business. Brophy reported that it retailed for $30 in 1937 when the Fulton was $25, the Fulton Special was $31, and the L.C. Smith Field Grade was $43.

Most of the following information was taken from a 1913 L.C. Smith catalog. Information on later grades came from the 1945 L.C.
Field

Field Grade

The Field Grade was the lowest grade available. The 1913 catalog said: “This gun is especially designed for those requiring a cheap, sound and plainly finished weapon. It is particularly useful for field and marsh where rough usage is required. The shooting powers of this gun can be relied upon to be fully equal to those of the higher grades. Featherweights are made in twelve-gauges as light as six and one-quarter pounds.” Brophy estimated that 141,844 Field Grades were manufactured accounting for about 80% of the total production of L.C. Smith shotguns during the period of 1913 to 1945. The price in 1913 was $25. A Hunter-One Trigger brought the price up to $45. A gun with ejectors sold for $35, and one with ejectors and the Hunter One-Trigger retailed for $55. It was available in 12, 16, and 20 gauge and later in 410 bore. The barrels were Armor Steel in lengths of 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches. Chokes were bored from cylinder to full to meet the customer’s order. Stocks were American walnut in full pistol, half pistol, or straight grips. L.C. SMITH was stamped on the lock plates, and there was no engraving. The right barrel was usually roll-stamped L.C SMITH FIELD GRADE and the left barrel was marked THE HUNTER ARMS CO. FULTON, N.Y. The 1939 catalog announced a new, improved Field Grade with an improved cocking mechanism, extra strength in the stock, and a reshaped forend. A Field Special was listed for $48. It was the new, improved Field Grade with ivory sights and a recoil pad. The 1945 price of the regular Field Grade was $65.

Ideal

Ideal Grade

The Hunter Arms Company advertised the Ideal Grade as a “general purpose” gun with “just enough engraving to make it attractive.” The locks were engraved with a simple oak leaf design. The trigger guard and frame had additional, but minimal, engraving. L.C. SMITH was roll-stamped on the lock plates. In 1913, the Ideal Grade was regularly available with London Steel barrels, but it could be ordered with Damascus Steel barrels. Barrel lengths were 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches, and they could be bored from cylinder to full choke. The right barrel was roll-stamped L.C. SMITH IDEAL GRADE while the left was marked THE HUNTER ARMS CO. FULTON, N.Y. Gauges were 10, 12, 16, and 20, and 410 bore was available later. The 1913 price with two triggers was $37.50. A Hunter One-Trigger added $20 to the price. A gun with ejectors was $49, and one with both ejectors and a Hunter One-Trigger was $69. In 1945, the base price for the Ideal Grade was $87. Between 1913 and 1945, Hunter Arms Company manufactured 21,862 Ideal Grade shotguns.
The Skeet Special Grade was introduced in 1929 at a base price of $47. The price increased to $92 with a selective or nonselective Hunter One-Trigger, beaver tail forend, and ejectors. The 1945 catalog stated “Skeet shooting demands a combination of quick thinking, fast action and a light, true-shooting, perfectly balanced gun. The L.C. Smith Skeet Special is just that kind of gun! Custom-built to any reasonable dimensions, it assures perfect fit. Bored Skeet No. 1 and No. 2, it guarantees an ideal skeet pattern. Equipped with Hunter One-trigger, it assures infallible operation on doubles without interruption of aim. Fitted with Streamline Beavertail Forend, it lends itself perfectly to the precision required of the shooter.” The walnut stock was available in straight grip but “any reasonable change custom-built at no extra charge.” The stock had no butt plate, but the wood on the butt was checkered instead. The London Steel barrels could be purchased in 26-, 27-, or 28-inch lengths. Gauges were 12, 16, and 20, and the 410 bore was available. Engraving on the left lock plate was a clay pigeon superimposed on a flying partridge. The right lock plate was engraved with a flying partridge. No engraving was placed on the frame. A total of 770 Skeet Special Grades were made.

The Trap Grade

The 1913 catalog stated “In the production of this grade particular attention has been paid to meet the requirements of sportsmen who are desirous of a gun for trap shooting, as well as for field, with all of the latest attachments – Hunter One-Trigger and Automatic Ejector especially – and at a very low price. Each lock-plate is engraved with a trap shooting scene consisting of a trap house and a squad of five shooters at the score. We can confidently recommend this grade as entirely satisfactory, especially for the purpose the name implies. With our special system of boring, no better guns are made for trap than the L.C. Smith Double Gun with Hunter One-Trigger.” The price with two triggers in 1913 was $55, and a Hunter One-Trigger brought the price up to $75. Ejectors added $11 to the price, and $86 would buy the gun with both ejectors and the Hunter One-Trigger. The base price of this grade increased to $77 by the time that it was discontinued in 1939. A total of 3,355 Trap Grade shotguns were built. The American walnut stock was available in full pistol, half pistol, and straight grips. Gauges available were 10, 12, 16, and 20 with the 410 bore being available later. Barrels were usually made from Crown Steel. Damascus Steel was available as an option up to 1917. Barrel lengths were 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches. The right barrel was roll-stamped L.C. SMITH TRAP GRADE, and the left barrel was stamped HUNTER ARMS CO. INC. M’F’R’S FULTON N.Y.

The Specialty Grade

The 1913 catalog states “A fine gun in all details, built to last a lifetime. Handsomely engraved . . . with fine lines of the best weapon and at a most moderate price. A thoroughly sound, serviceable gun, well fitted. Every attention has been paid to produce in this our Specialty grade a well-balanced and good shooting-gun and we have every confidence in recommending it to sportsmen who are desirous of having a high quality gun and do not feel justified in purchasing our highest.” A total of 6,565 Specialty Grades were made between 1913 and 1945. Base price in 1913 was $64. The Hunter One-Trigger added $25 and ejectors added $11. The base price was $131 in 1945. As with the lower grades, it was available in 10, 12, 16, and 20 gauges with the 410 being available later. Barrels were Nitro Steel, or Damascus Steel could be ordered. Barrel lengths were 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches and were “bored any way you choose.” The nicely figured walnut stocks were available in full pistol, half pistol, and straight grips. L.C.
SMITH was engraved on the lock plates. A pair of quail was engraved on the left lock plate, and a waterfowl scene was engraved on the right. The serial number was engraved on the trigger guard extension. The regular rib had a precious metal bar inlaid at the junction of the rib and rib extension. This bar was not present on guns with ventilated ribs or raised ribs. The left barrel was roll-stamped HUNTER ARMS CO. INC. M’F’R’S FULTON, N.Y., U.S.A. The right barrel was roll-stamped L.C. SMITH SPECIALTY GRADE.

Olympic

The Olympic Grade was produced from 1932 to 1938. Only 26 were made (twenty-two 12 gauges, three 16 gauges, and one 20 gauge). Its base price was $119, and it replaced the more expensive Eagle Grade ($176 when it was discontinued in 1932). One intermediate catalog described this grade as follows: “The Olympic double barrel with the Ventilated Rib and Beaver Tail Forend combines all of the fine qualities of design and workmanship necessary to produce and attractive, perfectly balanced and hard hitting gun. The Olympic is built especially for trap shooting. Feel, balance and shooting qualities are featured in this model. The Stock and Beaver Tail Forend are from selected walnut carefully checkered. The frame is neatly engraved with a scroll pattern. Barrels choked to your own special requirements. Recoil pad and Lyman ivory sights are part of standard equipment.” Full pistol, half pistol, and straight grips were available. Barrels were 30 or 32 inches in length and were “bored by the Smith System for perfection.”

Eagle

The 1913 catalog said “In introducing this new Eagle grade, we are presenting an entirely new type of ornamentation. This is especially designed for the shooter who wishes a medium high-priced gun, highly decorated. On the left lock-plate, with a frosted background, is a ring-necked pheasant in bold relief. On the right a duck in flight. The top and bottom of the frame are frosted and interlaced with scroll engraving.” The term “frosted” referred to the results from a stippling process. This technique was used on no other grade of L.C. Smith shotgun. An eagle with spread wings was engraved on the top of the lever. Each lock plate was engraved L.C. SMITH, and the serial number was engraved in the trigger guard extension. The base price in 1913 was $115. The Hunter One-Trigger added $25, and ejectors added $11 to the price. Gauges available were 10, 12, 16, and 20. The Eagle Grade was discontinued in 1932 after 580 were made. The base price in 1932 was $176. It was available with Nitro Steel barrels in 26-, 28-, 30-, and 32-inch lengths. Damascus barrels were available on special order until 1919 in 10, 12, and 20 gauges. The nicely figured, imported walnut stocks could be ordered in any grip style. The right barrel was roll-stamped L.C. SMITH EAGLE GRADE while the left was roll-stamped HUNTER ARMS CO. INC. M’F’R’S FULTON, N.Y. U.S.A.

Crown
Crown Grade

The Hunter Arms Company produced 842 Crown Grades from 1913 to 1945. Clearly, it was a replacement for the No. 5 which was discontinued in 1912. In most but not all cases, a gold crown was inlaid on top of the lever. Base price for the Crown Grade was $157 in 1913. For $182 the buyer could have a Hunter One-Trigger. Ejectors added $12 to the base price, and a gun with both ejectors and a Hunter One-Trigger was priced at $194. The base price in 1945 was $302. This gun was built and engraved to order resulting in few guns being exactly alike. While many had dog scenes engraved on the lock plates, others had upland birds and/or waterfowl. The serial number was engraved on the trigger guard extension. Stocks were highly figured, imported walnut with the grips made to order. Most of the barrels were Nitro Steel, although Damascus Steel was an early option. Barrel lengths were the standard 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches. The barrel extension is decoratively engraved, and the rib was matted. Crown Grade shotguns were available in 10, 12, 16, and 20 gauges. Five 410 bore shotguns were made between 1926 and 1933. The right barrel was engraved L.C. SMITH CROWN GRADE and the left was engraved MADE TO ORDER BY THE HUNTER ARMS CO., FULTON, N.Y.

Monogram

The Monogram was the one exception when the grades of L.C. Smith shotguns were changed in 1913. Its name and style did not change. Only 164 Monogram Grade guns were made between 1913 and 1945. The price with two triggers and ejectors was $281. A Hunter One-Trigger added $25 to the cost. The price had increased to $591 by 1941. This was a made to order gun, but most of the lock plates had scroll work and birds with scroll work and flowers covering most of the frame and trigger guard. The barrels were made of Sir Joseph Whitworth Fluid Compressed Steel and were available in 26-, 28-, 30-, and 32-inch lengths. The muzzle and breech ends of the barrels were engraved. Gauges offered were 12, 16, and 20. Later, a 410 bore was offered, but records do not indicate that any were made. The stocks were highly figured, imported walnut. The top of the right barrel was hand engraved SIR JOSEPH WHITWORTH FLUID COMPRESSED STEEL and the top of the left was engraved MADE TO ORDER BY THE HUNTER ARMS CO. FULTON, N.Y. The rib extension was engraved L.C. SMITH MONOGRAM GRADE.

Premier

The 1913 catalog said “The highest quality of material, workmanship and finish is employed in the manufacture of this Premier grade. To obtain the perfection of balance, great care is exercised in the distribution of both metal and wood. With our special system of boring, absolute perfection in shooting qualities is guaranteed. For quiet elegance . . . it is not surpassed by any gun made. It is engraved with a setter dog in relief on the left lock-plate and a pointer dog on the right. The top of the frame is elaborately ornamented with oak leaf bas-relief work. The lightning in the sides of the barrels is inlaid in gold.” But, the lightning on the sides of the barrels is not always inlaid in gold. The 1926 catalog noted that the hunting dogs on the lock plates were inlaid in gold. The inside of the lock plates was damascened. Usually, a gold pigeon was inlaid on the trigger plate in front of the trigger guard, and a gold medallion was inlaid in the stock. Some have a gold inlaid name or initials on the trigger guard. Base price of the Premier Grade was $562, and a Hunter One-Trigger increased the price by $25. The base price had increased to $846 when it was discontinued in 1941. The barrels were Sir Joseph Whitworth Fluid Compressed Steel in the standard lengths of 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches, but any length could be ordered. The muzzle and breech ends of the barrels were engraved. Gauges offered were 12, 16, and 20. Only 25 Premier Grade shotguns were made (twenty-one were 12 gauges, two were 16 gauges, and five were 20 gauges).
Seventeen were regular frame guns and 11 were featherweights. The top of the right barrel was hand engraved SIR JOSEPH WHITWORTH FLUID COMPRESSED STEEL and the top of the left barrel was hand engraved MADE TO ORDER BY THE HUNTER ARMS CO. FULTON, N.Y. The rib extension was engraved L.C. SMITH PREMIER GRADE.

De Luxe

The 1913 catalog said “This gun represents a beautiful specimen of mechanical and artistic skill, the finest type it is possible to man in the bas-relief on each lock plate, interlaced with the finest engraving, produce an effect that is most striking. We do not confine ourselves to a single design, customers’ own designs will be carried out and inscriptions of any character carefully inlaid or engraved. These superb productions are greatly appreciated by first-class sportsmen and connoisseurs . . . this “De Luxe” grade of the Smith gun is produced at great expense, as selected workmen or neither time nor money are spared in their manufacture. Specially suitable for presentation purposes.” The De Luxe Grade was priced Trigger in 1913 and $1465 in 1945. Obviously, this was a made to order gun, and it is doubtful that any of the 29 De Luxe Grade guns are the same. Some had fine gold scroll work entwined through the background engraving. Gold inlays may be found on the lock plate, trigger plate, forend iron, barrel lug, sides of the barrels, and the forend latch escutcheon. Barrels were made of Sir Joseph Whitworth Fluid Compressed Steel. Standard lengths were 26, 28, 30, and 32 inches, but any length could be ordered. Any style of barrel engraving could be ordered. Seven 20 gauges, two 16 gauges, and twenty 12 gauge guns were crafted. The stock were made from the highest quality, imported walnut. L.C. SMITH DE LUXE GRADE is usually inlaid in gold on the rib or rib extension. The top of the right barrel is usually hand engraved SIR JOSEPH WHITWORTH FLUID COMPRESSED STEEL, made to order by the Hunter Arms Co. Fulton, N.Y.