



Queen Cutlery History

Queen's Burnt Orange Knives by Bob Welch

The Burnt Orange range of Queen Cutlery knives are now rare and sought after. The name is derived from the distinctive color of a synthetic handle material used by the company during a short period in the late 1950's. Queen is well known for its use of Winterbottom bone handles on its knives. Winterbottom bone is noted for a unique linear groove pattern of jiggling on cow bone knife handles.



QUEEN #19 BURNT ORANGE

By the late '50's the price of the bone material increased while at the same time demand for knives was decreasing as America shifted away from a rural economy. These factors, along with a desire to increase the durability of knife handles led Queen

to begin experimenting with handles made with synthetic polymer (plastic). The cutlery provided samples of Winterbottom bone scales to Rogers Manufacturing Company, which made tools and began molding handles from Delrin, an acetal homopolymer from DuPont. Delrin is a tough plastic noted for low friction, high tensile strength and high wear resistance. The early batches were molded of natural (off-white) resin so they had to be colored with dye to more closely resemble genuine Winterbottom bone.

In August, 2016 the Queen Cutlery History team interviewed Fred Sampson, retired Master Cutler. Now retired, Fred, shown holding a burnt orange #39, started with Queen in 1948 and became Master Cutler in 1976.



Fred has a fantastic memory and he has been very generous over the years in sharing information to those interested in knowledge about Queen, the company and its products. During the interview, Fred Fisher produced a box of Burnt Orange knives and asked Fred what he could tell us about them. Here's what he had to say:

“The Burnt orange was our second Delrin handle. The first one was more or less like a roofing tarpaper and that didn't turn out good at all. And then they came up with this formula. We didn't know it was going to turn red until we had all the knives built and in the lower vault ready to be tested and worked over. And we went down and opened the vault and it was just about glowin' with this orange. Matt called the company (Rogers) and Vince Bitel made them and he came down with chemicals and he took garbage cans and put the knives in and that stopped it and kept it right where it was at. But we couldn't have done that had it not been stainless steel springs and stainless steel blades. The chemicals wouldn't ... if it had been carbon, it would have been bad.”

So, the now highly desirable burnt orange imitation Winterbottom handles came about as the result of a runaway chemical reaction during the dyeing process. Today, collectors know that some burnt orange knives

are in fact orange, while others tend toward red and others purple. Some of the variation may be explained by the length of time the chemical reaction ran before being stopped by Vince Bitel of Rogers Manufacturing and his chemical-filled garbage cans.

Once the process was stabilized, Queen continued to make knives with burnt orange handles for a few years,



QUEEN #58 BURNT ORANGE

into the early 1960's. If you were to browse through the QCH knife library you would count 31 patterns with this unique handle material and color. By far, most have Q Steel (1958-1960) tang stamps but a few are stamped Queen (script) (1950's). There are also a couple with no stamp (1960's) and one has a Big Q on the tang. Eventually Queen settled on a synthetic handle with black on white coloring, which is known simply as Imitation Winterbottom Bone.

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