

CONDITION STANDARDS FOR RATING FIREARMS

By: Marc Gorelick

The three major factors for determining a collectable firearm's value, whether antique or modern, are: 1) demand; 2) rarity; and 3) condition or "grade." In fact, if you ask many dealers how they determine a firearm's price, they will answer: "Condition, Condition, Condition." Basically, an accurate description of a firearm's condition is essential in evaluating the gun and estimating its value. Differences in condition can have a direct bearing on the price of a collectible gun. After all, a rare gun that looks like it was used as a boat anchor is worth a lot less than the same rare gun in excellent condition. And as collectors we want the best possible example of the items we are collecting (if we can afford them).

There are multiple systems used in determining a gun's "grade" or condition. So it is not wise to judge the grade given to one gun using one condition system against a grade given to another gun using a different condition system, especially since the terms used in evaluating a firearm's condition have specific meaning.

The most widely used standard for grading a firearm's condition is the National Rifle Association (NRA) system. The NRA system, which has been used for many years, is based on the overall condition of the weapon and is divided into two separate categories: modern guns and antique guns. Although the categories are both in the NRA grading system, and some of the terminology is the same, the grades have completely different meanings depending on the category in question. FLAYDERMAN'S GUIDE TO ANTIQUE AMERICAN FIREARMS, generally considered to be the most authoritative and the most widely used price guide to antique American firearms, generally follows the NRA's Antique Firearm Condition Standards.

Below are the standard gun condition rating terms, as defined by the NRA. Remember, there are separate rating systems used for Antique vs. Modern Firearms. (*Note: In the United States, an antique firearm is generally considered one that was manufactured before 1898.*)

NRA MODERN GUN CONDITION STANDARDS:

- **NEW:** Not previously sold at retail, in same condition as current factory production.
- **PERFECT:** In New condition in every respect. (Many collectors & dealers use "As New" to describe this condition.) A "perfect" gun is literally as good as new, although it may have been sold in a retail store.

- **EXCELLENT:** New condition, used but little, no noticeable marring of wood or metal, bluing perfect (except at muzzle or sharp edges).
- **VERY GOOD:** In perfect working condition, no appreciable wear on working surfaces, no corrosion or pitting, only minor surface dents or scratches.
- **GOOD:** In safe working condition, minor wear on working surfaces, no broken parts, no corrosion or pitting that will interfere with proper functioning.
- **FAIR:** In safe working condition but well worn, and may require some minor maintenance, such as replacement of minor parts or adjustments which should be indicated in advertisement. No rust, but may have corrosion pits which do not render article unsafe or inoperable.

NRA ANTIQUE FIREARM CONDITION STANDARDS:

- **FACTORY NEW:** All original parts; 100% original finish; in perfect condition in every respect, inside and out.
- **EXCELLENT:** All original parts; over 80% original finish; sharp lettering, numerals and design on metal and wood; unmarred wood; fine bore.
- **FINE:** All original parts; over 30% original finish; sharp lettering, numerals and design on metal and wood; minor marks in wood; good bore.
- **VERY GOOD:** All original parts; none to 30% original finish; original metal surfaces smooth with all edges sharp; clear lettering, numerals and design on metal; wood slightly scratched or bruised; bore disregarded for collectors firearms.
- **GOOD:** Some minor replacement parts; metal smoothly rusted or lightly pitted in places, cleaned or re-blued; principal letters, numerals and design on metal legible; wood refinished, scratched bruised or minor cracks repaired; in good working order.
- **FAIR:** Some major parts replaced; minor replacement parts may be required; metal rusted, may be lightly pitted all over, vigorously cleaned or re-blued; rounded edges of metal and wood; principal lettering, numerals and design on metal partly obliterated; wood scratched, bruised, cracked or repaired where broken; in fair working order or can be easily repaired and placed in working order.
- **POOR:** Major and minor parts replaced; major replacement parts required and extensive restoration needed; metal deeply pitted; principal lettering, numerals and design obliterated, wood badly scratched, bruised, cracked or broken; mechanically inoperative; generally undesirable as a collector's firearm.

OTHER CONDITION RATING SYSTEMS

There are a number of other systems used for grading the condition of firearms and determining their value. Two popular systems are:

BLUE BOOK OF GUN VALUES - PERCENTAGE OF ORIGINAL FINISH SYSTEM -

This system is widely used by collectors and dealers, and has been popularized by the BLUE BOOK OF GUN VALUES. This system usually refers to the percentage of ORIGINAL FINISH remaining on the metal surfaces. It does NOT refer to the overall condition of the gun. Also, if a firearm has no original finish remaining this system does not really apply. In addition, if a gun has been refinished, it would not be ratable under the Blue Book system, the BLUE BOOK grading system applies only to ORIGINAL factory finish.

STANDARD CATALOG OF FIREARMS SYSTEM – THE STANDARD CATALOG OF

FIREARMS by Ned Schwing is an excellent price guide, especially useful since it is photo illustrated. The user should be aware however, that although it's condition rating terms are the same words as the NRA system (such as "Excellent" or "Very Good") the definition or meanings may differ widely from the NRA standard grading system. The STANDARD CATALOG'S standards/definitions are roughly similar to the NRA's for modern guns, but its definitions/standards for antique gun conditions are markedly different. For instance, an antique firearm that has an "Excellent" grade under NRA antique condition standards might only rate "Very Good" under the STANDARD CATALOG OF FIREARMS grading system. This can have an impact on value and price.

OTHER PRICE GUIDE SYSTEMS – The first thing to do when referring to any price guide is to check the definitions of firearm condition grades or standards to see if the guide uses the same definitions and grades as the standard NRA system, or if it uses different definitions.

For more information about firearm condition grades and an expanded look at the NRA rating system by Jim Supica, NRA Museum Curator, go to:

<http://www.nramuseum.org/gun-info-research/evaluating-firearms-condition.aspx>