



Ok, here we go with the evolution of my favorite T/C the Contender. I will start from 1967 then all the way to the G2.

At first Warren Center & Ken Thompson made the frame via investment casting. Really all the frames are done this way. At first they made them as what are called "Flat-sides" which is easy to tell with these 2 photos how they get their name. During the process some of them had gas bubbles form and would leave pitting on the otherwise smooth surface once buffed. Only 71 of these 1967 Flat-sides are documented. Notice the hammer and trigger with the trigger guard being close to grip.

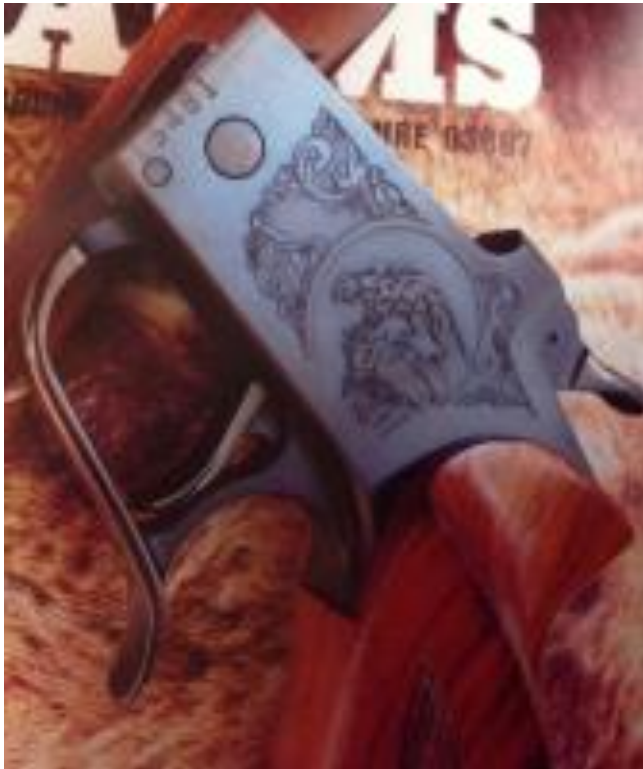
Next to deal with this surface trouble T/C went to acid etching the surface to help hide them. They tried a couple different patterns. The "Eagle" frames have the eagle on the right side with the crouching puma that we often see on the left side. Only 45 eagle frames have been documented. See photos of "Flat-side" above and "Eagle" below.



The choice was then made to run with the crouching puma as the acid etch pattern T/C would use. At first the pattern had more pattern to it which included the area around the tail of the puma and they are called "Full Etch". This early version was used for a number of years and with the original style hammer. Below is a photo of the "Full Etch" at the right and the hammer used on them. The Hammer change will make a variation to come so is why I wanted to show the 1st style. With this first hammer they do not have a safety on them. Also, the way to switch between rimfire and centerfire was by use of a flat screw driver on the front of the hammer. It is also a good time to point out that during the time that the full etched frames were made they were starting to work on beefing up the barrel locking lugs. By doing so they added more metal to the bottom of the barrel lug. In turn they had to make the top of the trigger guard thinner. Plus they added the over travel screw to the rear and changed the angle of the bottom to give more clearance for your fingers between it and the grip. With this being said if you are using a barrel on a Contender frame that has the "step" lug then make sure it also has the over travel screw.

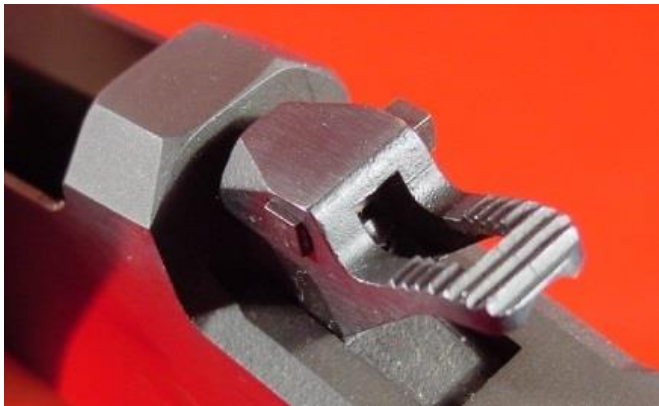


For a very short time as a way to think about making the Contender look better T/C even put the serial number on the side of the frame under the area which would have been covered by the forend. These are called simply "Side Stamp" frames. These did not go over too well since the dealer had to take the forend off to see it during a sale. Only a few of these had been made and collectors like myself want them. See photo below of this frame style.



Then the frames etch pattern went with the lesser pattern without the etching by tail. These are called "3/4 Etch" and during this change a few years later the hammer was changed to include the slide safety. So the attached photos are of the "3/4 Etch" with the original hammer and the next step in the Contender evolution with the newer hammer design with the slide safety. Also note in middle photo the location change of the pivot pin for the lever to open the frame. About this time right at serial number 195,000 they went to this change and is what are being called "Easy Open" frames since it did change

the physics and made it easier to release the locking lugs of the barrel to let it open.



Just before the "Easy Open" version came out in the late 1970's the folks with the IHMSA wanted to have frames made with IHMSA as part of the serial number and a few where made with Super 14 barrels. Of these 50 were made with the 14" 357 MAG barrel which also happen to be the only ones T/C made in the Super 14. As you can see in the photo these frames have the pivot pin towards the front and the slide safety hammer. These are flat-side frames but not the original "Flat-side" style.



It is important to point out as an upgrade to the older Contender frames you could send them in and be converted to the "Easy Open" design. By doing so they drilled the pivot pin location and put the next version of the hammer on them with the selector safety along with the newer trigger group.



Next at about around 210,000 serial numbered frame came the change again to the hammer style which is used from here on out and also used on the G2. Again they are all now easy open frames and in the blued version only at this time with the selector style hammer.



About this time the IHMSA game was huge and T/C took all comments given at matches back to the factory to make changes to make the Contender even better. One such thing was plating the entire Contender with a surface that did not rust as easy and had good wear. These are called Armor Alloy II Contenders and offered in popular 10" and 14" bull barrels also coated. The coating made the hinge pin hole a little smaller so blued barrels would not work on the Armor Alloy frame. These frames start with

the letter "A" at the front of the serial number. This is the only frame that you could not use the blue barrels and later the stainless steel barrels on if not modified. At one time you could send the AA frames and barrels to T/C and they would ream out the pin holes and stamp them with a * to mark such change being made. Notice the puma on the rock etching pattern. Unless it had been sent in to SSK Industries to be SSK Chromed then it is the Armor Alloy II series. The "A" serial number is a dead give away.



Next came along the Stainless Steel version in the Contender evolution. Also note that the acid etch pattern was gone and a machined puma head pattern was being used in the Stainless and Blued versions. These frame serial numbers in the stainless steel start with "S" before the number.



At this time T/C's custom shop Fox Ridge also offered flat-side frames in both blued and stainless steel. Note the pivot pin location of the easy open style being placed just above the trigger (the trigger which is a change too when the easy open frames came out) and the selector style hammer on this stainless custom shop flat-side. I also attached the IHMSA flat-side here too so you can easily see the difference in the two.



The last change to the pre G2 Contender frames came about after T/C had the huge factory fire that took a lot of machines including the machine to make octagon barrels. These frames still are machine etched but instead of a deep groove machine etch they are lighter and kind of "Scratched" onto the surface of both the stainless and blued frames. This pattern was used all the way up to the "Last Contender" which is blued with serial number 500,000 and left the factory with a 10" bull blued 38 Special Match barrel with iron sights.



Then came the G2 Contender around 2003. The Encore had been out for about 6 years and has been out selling the Contender by leaps and bounds since not only will the Encore handle the high pressure ammo it did away with the need to have to break open the action to re-cock the hammer if it was let down without firing. With this came the change to the G2 which lets you cock the hammer and let it down and re-cock without opening the frame. It also took on the smaller scaled back look of the Encore frame with the thicker material at the top forward of the breach plate. The G2 still uses the select hammer so you can use rimfire and centerfire barrels. Hope this helps anybody that is getting into shooting the AWESOME CONTENDER for hunting and shooting. Over 200 different chambers can be had in the Contender so you can hunt anything on the planet with the Contender from a mouse to Elephants. The grip used on the Contender is smaller and many like that for not only feel but also when using gloves in the winter. This attached photo is of the G2 at the top with the pre G2 in the middle and the Larger Encore at bottom so it is easy to tell the difference between them. They are all from the T/C custom shop after being heat treated by Doug Turnbull.



This long thread is the major changes to the Contender frames. Of course many other custom Contenders come into play from the beginning to even in the G2. I attached some of them too but the change in frame feature is pointed out above. The "Flower" pattern Contenders was done by T/C in the 70's via a couple Japanese engravers. Only 4 of them are known to have been made. They each also came with an extra engraved barrel in the Presentation Case.

Thanks for reading and enjoy. I hope this helps those just getting into the Contender to be able to see which version they already have or might be wanting to buy.

Justin Van Dee aka Rebecca Van Dee (I use wife's FB page to snoop around).



