

The Popular Post Versalog Slide Rule

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The Beginning

In several polls conducted by The International Slide Rule Group of its 1100 members, the favorite is always the Post Versalog 1460. This great “ten inch” (actually 25-centimeter scale length) duplex slide rule with 23 scales was made for Post by Hemmi of Japan, beginning in 1951. Scales are LL0,LL/0,K,DF[CF,CIF,CI,C]D,R1,R2,L // LL/1,LL/2,LL/3,[TT,SecTST,CosS,C]D,LL3, LL2,LL1.

According to the Foreword in the Versalog manual, it was designed by a team of engineers for Post. However, the nagging question remains about some of the first Versalogs bearing the marking “Hemmi No. 258” in addition to the Post markings.

For its 25-centimeter duplex slide rules, Hemmi used consecutive model numbers 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, etc. Skipped was 258. Strange!

The 16 known slide rules bearing the Hemmi 258 marking are all Versalogs. Fourteen of them bear the usual Post Versalog 1460 markings. The 15th is for sale on eBay as this article is being written; its markings are unknown at present. The 16th is labeled Hughes-Owens No. 1777 Versalog. Hughes-Owens, and its successor Geotec, were apparently granted license by Post to sell Versalogs in Canada, and to label them with their own company names and model numbers. Geotec labeled its ten-inch Versalogs model 341-3010 (Type 1b) and 341-3012 (Type II).

The Enigma

Two intriguing possibilities exist regarding the Versalog/Hemmi No. 258.

First possibility: When Post approached Hemmi in 1950 about making its newly designed Versalog, Hemmi agreed, made a few Versalogs, and placed the Hemmi No. 258 inscription in the usual location on the front face of the top stator, in addition to the Post Versalog labeling on the top edge. Apparently Post quickly told them to stop doing this. However, a few rules so labeled found their way out of the Hemmi factory and/or out of Post’s hands and into the marketplace.

Second possibility: When Post showed Hemmi its specifications for the Versalog, Hemmi said, “How about this rule”, showing Post its already designed but not produced No. 258. The Hemmi 258 may have been nearly the same as Post’s specs for the Versalog, thus Post said, “okey”. Far-fetched though this may seem at first glance, it might explain why 258 is missing from Hemmi’s series of model numbers for their 25cm duplex rules. We have found no other possible explanation. Perhaps this enigma will never be resolved.

The Evolution

During the Versalog’s life, several changes occurred in

labeling on the rules:

(1) 1951. The first Versalog appears. It bears on its top edge the following inscription: *Copyright 1951, Cat. No. 1460 Versalog, The Frederick Post Co., Hemmi Bamboo – Japan*. On the front face of its stator is the inscription: *SUN* HEMMI NO. 258 JAPAN BA. BA is the date code, indicating January 1951. This is the earliest known Versalog date code. It is in a standard green Hemmi two-piece cardboard case with end label reading *Hemmi No. 258*. On the other end of the case is a price label of 2500 Yen. This rule is in the collection of John Emmons and appears on the next page. (See Figure 2a-2c.)

Date codes appeared on most Versalogs, except those few which mysteriously escaped the Hemmi factory without one. Hemmi began its date code system in 1951.

(2) 1952. *Copyright 1951* is dropped.

(3) 1954. *The* is dropped from the company name imprinted on the top edge, leaving just *Frederick Post Co*.

(4) 1956. Serial numbers start, beginning with 700000. Why 700000? In 1956 the Hemmi year date code was G, the 7th letter of the alphabet. After the 900000 series, serial numbers began again with 100000.

(5) 1957. The 5-inch Versalog 1461 is introduced. The first models have exposed bamboo edges. We call them “woodies”.

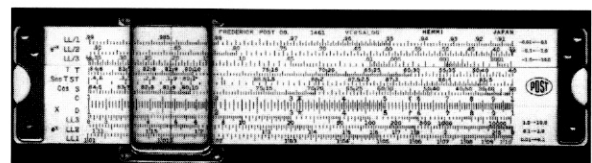


Figure 1. Versalog 1461, 12.5cm scales.

Author’s collection.

(6) 1958. The tiny (1mm high) two-letter date code is moved from the top edge to the bottom edge, and is only stamped into the celluloid and not colored. It is sometimes quite faint, requiring magnification and strong light to locate and read it.

(7) 1960. The COS scale is changed from black to green. Our notation for this rule is Type 1b; prior rules are Type 1a. In addition, Post labeling is moved from the top to the bottom edge; *Cat No.* is dropped, leaving only 1460.

(8) 1961. *Bamboo* is dropped from the labeling, leaving only *Hemmi Japan*.

(9) 1962. The 1461 acquires celluloid covered edges.

(10) 1968. Serial numbers are discontinued. By this time, serial numbers have made a complete cycle, and the 700000, 800000, and 900000 series have been used for the second time.

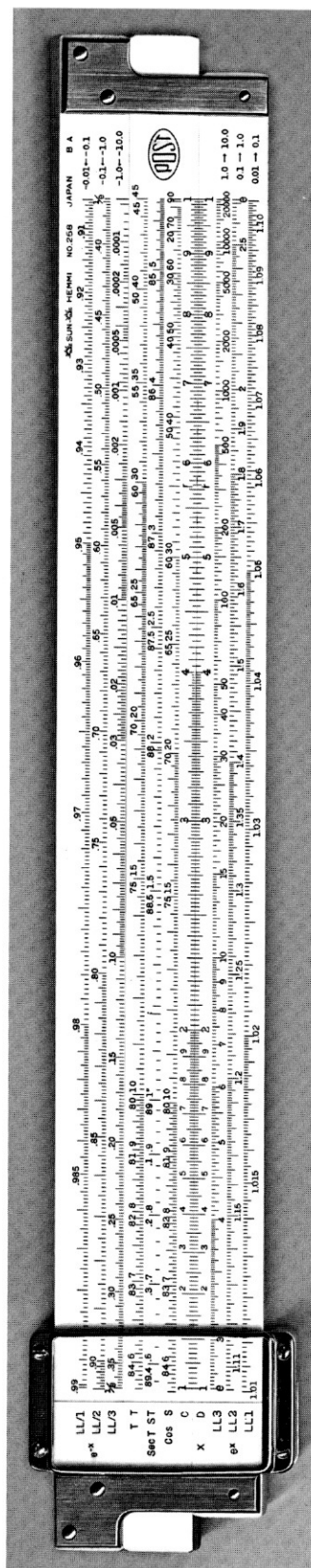
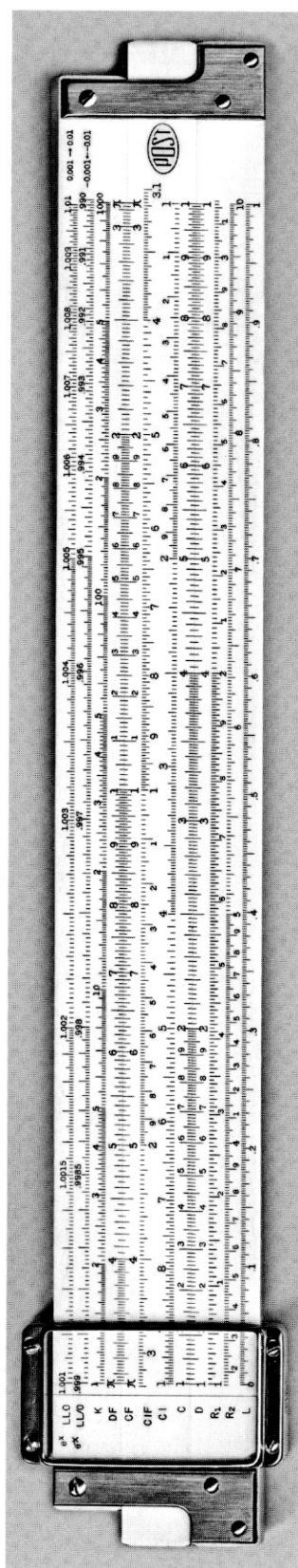
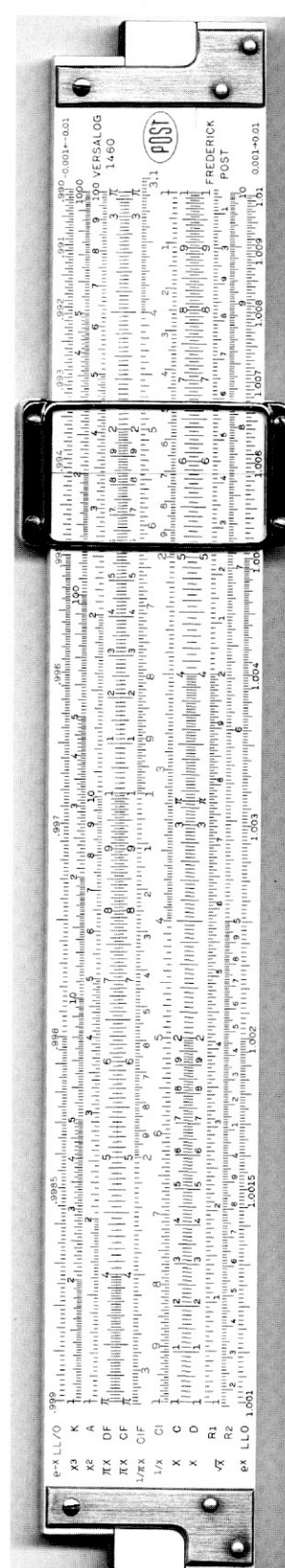
Figure 2a.¹

Figure 2b.



Figure 2c.

Figure 3.²

¹Very early Versalog 1460/Hemmi 258, 25cm scales. Courtesy of John Emmons.

²Post "Versalog II" 1460, 25cm scales.

(11) 1968. Scales are rearranged and an A scale is added. Post called this slide rule the "Versalog II", although this name appears only on packaging and manuals and is not imprinted on the rule. Several labeling changes accompany this addition, as can be seen in Figure 3 on the previous page.

(12) 1972. August. The last Post Versalog II is made. The first Teledyne-Post Versalog II (new model number 44CA-600) appeared shortly before then, in June 1972. The last Teledyne-Post Versalog, of which we know, bears date code WH (August 1972).

The Most Elusive Variants

As can be seen from the preceding, there are numerous variants available for the serious Versalog collector, plus rules that escaped the Hemmi factory without date codes when they should have had them, rules without serial numbers when they should have had them, one known example from 1963 with Hemmi's standard *SUN HEMMI* JAPAN labeling on the face of its top stator, etc.

Among the most difficult Versalogs to locate are the Teledyne-Post models, since they appear to have been produced for fewer than three months. The Teledyne-Post pocket Versalog is very difficult to find. Also, the Hughes-Owens and Geotec models are rather scarce, especially the pocket rules, for they were made in much smaller quantities than the ten-inch version. The Versalog/Hemmi 258 is quite rare, with only 16 examples known.

The Versalog was made in a six-foot classroom demonstration model, and in at least two variants of overhead projection models, all of which are very rare.

The ultimate Versalog rarity is an all-plastic, ten-inch Versalog sold by Geotec as model 341-3690. It is obviously very late production. Only one example of this rule is known to us; it is in the collection of Joe Pasquale.

We estimate that about 600,000 ten-inch Post Versalog 1460s were made and less than 100,000 five-inch Post Versalog 1461s were made during the 21 years of production.

The Manuals

High-quality hardback Versalog manuals were published by Post in 1951, 1962, and 1963, with the latter two describing the change of the COS scale to green. The 1963 version mentions the five-inch Versalog 1461 for the first time. Hughes-Owens used the same hardback versions as Post, with the H-O name on them instead of Post. Teledyne Post also published Versalog manuals in paperback for the Versalog II, with copyright dates of 1970 and 1971.

The Cases

The most commonly seen cases were provided in three basic varieties:

1. The familiar high-quality cordovan-color heavy leather case (which has several variants of linings, labeling, etc.). Versalogs sold in this case were listed as 1460L.
2. The 'fabricoid' case of black leather-like material, with black leather flap. Versalogs in this case were listed as 1460F and were priced a few dollars less than 1460L.
3. The molded gray plastic two-piece case, catalog number 1460M. This version carried a lower price than 1460L.

In addition, there were several varieties of cardboard two-piece slip-cap cases, an early brown heavy hardboard case with leather closure flap, etc. We know of a total of 13 different Versalog case variants.

The End

Fortunately for collectors, Versalogs were produced in relatively large quantity, and are readily available today at reasonable cost. Many collectors feel that the Versalog is the finest example of a slide rule sold by an American company, due to Hemmi's exquisite craftsmanship in the blending of laminated bamboo core, celluloid overlay, excellent engraving, and fine cursor.

My personal Versalog, purchased in 1956, remains my favorite slide rule and functions today even better than it did then. I suspect that it should continue to survive and function well, virtually forever.