

Phonography: A Century's Retrospective

The Edison Amberola 1 (Part 2) "The Second Amberola"

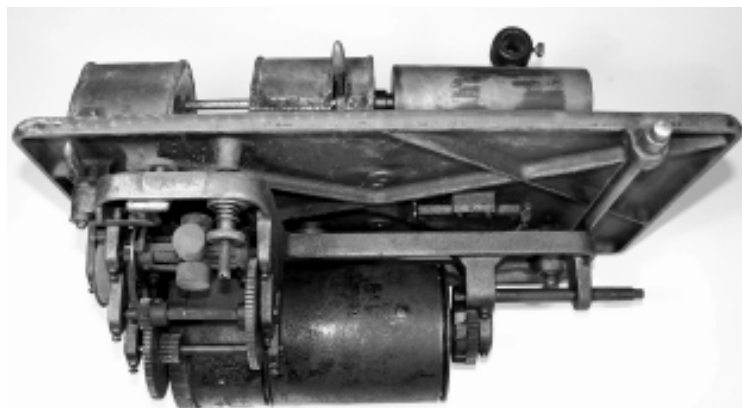
by George F. Paul

The second installment of this article was to have described the development of the Amberola 1A cabinet, supply shortages, changes in cabinet manufacturers, and ultimately the model's transformation into the 1B. All that and more must now appear in the third installment! What began as a conventional one-part article has certainly taken on a life of its own. The latest event that prompted these circumstances is the appearance of Amberola serial number 2. As one may imagine, "Number Two" (as I have come to refer to the instrument) is not a typical production Amberola 1A. In fact, this author is compelled to use a grossly misused and thoroughly overworked term in describing this particular Amberola. It is – it REALLY is – prototypical. In addition, it is unrestored; a fact that legitimizes some of its more unusual characteristics.

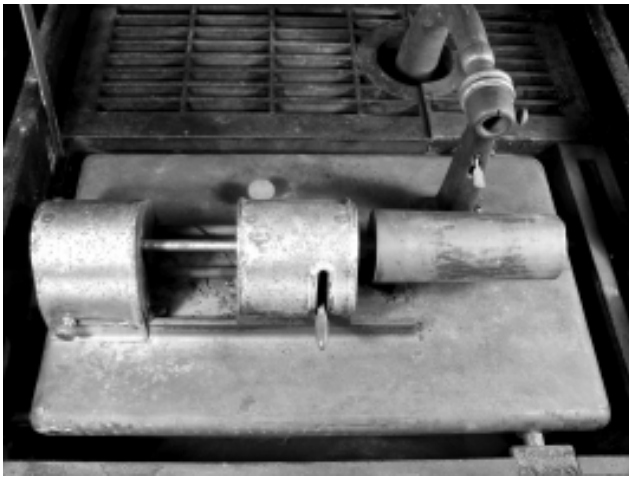


The lowest-numbered Edison Amberola in a lyre-grille cabinet (No.2) is seen at the right in

unrestored condition. The highest-known numbered Amberola in a lyre-grille cabinet (No.2876) is to the left. At a glance, they might seem identical except for condition.



The National Phonograph Company's *Sales Department Bulletin No.36*, dated October 18, 1909, described the two-spring motor collectors recognize as the conventional motor of the Amberola 1A. Amberola No.2 predates this Bulletin, and is fitted with a slightly modified "Triton" 3-spring motor (No.61463), as had powered the "Triumph" Phonograph for many



years. The motor plate differs from the conventional plate in its bracing and the lack of a hole for a speed control. Note the on/off lever and a speed control at upper left.

There are minor differences in the upper mechanism as well, the most noticeable of which are the ridges cast in the casings, and which lack typical pinstriping. Note that no speed control is visible. Original maroon paint has virtually all flaked off, but traces remain beneath the casings, and a few spots on the motor plate, which was pinstriped and decorated in a manner similar to conventional Amberola 1As.

Amberola No. 2 lacks the typical raised boss on the motor plate carrying the serial number. Instead, a "2" was stamped on the straight-edge. Note the mysterious rectangular area on the motor plate that



was ground off. This was hidden when painted, and would have remained so had the original paint survived intact. There is no data plate on the cabi-

net, nor was one ever attached. Instead, the number "2" is stamped into the wood where the data plate would normally be found.



The conventional (left) and prototypical (right) pulley casings. Note vertical slot in the prototypical casing. Traces of original maroon paint remain, but there is no evidence of gold pinstripes. The cast inventory numbers on these casings are 20299 (prototype) and 20299 2 (conventional).



The conventional (left) and prototypical (right) traveling carriage casings. Note differences in oilers and the cast ridges on the prototypical casing. Traces of original maroon paint remain, but there is no evidence of gold pinstripes. The cast inventory numbers on these casings are 20298 (prototype) and 20298 1 (conventional)

The horn is constructed of conventional materials (canvas or jute covered with a semi-pliant material and grain-painted) but lacking metal stiffeners at the vertical edges. Both vertical edges have softened and consequently the horn has collapsed. The upper and lower horizontal edges were pro-



vided with the stiffeners, and have retained their shape. Subsequent Amberola 1A and 1B horns were provided with vertical edge stiffeners as well. Note the larger than usual drip tray beneath the



motor; painted black and braced on each side. Note also that the knobs on the drawers are slightly larger than usual

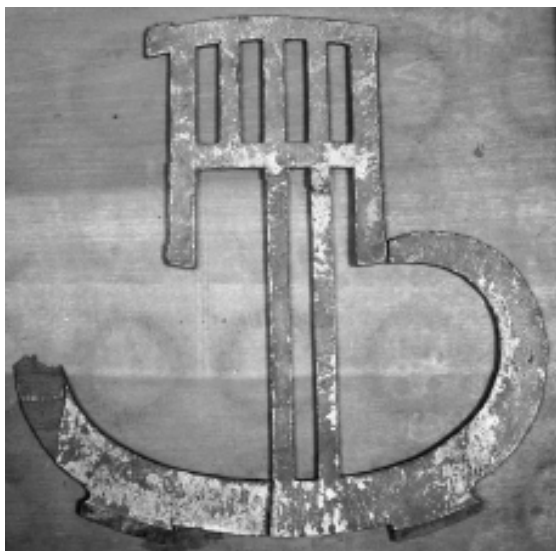
The winding crank is female, nickel plated, and unique to this machine, although seen in period photographs of other very early Amberolas. Note ring-type crank escutcheon. Note also the top of horn is gold plated rather than oxidized bronze as usually seen on these models. The lid decal is conventional.

Amberola No. 2 employed metal lid pads similar to those commonly seen on the “Triumphs” of the era. Production Amberolas featured felt pads.



Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Amberola No.2 is the original silver and gold paint on surviving pieces of the grille. The silver may have been an undercoat for the gold, or the different colors may have been successively ordered by the Entertainment Phonograph Committee to evaluate the Amberola’s aesthetics. The oval ring surrounding the lyre was painted in the same manner. There are also barely perceptible traces of gold paint on the edges of the cabinet louvers.

Hopefully, the accompanying photographs and captions have clearly illustrated how the Amberola was developing in July/August 1909. We may safely presume that this particular instrument pre-dates September 1, 1909 – the date when Edison



awarded the first Amberola cabinet contract to the Herzog Art Furniture Company. Since Herzog shipped the cabinets to West Orange already finished, the decisions to not paint the grille and eliminate the metal lid pads had previously been made, and had been reflected in Herzog's quotation of late August.

Where Amberola No.2 spent most of its life remains a mystery, although we can surmise from the blistering of the cabinet finish that it was repeatedly exposed to high summer heat, and the virtual absence of paint on exposed areas of the mechanism suggests rapid and extreme temperature changes. Its original reproducer did not survive, nor did the door to the record storage compartment. Thankfully, enough remains for a thorough photographic record to be made, and hopefully a complete restoration will return this remarkable Amberola to a condition approximating what members of Edison's Amusement Phonograph Committee evaluated a century ago this summer.

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One Collector's Perspective

by George Paul