Coleman 500 Stoves – made in Wichita & Toronto

-Fred Kuntz & Terry Marsh

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The Coleman 500 Speedmaster stove was a very successful model for the Coleman Company and is a favorite among collectors. In Canada it enjoys a reputation for being a reliable cold weather stove for people living in the North – beyond the reach of powerlines (George Rocen). After getting information on over 100 of these stoves, we want to share what we have learned about this model over its nearly 40 years of production in the US and Canada.

Coleman in Wichita, Kansas, first made this model in the beginning of 1940. Herb Ebendorf provided us with an instruction card for the US version of the 500 Speedmaster stove that bears a printer's date of December, 1939. Additionally we have seen a number of US 500 stoves that are date-stamped A 40 (which we believe to be the first quarter of 1940; stoves are stamped A, B, C, or D); but none with an earlier date. Figure 1 is an image of this first US Model 500 stove. A short article introducing the stove appeared in the January 25, 1940, issue of Hardware Age. These facts are in contradiction to the Coleman Outing Products Manual (1965) which first noted this model in 1942 with all parts available. Matt Moore identified 1941 as the first year of production of this model in his article in the Spring, 2002 issue of the Coleman Lite.

Figure 1. US Model 500 Speedmaster, date-stamped A 40 (Fred Kuntz collection)

Coleman made a Utility Burner, Model 454, and Soldering Furnace, Model 456, between 1929 and 1932 at both the Wichita and Toronto factories (Charleen Becker, 1997). Model 454 consists of a brass fount with built-in pump as on a CQ lamp, collar, cast iron burner, and an instant lighting fuel air line (see Figure 2). The founts on some of these burners are brass but others have brown Colac paint remaining so all may have been painted originally. The Soldering Furnace is similar except for a shelf above the burner on which to rest heating soldering irons, in lieu of a caste iron grate. Herb Ebendorf believes that Coleman "…benefitted from the experience…" of building these two models in designing the 500 stove.

Figure 2. Coleman Model 454 Utility Burner. The original finish on the windscreen was brown paint (Terry Marsh collection)

Coleman promotional literature for the 500 stove from the early 40's noted the instant lighting feature; the wind-proof, quiet, odorless Band-A-Blu burner; the "large, long-lasting generator that is easily cleaned and replaced;" and the two-pint capacity fount. They rated the 5 ¼ lb stove at over 7500 BTU's/hour.

Design Patent 120152 for the stove was filed with the US Patent Office on January 22, 1940, by Boyd W. Tullis, assignor to The Coleman Lamp and Stove Company and a week later the patent for the stove, 2246080, was filed. These patents were granted on April 23, 1940 and June 21, 1941 respectively.

Imagine our surprise when we discovered 500 stoves with dates as early as C 38 and stamped Made in Canada under the Coleman logo (see Figure 3)! To date we have located 15 Canadian 500 stoves dated prior to 1940 – see Table 1.

Figure 3. Canadian 500 stove date-stamped D 38 (Fred Kuntz collection)

Table 1. Early Canadian 500 stoves

Date:	C 38	D 38	B 39	C 39	D 39
How many:	5	6	1	2	1
Burn/Light lever:	"L"*	"L"*	loop	loop	loop

***** one of these ends in a loop

The Canadian 500 stoves have staggered holes in the baserest whereas the US versions have a single row of holes. With two exceptions, the stoves made in Canada in 1938 have a Burn/Light lever that ends in an "L." Beginning in 1939 this lever ends in an oval loop on all versions of the 500 stove models until the end of production. Interestingly the early parts diagrams show the stove with the "L" shaped lever although the patent drawings show it with the loop. The fuel valve body on the earliest stove is also different – see Figure 4.

Figure 4. Fuel valve bodies from a Canadian 500 date-stamped C 38, left, and from a US 500 date-stamped B 41, right (Terry Marsh collection)

After the first US production of the 500 Speedmaster in A 40, the next date stamp we have found on this model in the US is B (second quarter) 41. After that the stove "disappears" in the US until after WWII; we have seen B 45 stamped stoves following the war. The US 500 stoves date-stamped B 41 vary in finish, materials, and patent stampings on the collar. The stamping of the B on some of these stoves is light and appears to be an F or P. We have arranged the stoves we have seen in Table 2 in the order we believe they were made:

Table 2. US 500 stoves date-stamped B 41

Owner's initials:	DD	JE	DC	SW	RH	FK	TM	AC	DD
Stamped PAT. NO. D120,152 (Y/N):	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
stamped 2,246,080 (Y/N):	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fount side material (brass/steel):	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S	S
finish (nickel/ivory paint):	N	N	N	N	I	I	I	I	I

The first stoves have no patent stampings on the collar, and the sides of the founts are made with brass that is nickel plated. The design patent for the stove was granted in April 23, 1940, well before these stoves were made. We cannot explain the reason it is not stamped on the stoves early in the second quarter of '41. The wartime demand for brass and nickel had not yet hit Coleman at this time. The next stoves are the same as the preceding except that now Coleman is stamping the earlier granted design patent on the collars. Next, both the design and stove patent are stamped on the collar; the latter was granted on June 21, 1941, near the end of the second quarter. These stoves also are painted ivory, perhaps because the military demand for nickel took precedence. Finally the fount sides are steel, not brass, we believe because of the military demand for brass.

While we have not found a 500 stove stamped or marked U.S. for the military, Carl Tucker bought an unmarked canvas pack in the military style that contained an early 1940's 500 stove from a former soldier. The former soldier told him that the stoves were used in the early days of WWII by armored infantry units (carried in halftracks) and as squad stoves (one per squad) (see Figure 5). As WWII progressed Coleman and other companies made the more compact M-1942 and 520 stove models that could be carried by airborne and ground troops.

Figure 5. Unmarked military style pack that came with an early 1940's 500 stove (Ed Erb collection)

We have seen seven Canadian 500 stoves made during WWII. The first three are stamped D 41 or C 42 and have nickel plated brass founts. The stove date-stamped D 41 is the last one to only have the Burn/Light stampings in the baserest in English. Canadian 500 stoves made after this are stamped in 3 languages - English, French, and Spanish. These three stoves have the same features as the Canadian stoves from 1939 except for a projection on the rear of the cast iron burner casting. The two stoves dated C 42 have a brass set screw threaded into the projection. We have seen one other Canadian 500 stove, date-stamped D 38 and without the projection in the burner casting, that is also threaded and fitted with the brass set screw. The position of the set screw is in line with the generator orifice but the purpose of the set screw is unknown to us. These three stoves are the only 500's we have seen that have the brass set screw, but the projection in the rear of the burner casting remains on Canadian 500 stoves for as long as they were made in that country (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Canadian 500 burner in stove date-stamped C 42 (Fred Kuntz collection)

The remaining four Canadian wartime 500 stoves are date-stamped C 42, D 42, and C 43. The brass founts are painted olive drab as are the baserests. Burn and Light with arrows are stenciled in silver paint over the olive drab paint and the Burn/Light stampings in 3 languages, making those stampings nearly invisible. The stoves have no military markings, only the olive drab paint. A two-piece windscreen is fastened to the grate legs. The pump cap, which had been a nickel plated brass casting, is pressed steel (see Figure 7). We assume these were made for Canadian soldiers but have no documentation of this. The next Canadian 500 stoves we have seen are date-stamped 2 47.


Figure 7. Canadian 500 stove date-stamped D 42 (Terry Marsh collection)

In the years following WWII Coleman in Wichita and Toronto made many 500 stoves, based on the frequency that they turn up in collections. All the post war stoves we have seen have brass sided founts but were painted green until 1947 in the US and until 1948 in Canada. The painted Canadian founts vary between light green and blue-green. After the war Wichita date-stamped the months as A & B which we believe stands for the first and second halves of the year respectively. Canadian postwar stoves are stamped with the month and year. The first postwar Canadian stoves we have seen date to 1947 and have an oil hole in the pump cap for the first time. In the US this feature first shows up in stoves date-stamped B 51. In Wichita Coleman stopped nickel plating the brass founts of the 500 in the second half of 1951 and painted the founts green. It was at this same time that Coleman changed their lantern manufacturing to steel-sided founts painted green. In Toronto the founts continued to be nickel plated brass.

The Amish also used 500 stoves both as stoves and as heaters. We have seen two 500 stoves that have been converted to heaters by making sheet metal boxes built with heat shields and vent to warm riders in buggies (see Figure 8). The upper half of the front panel is a sliding door that allows you to put the stove into the box when running and pump, adjust, or turn off the stove. The handle on the top of the box has a slot on the back so the heater can be hooked on the dashboard of the buggy to keep it from sliding into the occupants. One of these stoves is a US 500 date-stamped A 51 and the other is a Canadian 500 date-stamped 8 63. We showed one of these heaters to Mervin Miller, who lives in north-central Indiana where one of these heater-stoves turned up. He quickly identified the Sunrise Metal Shop in Topeka, Indiana, as the maker of the sheet metal boxes for this stove as well as a box for the 502 Sportster stove that came later.

Figure 8. US 500 stove date-stamped A 51 in an Amish heater box (Jon Schedler collection)

Coleman in Wichita introduced the 500A Sportmaster stove in 1954 as a replacement for the 500 Speedmaster. Model 500A differed from the recently made 500 Wichita model in having a green painted, steel-sided fount; a Coleman decal on the side of the fount below the valve wheel; a large filler hole and cap that was only about 45 degrees from the pump; a cast iron burner lacking the horizontal slot between the outgoing and incoming mixing chambers; and a round grate with the four wires bent back to the outside (see Figure 9). By late 1959 the pump cap was no longer held by flat head screws but by a clip.

Figure 9. US 500A date-stamped 4 60 (Jules Folgate collection)

To our knowledge Coleman didn't make an accessory heater for the 500 stove; however, we have seen an aftermarket heat drum for the 500/500A (see Figure 10). The heat drum is marked "The Drum Heater, No. 5050, Kamp-Site Products Co., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma."

Figure 10. US 500A date-stamped 1 57 with aftermarket heat drum (Fred Kuntz collection)

Model 500A was made in Wichita until 1962 when the smaller 501 stove was introduced and quickly replaced by Model 502. The most recent 500A we are aware of is date-stamped 6 61. This last stove has another change that we have only seen three times; the four grate legs are not held on the frame base plate by nuts above and below the plate but the legs themselves are bent over and spot welded to the frame base plate (see Figure 11). This means that removing the burner from the grate-frame base plate requires unscrewing the burner from the latter and sliding it out. A second stove, date-stamped 11 60, has the grate spot welded to the frame base plate. The third 500A stove we have seen with the grate spot welded to the frame base plate is undated and in the Coleman Museum in Wichita. In Outing Products Parts Catalog 32C (Revised Jan. 1964) Coleman states that both the 500 and 500A are discontinued. The catalog has a figure showing the grate spot welded to the frame base plate and notes that this replaces the earlier style grate. Possibly this spot welded, “Grate and Baffle Ass’y,” Part No. 500B3751, was only a replacement part and not a production part.

Figure 11. US 500A date-stamped 6 61 (Glenn Knapke collection)

During the time that the Coleman factory in Wichita had gone from 500 and 500A models to Models 501 and 502, the Coleman factory in Toronto continued to make their Model 500 stove. By the mid 1950's Canadian 500 Speedmaster stoves had a circular grate, and the frame base plate was held with two nuts threaded on studs rather than the earlier stove bolts used in both countries. The stove model number was no longer marked on the stove but it is identified as a Model 500 on the boxes with the stoves that are in a couple of collections. In the early 1960's Coleman in Toronto added the Coleman parallelogram decal to the side of the stove and began using a clip to hold the pump cap in place. Finally in the late 1960's Coleman in Toronto attached the valve wheel to the assembly with a screw. With these minimal changes, the Canadian Coleman 500 stove continued to be produced until 1970 (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Canadian 500 stove date-stamped 7 68 (Terry Marsh collection)

Coleman in Toronto briefly made a Model 500A stove that they identified as such on the box only. The only one we have seen is undated but the accompanying instruction sheet is date-stamped 7 70; the A is stamped in black after the 500 on the printed box label. As noted in the previous paragraph, the model is not identified on the stove. The instruction sheet that came with this stove does not give the model number either but identifies the stove as a Sport Master, the same name as Coleman in Wichita used for their 500A (see Figure 13). The 500A stove differs from Canadian 500 stoves from the 60's (1 61 – 2 70) in the following ways: 1. The burner lacks the open slot between the upper and lower tubes (similar to the US 500A); 2. The filler cap, while still the small three-piece type, is painted green; 3. The fount is green painted brass, not nickel plated; and 4. There is no logo or date-stamping on the stove. Two Canadian Coleman 500s date-stamped 10 67 and one date-stamped 6 68 are only identified on their boxes as Model 500, and the instruction sheet that is still with one of the 10 67 stoves is only marked Sport Master. We are taking the conservative view here that only the stove with the date-stamped instruction sheet of 7 70 is a Canadian Model 500A, and not any of the earlier ones from the 1960's.

Figure 13. Canadian 500A (Matthew Reid collection)

In the early 1970's Coleman in Toronto replaced their 500 Sportmaster Model 500A with Model 500B, the Sportsmaster, which was different from the US 500A Sportmaster. Model 500B has a green painted steel sided fount with the larger Coleman filler cap, now one-piece. The slot in the burner casting between the upper and lower mixing chamber tubes is filled as on the Canadian 500A (see Figure 14). The model number, date, and a parallelogram logo are stamped on the bottom. Of the eight 500B stoves for which we have data, six are date-stamped in January; the remaining two are date-stamped in February ('72). The year range we have seen is from 1972 – 1974, although they may have been made for another couple of years.

Figure 14. Canadian 500B date-stamped 1 74 (Fred Kuntz collection)

After being manufactured for nearly 40 years, production of a 500 stove ended in the mid 1970's in Canada. Collectors we have talked to have often been surprised to learn that there were five 500 stove models – the Canadian & US 500 Speedmaster, the US & Canadian 500A Sportmaster, and the Canadian 500B Sportsmaster. The 500 stoves were replaced by smaller, lighter one-burner stove models that were part of the increased interest in lightweight gear for backpacking and hiking in North America. Today it is primarily the collectors that appreciate the construction quality and heat output of these fine stoves.

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