

Queen Presto light and skate key Knives

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Introduction

"Presto light" is a name familiar in the earliest part of the 20th century, but very unfamiliar to most people in the 21st century. It describes an application of carbide headlamps used by underground miners to provide headlights for early cars (especially model T Fords). See a useful demonstration at YouTube headlamp ([The Carbide Miners Lamp - Bringing History Back to Life! - YouTube](#)). Queen reintroduced the term to modern knife collectors in 2002, when it produced a special knife for its 80th anniversary, the #10 jack knife with a Stanhope lens and a "presto light key" as the secondary blade (Figure 1). (There are many ways of spelling the name of this knife – throughout this article, we will use the Queen name from 2002.)

There is no sign of presto light knives in either existing Schatt and Morgan catalogs, 1903 and 1907 (David Clark, 2010 reproduction catalogs). It is very likely that the knife was produced after that time to take advantage of a growing market -the automobile.

From approximately 1907 till 1914, the presto light was the best solution for driving a car at night. It replaced the old-fashioned oil lantern from carriages, and until the electric headlight replaced it, every car owner needed (at least one) presto light key to turn the system on and off, and avoid any potential explosions of acetylene gas. "Old folder" posted (*Presto-O-Light. Wrench for squares*, Allaboutpocketknives.com, 12/14.2016) to point out that "many of our favorite knife manufacturers, Camillus, Schrade, Union Cutlery, Ka-bar, Napanoch, Empire, Keen Kutter, Stiletto, Ulster, Mayher & Grosh, Riverside, and Case" made a variety of presto knife blades and cap lifters on a variety of multi-use knives. Schatt and Morgan was one more cutlery company who made these special knives. He also cites a detailed article of the same name by Dennis Ellingsen (1993, January,

page 1) in Knife World with detailed photographs of these various blades. "Old folder's" article would have been posted right after the Queen "Skate Key knife" started getting a lot of publicity. Many interesting comments support his post – a great read on a small corner of pocket knives history.



Figure 1. The sales flier for the 2002 Queen City Stanhope lens knife with Presto light key. (See Fisher & Lago, 2019, with a focus on the unique stanhope lens.)

Queen City Cutlery, who took over the Schatt and Morgan factory after the company failed in the Great Depression, never produced any catalogs or advertising literature that has survived, so there are no available records of their ever producing a presto light knife, but their time period was well after the cutlery industry interest in this type of knife had waned. Though dies for this blade might have remained in the Queen factory for years, it is most likely that the tang stamp in this 2002 knife is an historical

way as a completely modern version of the old blade style, in 420 stainless steel, as part of the 80th anniversary effort.

Early Schatt & Morgan Presto light knives

There are very few Schatt and Morgan Presto light knives around today. Vigorous collectors have only seen a few – these were hard use work knives. We show one such knife as proof that Schatt and Morgan did make them. Thus, it is very likely that the dies for the unique blade might have been left in the factory after they closed.



Figure 2. A Schatt & Morgan Titusville presto light knife in the collection of David Gentry as purchased off Ebay. The knife clearly has seen hard use. The handle is made of a rubber material called "gum fuddy," that was a little softer than some hard rubber also used at this time (David Gentry).

Gentry had the knife restored with some fine old rosewood removed from the Cattaraugus factory by Mike Losicco, before the building was razed. The restoration work was beautifully done by Glenn Trowbridge (also on Facebook). The tang stamp on the secondary blade is clearly visible in Figure 3, as Schatt & Morgan Cutlery in Titusville. All three blades have the same stamp.



Figure 3. Tang stamp of the restored presto light knife shown in Figure 2, still in the collection of David Gentry. (David Gentry photo)

Queen Skate Key Knives

After Daniels Family Cutlery acquired Queen Cutlery in 2012, they were looking to focus on the company's history and produce more stag handled knives, but using existing inventory to save money. Unfortunately, some person making decisions probably saw the 2002 presto light blade remaining in inventory, but unaware of the actual history of the knife, decided to name the new knife "The skate key knife." It was produced in early 2015, in three different versions. The knife was never cataloged. And of course, that is how the knife has now been labeled, sold, and is now widely known. It is quite easy to see that the newer versions of this knife (Figures 4, 5, and 6) use the same blade as the 2002 Stanhope/presto light in Figure 1. Same screw driver end, same "swell" around the larger square insert, same location of the nail nick, and the same Queen City tang stamp.



Figure 4. A Queen new version of the Skate Key Knife (formerly "Presto light") on the #10 jack knife, produced in 2015. (Edition size unknown). Ken Daniels wanted to use more stag handles and this knife shows a very modern and stylish approach to the old working knife with both stag and heraldic shield. Internet photo.



Figure 5. A presto light new version on the #10 jack knife frame with a primary blade etch "Queen Cutlery Annual Show, 2015." This knife was produced in an edition of 50 (shown on the pile side of the primary blade. (Internet photo).

Figure 6, shows a version using the #69 barlow with a very nice dark stag shown very well on the barehead frame and with a popular bolster from 1993, with the "Queen Steel" signature upper bolster. This seems to be, in our opinion, the most attractive of these new knives. Again, a very classy approach on the old working knife.

Now certain roller skate makers might have used a key of this size for tightening the skate onto the soles of a shoes, and these types of knives might have worked. There were other acetylene gas systems that also that might have been able to use such square pocketknife wrenches, so it is not impossible that the new name could have some from such personal experience, but it is clear that these knives were primarily used for early automobile headlights.



Figure 6. #69 skate key Barlow in torched Sambar stag and using a special bolster from a popular 1993 knife with "Queen Steel." This knife was produced in a small edition of 40, so this is the most difficult of this version to acquire, but it is still seen for sale fairly often, though at a higher price. (Internet photo). Very unusually, some of these knives have the "easy open" cut on their handle and others do not! More rarity built in.

Parts knives: Another piece of the story

Queen often made blades in large quantities and stored them in inventory to assemble knives as needed for future sales. They were famous for keeping large quantities of knife making equipment or parts, and using old dies to make their high-end knives. This process might help explain the process leading to the 2002 presto light knife, since the family resemblance of the several blades is very clear. The Schatt & Morgan and Queen blades are unlike the large number of blades shapes shown in Dennis Ellingsen's (1993) article by other cutlery companies. Unfortunately, Queen Cutlery, Queen City Cutlery, and Schatt & Morgan's habit of keeping knife parts around meant knife parts could "escape" and be used to create other knives.

This might also be an issue for presto light knives. Figure 7, shows a knife that is well ahead of the 2002 knife and does not look like 420 stainless



Figure 7. A Presto light knife with some features similar to a Schatt & Morgan knife, but also odd bone and unusual main blade, though with

Schatt & Morgan tang stamp. Thanks to Mr. Roger Wofford, 3-27-2022 for posting this knife on Facebook for information and stimulating our attention and response.

steel. The mark side tang on the main blade shows a faint Schatt & Morgan stamp and the blade has a lightly "off" shape - (notice protruding kick details of the shape of the spear point). The nail nick is missing on the presto light blade (like the old Schatt & Morgan) and the lower edge of the blade appears to have been sharpened for how a person planned to use it. The bone handle seems to be older. So, this not likely to be a knife from parts widely available after Queen's 2018 bankruptcy (eg. a 2002 blade – stainless with a well-defined Queen City stamp). So, an earlier exchange of parts is suspected. Commentators on Facebook "Queen Cutlery and Schatt & Morgan knives" leaned toward the conclusion that this was a parts knife or repaired a long while ago, and that the knife was very desirable.

David Anthony's (2010, pp. 91-93) book about Great Eastern Cutleries brand names, Northfield and Tidioute, describes one skilled knife maker, Mr. Bill Atkins in the 1960s, who worked for both Queen and Tidioute, had access to Queen inventory, and was locally well known for knives he made on the side. Of course, there were many such cutlers who could quietly take home a part of a knife at a time, finish the knives, and give away or sell them as a benefit of working in a busy cutlery.

Queen also sold parts heavily throughout the 1970s, after Servotronics acquired the company and there is no guarantee that some person might have used early parts to create a new knife (Fisher & Lago, 1972-1981 parts, 2020). So, there are multiple ways parts could have escaped the factory and been used to create or modify an early knife. This is always an issue with Queen Cutlery knives that collectors need to be aware of.

This article attempts to pull together a number of commentators who have recently clarified some knife history regarding Queen and Schatt & Morgan Presto light knives. Since we do not own many of these knives, we very much appreciate those who share photos and information on the Internet. Of course, we are not making money from using any of these resources – simply a gift for other collectors. As, this is a first edition piece,

we always request any suggestions for adding content or improving accuracy. Thank you.

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