

Weak Points - Fine Points

by Dave Thorpe

Many times I have come home with a new lamp and noticed a particular flaw. Then, some time later, while viewing someone else's collection, I see the same flaw in the same lamp. It is apparent that certain lamps have *weak points* in their manufacture or design. Sometimes a piece is too weak and prone to breakage or a loosely attached part is missing altogether. Sometimes the flaw is not readily apparent until the piece is compared to one that is "right". If you know what to look for ahead of time, it can save you heartache and dollars.

As collecting carbide lamps has become a more costly (and lucrative for some) endeavor, incomplete lamps are often sold and traded with substitute parts. The part may be close in overall appearance, but "top dollar" should

never be paid for a rare piece with substituted components. To find the correct part usually means finding the entire lamp itself, then reselling the flawed piece. Knowing which parts are typically substituted and how to tell the difference between the fake and the real thing is not too difficult if you know the *fine points* to look for.

In this article, I will describe some of the *weak points* and *fine points* that may be a helpful guide to the novice collector. As a rule of thumb: a rare lamp with a *single* piece needing replacement is worth only half of the same lamp complete (unless you already have the missing piece).



Only two reflectors are acceptable for the Springfield Lamp. On the left, is the sharp edged version. On the right, the reflector has a crimped over edge.

The Springfield Lamp

The Springfield, one of the simplest looking lamps, is also one of the most difficult to find in correct, excellent condition. The reflector is commonly found to be replaced. There are only two proper reflectors for the Springfield. Both have the inner recessed center. The main difference between the two is whether or not the outer edge is a rolled seam or simply bent back to a sharp edge.

Early Springfields have no reflector brace, late model lamps do (see photo).

The nut holding on the reflector is a very thick hex nut. It is not the typical machine stamped nut, it has very sharp edges as if it were hand made. Do not accept a thin machine stamped nut as original equipment. Such a lamp has been "high-graded".

Springfield bases come in three styles. The most common and most recent is eight-sided. It is a beautiful piece, but 95% are found pretty well crinkled up around the bottom edge, despite being found with a well-preserved top. Finding a Springfield with an excellent top is not nearly as great a find as one with an excellent base, no matter what the condition of the top.

Of the other bases, one has very fine ribs, and the other is smooth. The ribbed is the rarest of all three. The smooth base is the earliest, but beware: other smooth bases are occasionally found screwed on to Springfield tops. The most common substitute is the smooth sided Guy's Dropper base, another is the Justrite. How does one tell which is which? All Springfield bases have a unique crimping below the threads in which the solder seam is actually *above* the shoulder.

A nice feature of the Springfield from a collectors point of view is that there are no cap braces on the lamp. Cap braces are the most commonly broken or missing item on cap lamps. No problem here.

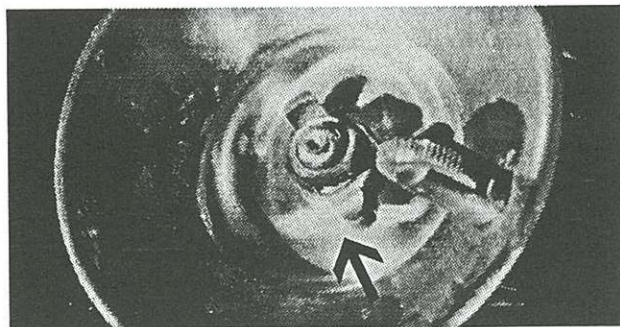
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Shanklin Metal Products



The Shanklin Metal Products lamp is equipped with a unique reflector. It is similar to the Springfield, having a recessed center section, but this inner recessed area is form-fitting to the body of the lamp. A horizontal groove should be seen on the lower portion of the inner recess to lock it against the bottom edge of the water tank. This eliminates the need for a reflector brace (although a few of these lamps have been reported with their own unique brace).

A weak point of the reflector is its nickel-plating. So thin is the plating that even mild polishing will completely remove the nickel. Most of these reflectors are found with significant loss of nickel on the front surface.



Look for the indented crease in the reflector that makes it form-fit to the lamp.

Buddy



Myer Stein manufactured the Springfield lamp, but he was also involved to some degree with Shanklin Metal Products lamps as well as Buddy and Elkhorn lamps. Most Buddys have locator notches for their reflectors. All Buddys should have reflector braces, and if the reflector is notched, so must the the brace to fit the reflector. Like the Shanklin reflectors, these reflectors have very weak nickeling. Great care should be taken in cleaning them.

All Buddys have cap braces that are commonly broken off. These braces are bent at angles rather than curves, and therefore they have been easily copied by the after-marketeers. Careful examination of the inside bends reveals a flattened tooling area on the originals that can help the collector determine which is real and which is fake (see below).



The Elkhorn is a close cousin to the aforementioned Buddy. Elkhorns are found with standard concave reflectors (nearly identical to the Buddy's), as well as with a Springfield-like inner-recessed reflector. Most Elkhorns have the inner recessed reflector, which also happens to be the most desired.



The reflectors with the inner recess use a deeper reflector brace than the standard (see photo). Its nickeling is as weak as the Buddy's, and should be handled with care. Some Elkhorns have unplated brass reflectors. While most Buddy reflectors have locator notches, *none* of the Elkhorns do. Likewise, the reflector brace should have no notch. This is a critical feature to look for when trying to decide if the reflector and brace are original. One final note: early Elkhorns do not have reflector braces at all, and a few seem to have been manufactured with no cap brace. But the absence of these items is still something that should be evaluated carefully, for this is the exception, not the rule. These peculiarities make the Elkhorn a closer relative to the Springfield than the Buddy is.

Defender (and Victor)

The Defender qualifies as a rare lamp. It is similar to the common Justrite Victor, but instead of ribs, there are raised dots around the surface. An even rarer Defender lamp is ribbed like the Victor, however its value to collectors is actually *less* than the standard Defender, as it does not appear "unusual".



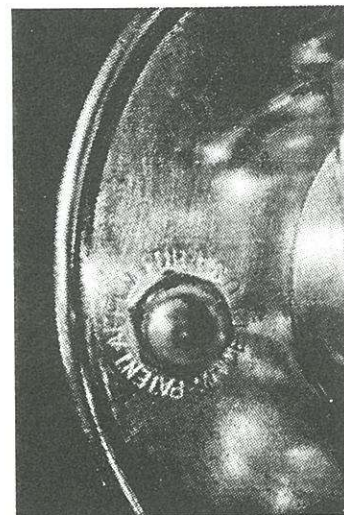
A particular weakness of the Defender lamp is the hook attachment. When the hook was originally stamped, a thin area resulted just where it takes off from the lamp body. Always check this area: some hooks are ready to fall off with even the slightest coaxing. Interestingly, this does not seem to be as great a problem on Victor lamps.

Cap braces are a critical issue for both Defenders and Victors. The flat strap brace actually penetrates the lamp body for added strength of attachment. Unfortunately, one or both sides are commonly found broken off just at the point where they penetrate the lamp. A Victor with even one side brace broken off is worth next to nothing to collectors,

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no matter what the condition, for it is impossible to repair or replace this brace in any acceptable manner.

Original reflectors for Victors and Defenders have a circular stamping behind the reflector around the striker hole. Always check to be sure this stamping is present, as this reflector may be the most commonly substituted of all.



Grier

Oh dear, it's another Grier! Full of stress cracks, and ignored by the novice collector as unacceptable in condition. What a mistake to do so.



Early Griers are prone to stress cracks as a natural part of aging, and if the lamp is otherwise in good shape, it is an excellent collectible. Of course finding a Grier with no stress cracks is nicer (and the later varieties do not

seem prone to cracks) it is not considered a particular detriment if a Grier has several stress cracks that have not opened up significantly.

Like all cap lamps, the presence of undamaged cap braces is a premium, and this is the first thing one should evaluate when finding a new Grier. Make sure they have not been resoldered. No one to date has successfully copied the gob of solder that holds this brace on!

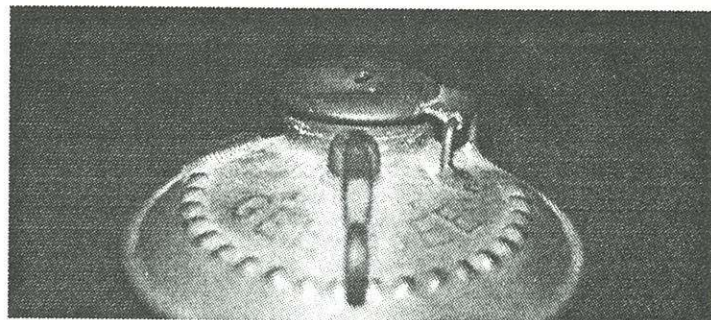
Griers do have a weakness where the reflector is attached. It is generally soldered to a very small area...either to two small posts or to the removable brace. It is not that the reflector is prone to falling off, but rather, it was commonly dented at the solder point whenever the reflector was bumped by normal use in the mines (see photo on previous page). This is quite unsightly, especially if the reflector is cleaned, accentuating the high points of a surface that should gleam evenly.

Finding a Grier with no internal denting of the reflector is considered quite a premium.

Gee Bee



The Gee Bee is a tall lamp....tall and narrow-waisted like a fashion model. But like some superstars, it has a weak head. Yes, the water-door on this eye-popping beauty was fragile and exposed. More Gee Bees have dented waterdoors than any other lamp. Either accept your dented door as one of the many, or enjoy your undented door as one of the few.



A flattened door.

The Gee Bee has a rather plain reflector, which is often removed and replaced with a substitute. In fact, a metalsmith in California is turning out copies...almost. These, as many fake reflectors, are made by a "spinning" process. Faint concentric lines can be seen on a reflector that has been spun. Original Gee Bee reflectors can be identified by a small dimple near the burner hole used as a locating notch. The dimple fits into the reflector brace, which is also a unique piece, and often removed from lamps that are traded off. Look for the right reflector and brace before trading your life away on a Gee Bee.

Horizontal Justrites

Horizontal Justrite lamps used one end of their cylindrical water tank as a reflector, and in this way, were a great innovation of design, but sadly not one of durability. The reflector on any lamp was the "leading edge" and was exposed to the most abuse. As a result of this weakness, carbide lamps evolved to have removable (replaceable) reflectors. Not so for the early Justrites. Like a good Catholic, what you got, was what you lived with, no matter

how it aged. The top edge of many horizontal Justrite reflectors is dented down. Worse yet, someone invariably has tried to bend it back up with pliers, leaving characteristic ugly tool marks, and destroying the lamp's collecting value. The top edge of the reflector is the first fine point to check on these lamps.



This one's mint unfired, but Justrites are prone to reflector damage at the top rim.

With time and use, these lamps usually developed problems with their rear ends. The back of the Justrite tank being flat sheet metal, was weak, and the hook is often found to be indenting this area.

Many a collector believes they have struck the jackpot when they have found their first early smooth-based nickel-plated horizontal Justrite, *complete with superintendent's handles!* Though stunning, and early, these lamps are actually relatively common, more so anyway than the brass equivalent with hook and cap braces. An early smooth-based

Justrite, *in brass*, is quite difficult to find in decent condition.

The Justrite horizontal is not the only lamp prone to reflector problems. The Guy's Dropper Squarelite is found more times than not with a crinkled reflector as it juts up higher than the lamp. And like the Justrite, the reflector is permanently soldered on, sentencing the lamp to a life of deformity.

Guy's Dropper

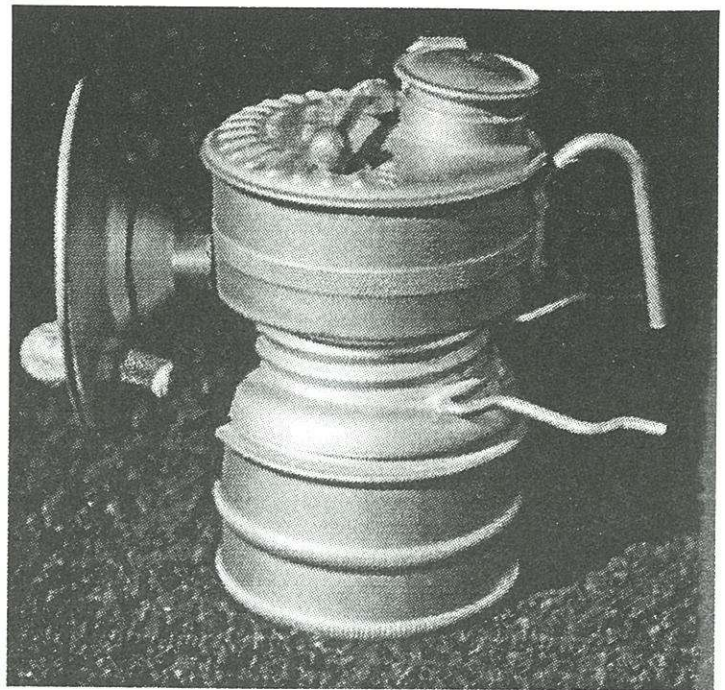
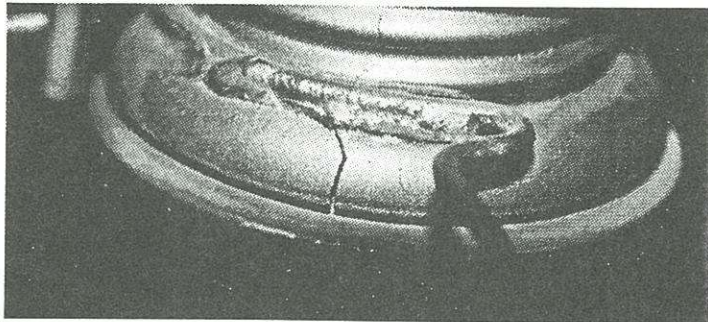
Unlike most cap lamps which became stronger and more durable throughout their manufacturing history, the Dropper became more flimsy. The last two generations of Droppers (the "six-date" and the "no-date" models) were highly prone to cracks in the flange area below the threads. Insidiously, the crack often develops directly behind the reflector, keeping it somewhat hidden until the owner has taken it home for closer examination. If such a problem were to exist on a rare early lamp, one could accept it, but having a split flange on a common Dropper relegates it to near throw-away status.



A split flange is a common problem for Droppers.

Arrow

Split flanges are also endemic to the Arrow, but being a bit rarer, it is more of a strong irritant than an intolerability. Check all Arrows carefully for this problem.

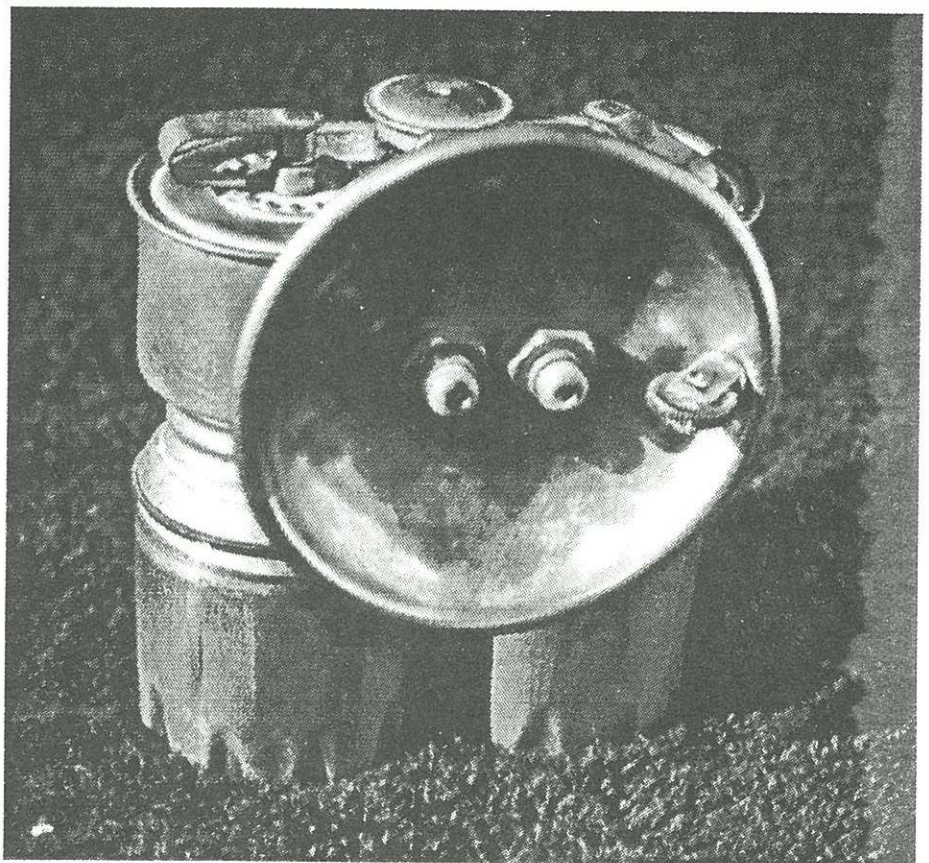


This unfired Arrow looks great, but check the flange: it's cracked!

Scoby

When is a weak point a good thing? When you own a rare Scoby duplex lamp. Virtually all of these tiny half-load bases are found with stress cracks. So what's so good about stress cracks? Not much, but since a number of very nice reproduction bases for this lamp have surfaced, the first question I ask when talking about an available Scoby over the phone is whether or not the base has stress cracks. If you own an original Scoby duplex, you may rightly show off these scars that proudly declare it to be the real thing.

The Scoby Duplex is also highly prone to reflector damage, as its reflector sits up much higher than other lamps. Fortunately, this reflector is removable for repair or replacement.



Don't fret too much if your Scoby has stress cracks in the bases...it shows they are originals!

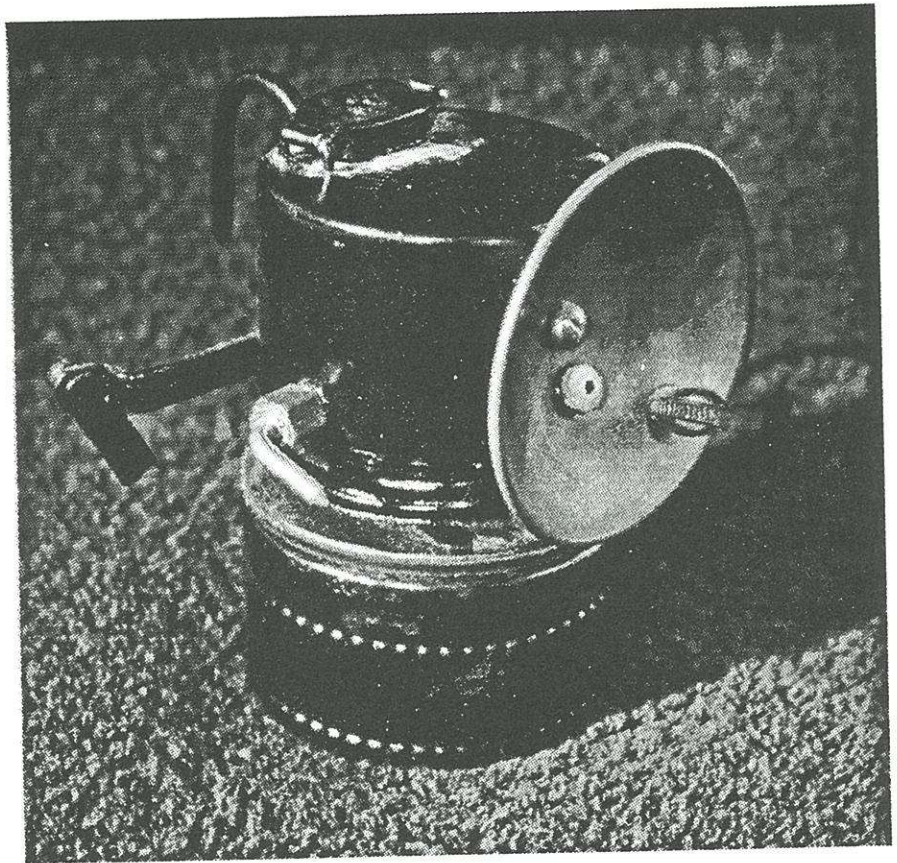
Britelite

The stamping declares this to be "A Different Kind of Lamp". Different indeed, steel construction, painted black. Steel rusts, and the screw threads seem to be most prone, though the entire lamp is at risk. Check carefully for rust holes as well as gray "Bondo" metal filler that may have been used to fill the same.

The black paint is sometimes a problem. It is not a high grade enamel paint. I once destroyed an entire lamp with just a few sprays of Windex. The paint just flowed off...entirely. Don't worry too much about small areas of paint that may have been chipped off exposing the metal surface. As so many of these lamps have been repainted, the chipped paint proves it to be original, and if acceptable to view, it's best to leave it that way. If too much paint is missing, these lamps *can* be repainted without serious depreciation in value. To be accurate, the finish should be neither glossy nor matte, but a finish referred to in the paint trade as "satin".

A brass Britelite cap lamp was manufactured that deserves mention for a particular fine point. This Britelite, known as the "Bulldog" (meaning the waterfeed is on top of the lamp instead of the more typical side feed seen on most Britelites) has a brass hook without the usual horizontal cap brace. Instead, a "tail" extends below the hook, its intended purpose I'm not sure of. More often than not, the tail has been clipped off, as I'm certain that it proved more of a hindrance than anything. Such a lamp with no tail is an embarrassment, and unfortunately results in a mistake that novice collectors often pay dearly for if they have not first seen the unclipped correct version .

A bulldog without the tail shown here is considered by most collectors to be a castrated lamp.

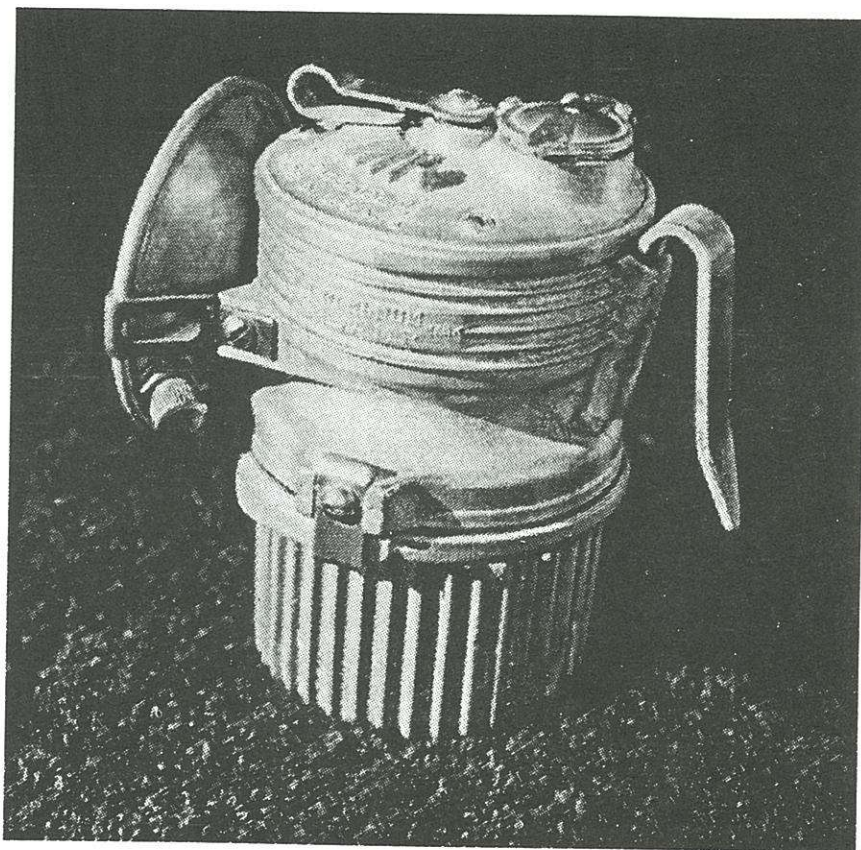


(Above) Painted black and born to rust.



Lu-Mi-Num

This cast aluminum cap lamp was extraordinarily durable. While the body is aluminum, there are several pieces that are nickel-plated brass. These are the two side clamps for the reflector brace, the two clips that hold the top to the base, the water lever, and several screws. Beware: the nickel is weak and often highly worn. Many of these lamps are sold with these pieces buffed to a lustrous eye-catching shine....buffed right through that original nickel plating, and seriously degrading its collecting value. A truly unfired Lu-Mi-Num is a sight



This cast aluminum lamp could withstand serious abuse, but for the discerning collector, check the nickel plating on the accessories. A buffed brass finish is bad news.

to behold!

Additional Pointers

- 1. Buffed lamps:** Many times a lamp will be for sale that has been buffed to a mirror shine on a rouge wheel. Such a lamp has been seriously degraded in value. Raised lettering or decorative stampings are flattened and though the metal surface may dull down somewhat through aging, it will never be acceptable to a serious collector.
- 2. Repaired dents:** A lamp may have moderate denting and still be quite acceptable, but often a collector or dealer will attempt to push these dents out with a sharp instrument, leaving a raised point which is nearly impossible to repair and seriously degrades the lamp's value.
- 3. Pitted surfaces:** A steel reflector commonly has a bit of rust on it. Many have been bead blasted to remove the rust or acid cleaned, leaving unsightly pitting. The lamp's value has now been degraded. Better to have left the rust.

For many who read this, it must seem that the author's scrutiny verges on mania. But the fine details I have mentioned, are not written to discourage the acquisition of lamps that are less than perfect, but to let the buyer know what areas of a lamp to examine when they find one that may seem high priced. Paying top dollar for a flawed lamp is *always* a mistake, but going the extra mile for one that is "right" is generally an investment that is never regretted.