

Ruger Blackhawk Old Model

Identifying old model conversion vs old model, not converted.

Sometimes I see guns advertised that I can tell are converted, but the ad doesn't mention that fact. And when those are auction guns that get bid up to collector grade price, I can only imagine that the buyers are disappointed when they receive those guns, only to find the transfer bar safety installed and no original parts present.

So I think a guide for detecting the conversion kit in online revolver pictures may be helpful.

BACKGROUND

Ruger introduced the New Model line of Single Six, Blackhawk, and Super Blackhawk revolvers that incorporated the transfer bar safety mechanism in 1973. It took a few more years for Ruger engineers to solve the transfer bar problem with the Bearcat, so the New Bearcat did not emerge until 1993. The transfer bar acts as an intermediary device that transfers the impact from the hammer to the firing pin, rather than having the hammer come in direct contact with the firing pin. In order to fire, the transfer bar must be in a raised position, and the trigger must be pulled for the transfer bar to be in that upper position. The New Model solved the issue of accidental discharge from an inadvertent blow to the hammer, which was possible with the original "old model" action. A few years later, I think around 1980, Ruger engineers figured out a way to retrofit the transfer bar mechanism into old model revolvers by means of a factory-installed safety conversion kit. Thus began the familiar ad campaign that still exists today, where Ruger encourages owners of old model revolvers to return their guns to the factory for the free installation of the conversion kit.

Eliminating accidental discharges is a noble goal. It can be accomplished by other means, such as never carrying an old model with the hammer down on a live round. Or in the case of die hard collectors, not shooting our safe queens! We, as responsible firearm enthusiasts, know this. But it is not a foolproof method that Ruger can rely on, particularly because guns change hands over time, so they really want to install the conversion kit to reduce their liability.

The problem is that Ruger collectors cherish the originality of the firearms we collect, and that includes having the original parts installed in our collector pieces. So most old model Ruger single action collectors will seek guns that have not had the conversion kit installed.

THE KIT

The image below shows the five primary conversion kit components. I say primary because there are 3 more parts (pawl, cylinder stop spring, and trigger return spring) that are replaced during the installation of the kit, but they are by and large identical to the original old model parts (although the springs are a bit stiffer).

Four of these five components (hammer, trigger, cylinder stop, and base pin) are direct replacements for the same four corresponding original parts. There is one new component added, the transfer bar. In this image, I show the transfer bar linked to the arm on the back of the trigger that actuates it, but the trigger and transfer bar are 2 separate parts:



DETERMINING KIT PRESENCE

Suppose you see an ad for an old model Single Six or Blackhawk revolver but it doesn't mention whether it has been converted. There are a number of clues to determine whether it has the conversion kit installed. I'm using Single Sixes for this example. Converted Blackhawks can be spotted the exact same way. Super Blackhawks and Bearcats are easier and I'll get to those later.

One of these has the conversion kit installed. Can you tell which is which?

Gun 1:



Gun 2:

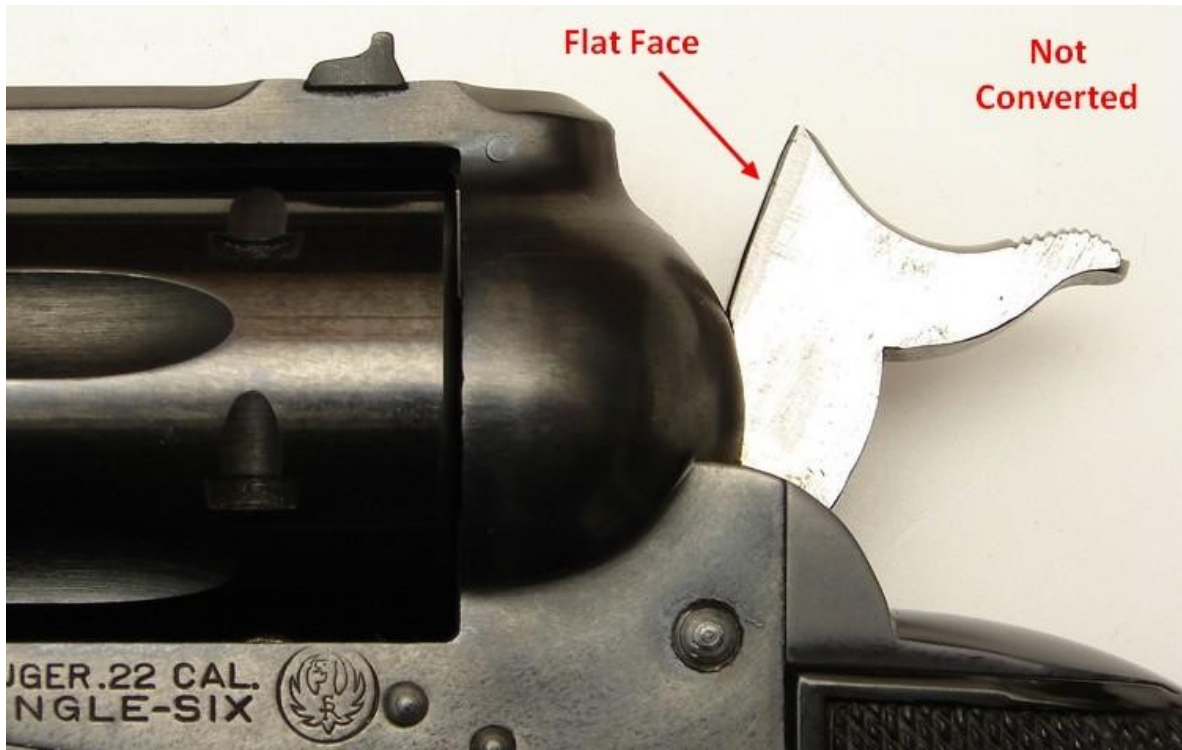


The face of the conversion kit hammer is notched for the transfer bar:

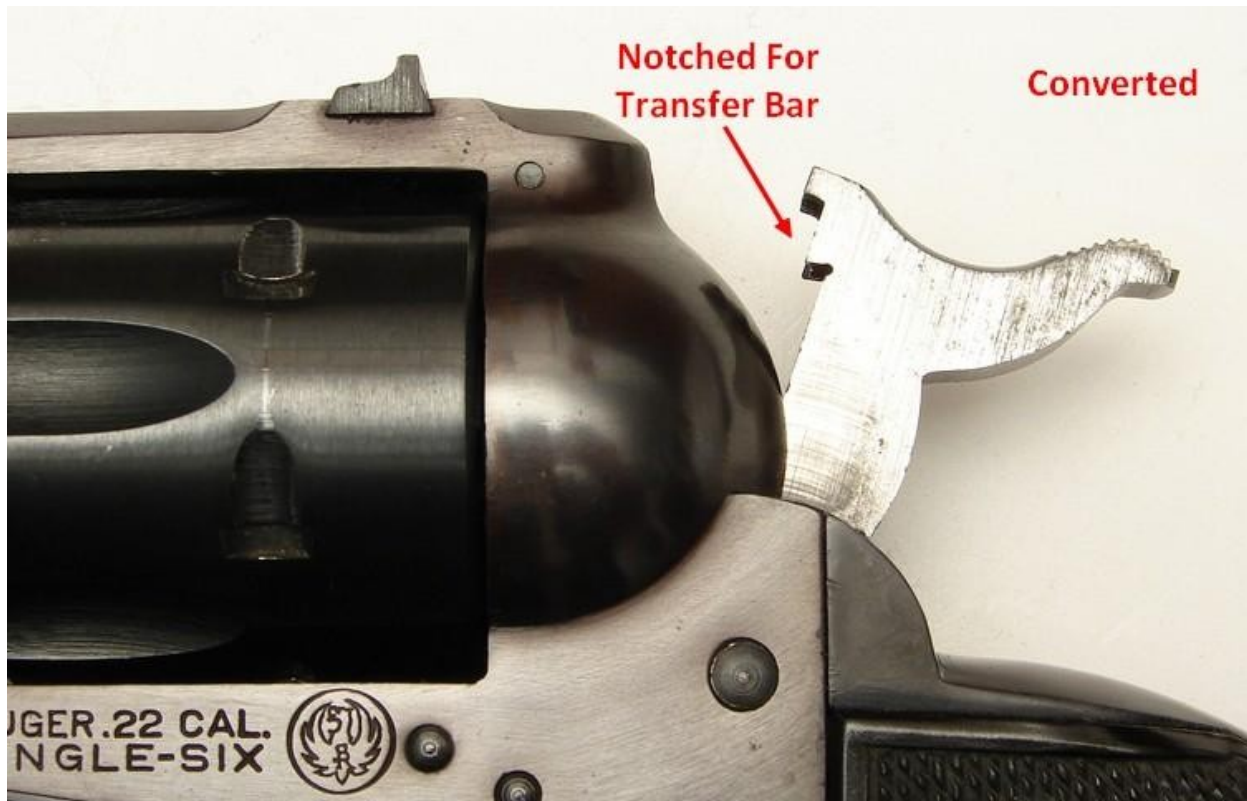


Knowing this, had the pictures shown the hammers on half cock, you can easily tell which one is "converted" to the transfer bar safety. The hammer face distinction is also valid for the Super Blackhawk and Bearcat.

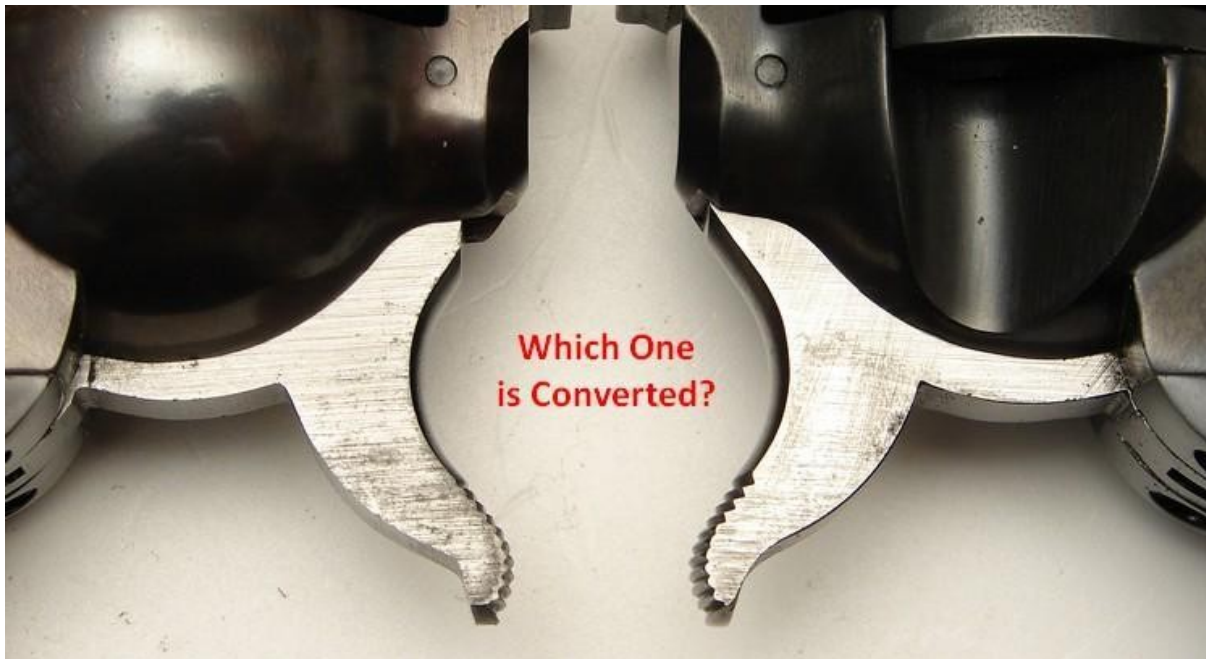
Gun 1:



Gun 2:



But suppose the ad does not show the hammer back. Can you tell which is which based solely on the hammer in the down position?



I cannot. There is a bit of a clue at the base of the hammer, but that may not be reliable. We need to determine the conversion status some other way.

How? The trigger. Here is a picture I took many years ago of a variety of evolving styles or original triggers from Single Six and Blackhawk revolvers:



Take a good look at those triggers, they are all original old model items (the one on the far right is actually a Super Blackhawk wide trigger, but there was a late old model Single Six and Blackhawk trigger that was just about as "fat" from front to back).

The conversion kit trigger seems to have evolved at least once that I am aware of. The trigger in the parts shown above is the earlier trigger, that has a hump at the back where the trigger return plunger pushes forward:



The other type is more of a gradual taper profile, from thicker at the top, to thinner at the bottom. The converted Single Six shown above has this second type of trigger, that is more commonly seen:



With a little practice, you can pick out the conversion kit trigger almost at first glance. Just remember that if the trigger isn't obviously tapered, to also check for the hump on the older kit trigger.

WHAT ABOUT SUPER BLACKHAWKS?

The hammer face profiles shown above also apply to the Super Blackhawk. And a converted Super Blackhawk does not have the grooved trigger of an original old model Super.

But there is a much, much easier way to spot a converted Super Blackhawk. The hammer spur.

Ruger didn't bother to make a wide spur conversion kit hammer. Instead, they just use the same large frame Blackhawk hammer when converting an old model Super.

For the Super Blackhawk, lack of a wide spur hammer usually means conversion kit:



I say "usually" because it could also be that someone installed a standard old model Blackhawk hammer. But either way, it is not original.

WHAT ABOUT BEARCATS and SUPER BEARCATS?

Ironically, the Bearcat (and Super Bearcat) is exactly the opposite situation of the Super Blackhawk. Original old model Bearcat hammers have a standard spur (same width as the rest of the hammer).

Only on converted old models will you see the wide spur on a Bearcat:



The New Bearcat also has a wide spur hammer. So I am not certain of this, but I suspect that the wide spur hammer used in the Bearcat conversion kit is the same hammer used for the New Bearcat. Someone correct me if I'm wrong.

OTHER CLUES

The above should give you all the info you need to determine if an old model single action Ruger has been converted. There are some other clues that only apply to select cases, and those are differences in the exposed part of the base pin. During conversion, the base pin has to be changed to a New Model style base pin with the spring loaded plunger at the back. The plunger pushes the transfer bar back in order to clear the firing pin during cocking. If the revolver in question is a very early flattop Blackhawk (.357 with original base pin that had narrow lands, or .44 with original non-collared base pin), the conversion kit pin will not display those features. But this is a corner case in that only applies to early flattops, and the lack of the original pin doesn't necessarily mean the gun is converted, just that it has a later base pin (could be a later old model pin, or the conversion kit pin).

I hope this helps some folks determine whether a gun they see pictured has the conversion kit installed.

TRANSFER BAR TRIVIA!

Q1: What was the first revolver that Ruger offered that incorporated a transfer bar safety? And when?

A1: Were you tempted to guess the New Model Single Six or Blackhawk? In 1973? Nope. The double action Security Six, introduced in 1970 and with prototypes at least as early as 1969, was the first Ruger with a transfer bar.

Q2: Who invented and patented the transfer bar safety? And when?

A2: Were you tempted to guess Ruger in the late 1960's? Nope. The transfer bar safety was invented by a fellow working for Iver Johnson and patented in 1896! Iver Johnson advertised revolvers with this safety using the slogan, "Hammer The Hammer" with a drawing of a claw hammer striking the spur of a revolver hammer as a means to make the point that a blow to the hammer would not result in the firearm discharging.

Converted Super Blackhawk image courtesy of user SteveRuger. Converted Bearcat image courtesy of user Heliman

An excellent & informative post. Very good pics & details.

I know I handle a lot more of them than many here,, but in your first pics asking which one was converted & which one wasn't, using the hammer. I knew right away.

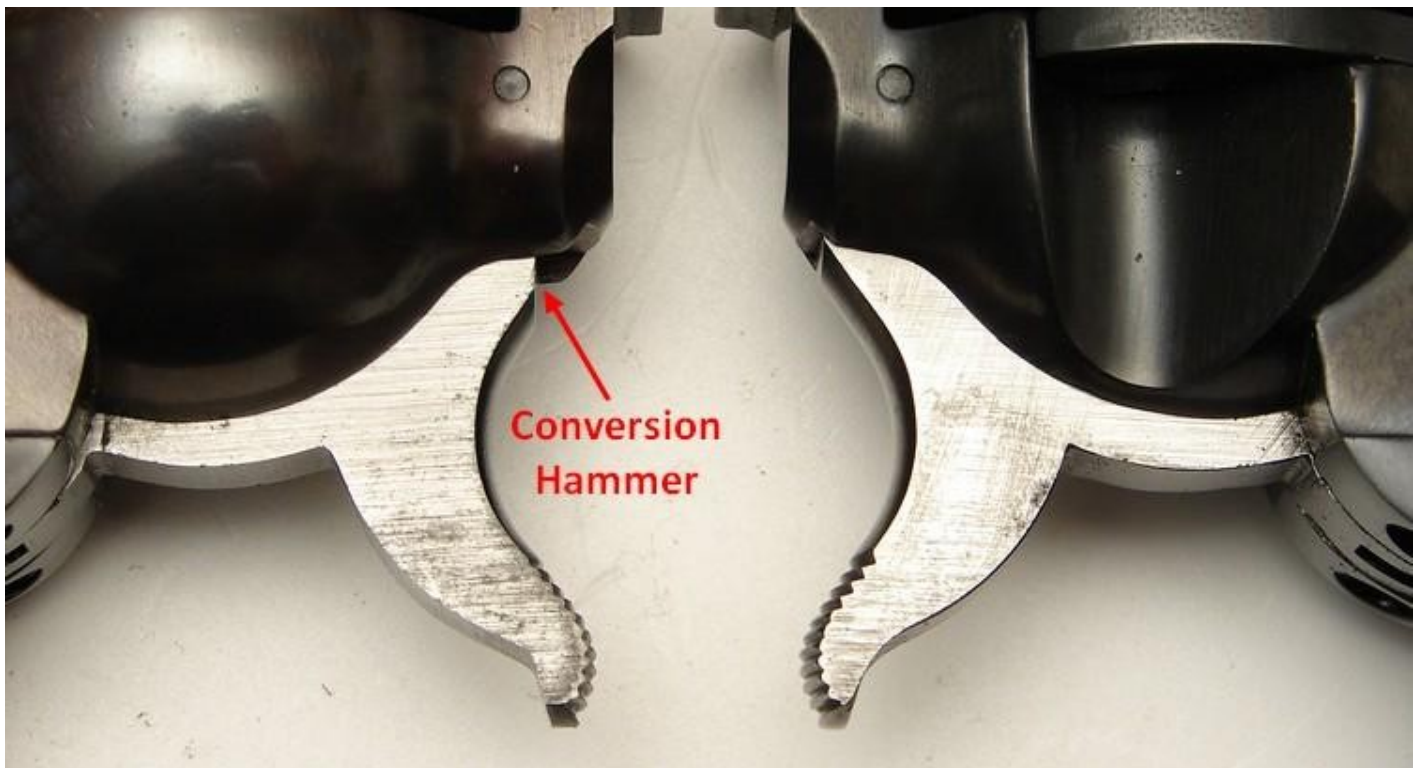
Why?

The top of the hammer. On the original OM,, it has a flat, the conversion,, no flat.

BUT,, that is NOT a guaranteed identifying point to use. The conversion hammers for the Blackhawk do, if I recall correctly, do have a flat spot. The Single-Six seems to be the only one without the flat.

And as noted,, the trigger is the easiest give-away to help spot the potential conversion parts. I always look at that first if I can.

It is actually the opposite, the conversion hammer has the flat spot

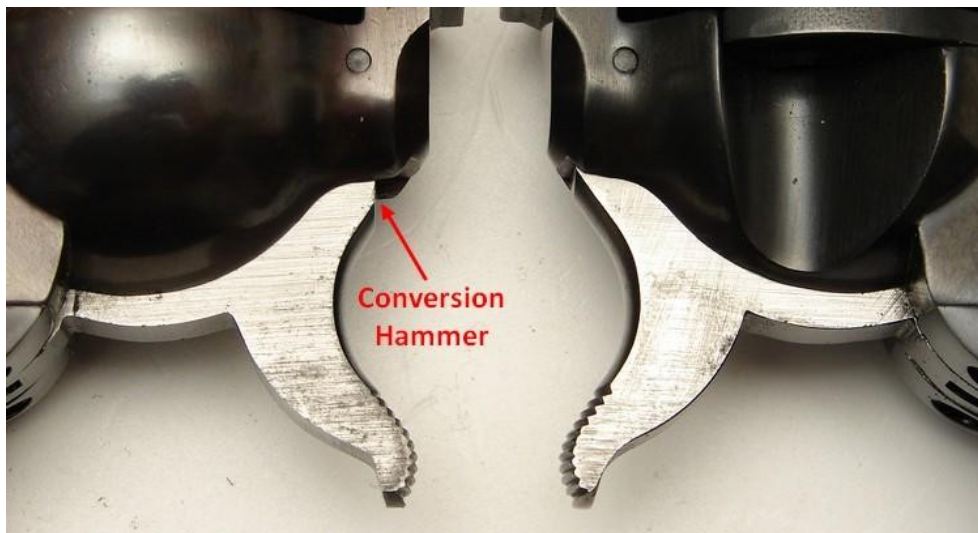


But thanks for adding that clue, I never noticed it before. More info is good!

By the way, these hammers are large frame Blackhawk, and you can see the flat top on the conversion hammer, but not on the original:



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