

Ludwig's Use of Paper Labels in 1971 / 1972 – Date Stamps and Date Codes

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For about a year in the early 1970s Ludwig affixes a rectangular paper label to the interior of many of its drums. This paper label is white with blue and olive ink and has spaces marked "DATE" and "MODEL NO." The blank next to date is filled with either a date stamp or the somewhat mysterious Date Code. The blank next to model number is filled with a handwritten number which corresponds to the model numbers published in catalogs and price lists. This article shares some observations and theories which result from a study of 432 Ludwig main line and 106 Standard drums with paper labels.

DATE STAMPS:

Dating back to at least the 1930s, Ludwig ink stamped inside many of its drum shells a four-digit number which indicated year and month in a YYMM format. By the later 1950s, this is replaced by an ink stamp containing the month, date and year in an MMM DD YYYY format. In 1968, when Ludwig first introduced its second-tier Standard models, dates are stamped directly on the shell just as on its main line drums. It is not clear if this date represents the date of shell manufacture, the date of final assembly or some other date in the life of a drum's creation. Not all drums possess intact date stamps, but when present, they are considered useful and reliable evidence of a drum's "birthdate."

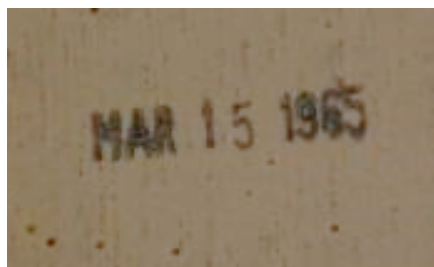


Figure 1. Date Stamp on Shell Interior

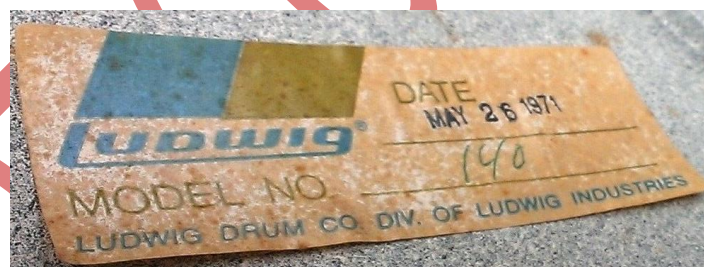


Figure 2. Date Stamp on Paper Label

The practice of stamping a date on the shell interior continues on both main and Standard model lines until mid-April 1971, when, using the same MMM DD YYYY format, Ludwig begins stamping dates on paper labels which are affixed to the shell interiors. April 15, 1971 is both the latest date recorded stamped directly on the inside of a shell and the earliest date recorded stamped on a paper label. New reports may move that date, but it appears that April 15, 1971 is a solid estimate for when the paper label is introduced. Paper labels with date stamps continue through the end of 1971, with a few reports of date stamps in the first quarter of 1972.¹

A look at the serial numbers on drums with paper labels with date stamps indicates that the general relationship between serial number and date stamp established with drums from late 1963 through early 1971 remains intact when paper labels are introduced in April 1971 and used through the end of 1971. Lower serial numbers still tend to be associated with earlier dates and higher serial numbers still tend to be associated with later dates.²

After about December 1971, the date stamp is lost as a dating tool until a new form of date stamp begins to appear again on some Ludwig drums about twenty years later. Therefore, for vintage drums newer than 1971, one must look elsewhere for help estimating the birthdate of their drums. Serial numbers and changes in physical characteristics and features remain as available tools.

¹ Based upon a group of 200 drums with paper labels with date stamps (149 main line, 51 Standards).

² Richard E. Gier, Serial Number Based Dating Guide for Vintage Ludwig Drums, Rebeats, Inc., 2013.

DATE CODES:

Using the same paper label used for date stamps, Ludwig introduces a new four- or five-digit number referred to as the “Date Code.” The Date Code is usually stamped, although a few are handwritten. Twenty different Date Codes have been identified: 4272, 11472, 11717, 12717, 13727, 14717, 14720, 14727, 20717, 21720, 21727, 31720, 32372, 41727, 56717, 57717, 58717, 59717, 60717 and 61717. Two hundred ninety-three reports of Date Codes are recorded (245 main line, 48 Standards). Some Date Codes appear only once, while ten appear more than ten times. The most frequently appearing Date Code, 56717, appears on forty-two different drums.

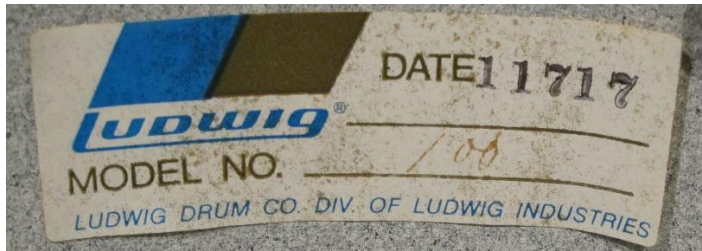


Figure 3. Date Code on Paper Label

Table 1. Date Codes on Main Line and Standard Drums

Date Code	Total
4272	30
11472	5
11717	16
12717	10
13727	1
14717	1
14720	1
14727	26
20717	5
21720	31
21727	1
31720	23
32372	3
41727	1
56717	42
57717	21
58717	28
59717	24
60717	20
61717	4
Total	293

The Date Code has been a mystery for years, as no one in the vintage community seems to know exactly what they mean. Several people looked at Date Codes seeking logic hidden within them, but no answer has yet emerged. It is also not clear precisely when the Date Code is used, as no reported drums

with Date Codes also have date stamps. The Date Code is initially used concurrently with the date stamp and then continues after the date stamp is abandoned. It is possible that the Date Code does not contain an encoded date, despite appearing in the blank where date once had been stamped.

DATE CODES – COMMON (MIS)INTERPRETATIONS:

The lack of a solution to the Date Code mystery permits people to declare, sometimes with “don’t you dare challenge my opinion” certainty, what a particular Date Code means. Most of these theories look only for logic in the numbers in a Date Code itself, not considering the interplay between Date Codes and other characteristics of the drums upon which they are displayed. It is treated as an isolated number puzzle without being placed in context.

All Date Codes contain either a “71” or a “72” and many declare that portion of the code to be an indicator of year. This is a very appealing interpretation which fits with the estimated dates of use of the paper label. However, after plucking the two digit “year” from the Date Code two or three digits remain to be deciphered. Many just stop there, declaring that despite finding clear and absolute meaning in two of the digits that there is no meaning in the other digits. This interpretation is incomplete. If two of the digits have meaning, why don’t the other two or three? Some will acknowledge that they do not know the meaning of the remaining digits, but that explanation is also incomplete and unsatisfying. Others find meaning and are not shy about proclaiming explanations for the remaining digits.

Some are certain that the Date Code contains a month, day and year in a MDYY format. For example, Date Code 4272 is often interpreted as April 2, 1972. This answer is only appealing for someone with only a single drum with Date Code 4272 in front of them who is unaware that other Date Codes exist. When one considers the 20 different Date Codes present on 293 different drums, this approach falls apart. First, it is highly unlikely that production is so sporadic that only twenty days would be represented. For example, ten percent (30 of 293) of drums studied would have to be made on April 2, 1972. Second, no other Date Code easily converts to month/day/year format without having to ignore digits. For example, one must drop the seven at the end to interpret Date Codes 56717, 57717, 58717 and 59717 as May 6 – May 9, 1971 using a MDYY format. This would mean that 115 of 293 drums studied were made during four days. Date Code 31720, again after ignoring the last digit, is similarly read as March 1, 1972. This would mean another 23 drums are made on that one day. This approach, despite some limited initial appeal, just does not make sense. It is beyond reason that Ludwig made more than half of the reported drums with Date Codes (168 of 293) on only six selected days or all 293 drums on only twenty different days.

An alternative theory uses YDDD logic for Date Code 4272, with the “4” representing 1974 and “272” representing the 272nd date of the year. Not only is the year incorrect based upon when paper labels are in use, no other Date Code fits this YDDD pattern. A few have declared that Date Code 4272 represents the 42nd week of 1972 using a WWYY format. These two theories have the same limitation – they might work if considered in isolation, but do not work with other Date Codes.

Others suggest using a MMYD format, with Date Code 11717 read as November 7, 1971 and Date Code 12717 read as December 7, 1971. But, the MMYD format only works for those two Date Codes. It has also been suggested that Date Code 14727 represents July 14, 1972 using a DDYYM format. At least these explanations use all of the digits in the Date Code. But, if either format is correct, that would mean Ludwig was particularly active those days, as 26 examples of each format are included in this study. It also does not fit the seventeen remaining Date Codes. Similarly, some suggest that all of the Date Codes which end in a seven are made in July using a DDYYM format. The fourteen Date Codes which end in seven represent more than two-thirds of the drums (200 of 293) in this study. It also does not really work with the 56717, 57717, 58717, 59717, 60717 and 61717 Date Codes. For example, when exactly is July 56, 1971? This approach also does not explain what month should be used for the three Date Codes ending in a zero (55 of 293 drums studied) or the Date Codes which don’t have numbers after the digits already interpreted as representing the year.

It can be reasonably concluded, based upon the low number of different Date Codes and the high frequency of certain ones, that any interpretation involving individual dates being represented in Date Codes is not likely correct. That reduces the date-related interpretations to those which involve year only or year and month. Many patterns and logic seeking a month and date have been suggested and tested, but none so far provide a comprehensive explanation. No pattern using the traditional 1-12 representation of the twelve months of the year is found. It is possible that 1-9 represent January through September, with 0 for October, 1 for November and 2 for December, but that approach also fails. Some other representation of month may be present, but not has been confirmed.

With no obvious solution, it is possible that the Date Code is not date related at all, but just happens to occupy the date space on the label. As vintage drum collector Kevin Oppendike opined on a Drumforum.org post, "I can't think of any reason why they would change to some super-secret unbreakable date coding all of a sudden. What would be the purpose? Particularly since it is highly unlikely that they kept any record of these numbers (they did not keep records of the serial numbers on drums so why track the dates?)." Suggestions for non-date related alternative imbedded logic include: employee number, customer order number, production batch number or some other number which held some significance to Ludwig manufacturing process. All of these interpretations are possible. Certain Date Codes are tightly linked to wood shelled drums while other appear on both wood and metal shelled drums, lending support to process or batch-based interpretations. Only twenty Date Codes are known to exist, so they could possibly be linked to individual employees or processes. But, because there are only twenty different Date Codes, they do not appear to be linked to individual dates, customers or order numbers.

It also seems possible that the Date Code contains a combination of a year and an indicator of something else which is not date related. However, after removing the 71 or 72, no obvious patterns are seen in the two or three digits which remain. Steve Black, retired statistician and general gatherer of information about cymbals³, volunteered to look for patterns. He broke each Date Code into three components, the 71 or 72 as representing the year, the prefix (numbers preceding the 71/72), and the suffix (numbers following the 71/72), then sorted by year then prefix. He noted that all 1971 codes have the same suffix, 7, but that makes the suffix invariant and therefore not meaningful. In the 1972 codes there are three suffixes (2, 0, none). He concludes that the prefix can't be a simple week number because they go past 52, but they can still be an arbitrary number that is encoded.

Table 2. Date Code Analysis Viewing Prefix, Year and Suffix

Date Code	Total	Prefix	71 or 72	Suffix
11717	16	11	71	7
12717	10	12	71	7
14717	1	14	71	7
20717	5	20	71	7
56717	42	56	71	7
57717	21	57	71	7
58717	28	58	71	7
59717	24	59	71	7
60717	20	60	71	7
61717	4	61	71	7
13727	1	13	72	7
14720	1	14	72	0

³ <https://black.net.nz/avedis.html>; <https://black.net.nz/paiste.html>

14727	26	14	72	7
21720	31	21	72	0
21727	1	21	72	7
31720	23	31	72	0
41727	1	41	72	7
4272	30	42	72	none
11472	5	114	72	none
32372	3	323	72	none

Unfortunately, Steve was not able to solve the mystery either. I found his email comments very instructive, “As far as why Ludwig would invent some coding scheme which we are having trouble decoding, I'm not surprised this is how it appears. This is more a problem of the volume of data and computation plus insight needed to decode a coding scheme. And if there isn't a coding scheme in the first place then you will be busy until you give up.”

Despite the many eBay and Reverb listings and Facebook and other online forum postings which definitively declare different interpretations of the Date Code, and diligent efforts to find meaning imbedded inside, no explanation offered thus far works with every Date Code. The purpose of listing so many theories which do not survive even the slightest bit of scrutiny is to encourage vintage drum enthusiasts to refrain from repeating this particular part of the legend and lore of vintage drums as if it is truth. If you don't know the meaning of a Date Code, please don't just make something up. In the words of Maurice Switzer, “It is better to remain silent at the risk of being thought a fool, than to talk and remove all doubt of it.”

DATE CODES AND SERIAL NUMBERS:

In addition to looking at Date Codes as number puzzles viewed in isolation, considerable effort went into determining if the general pattern of increasing serial numbers with the passage of time could place Date Codes in rough date order.⁴ However, as seen with prior research, the variability of the Ludwig date stamp/serial number relationship means that down-to-the-month precision is not achieved even when date stamps are involved.⁵ Less conclusive results are apparent when linking serial numbers to Date Codes. This result is the same for main line and Standards. Serial numbers are just too imprecise a tool for answering this particular question.

DATE CODES – WHEN USED?

Even without understanding exactly what the digits in the Date Code represent or being able to place them in the order they are used, it is possible to develop an approximate date of use of Date Codes. Knowing when they are used may be helpful in understanding them. Let's start with what we do know. Drums with paper labels and Date Codes share physical characteristics with drums with paper labels and date stamps:

1. The same paper labels are used for date stamps from April 1971 through December 1971 and Date Codes.
2. All main line drums with paper labels possess the same version of the blue/olive badge - the first version of the Blue/Olive badge which lacked the ® trademark registration symbol. This version

⁴ A section in my Ludwig dating guide is dedicated to Date Codes. A list of Date Codes and associated serial numbers on my website (<http://www.gretschdrumdatingguide.com/ludwig-drum-guide.html>) is regularly updated seeking insight into the Date Code mystery.

⁵ See note 2.

of the badge is introduced in late 1969 at about serial number 748200 and used for only a few years until about serial number 950000. This badge is replaced with a second version of the badge which includes the ® trademark registration symbol.

3. The vast majority of main line wood shelled drums for which the interior finish is known had a clear lacquer spray finish, with a few reports of Lud-Cote and one Conga having Resa-Cote. Ludwig introduced the “hot clear lacquer spray” interior in about April 1968, and first used the Lud-Cote term in a 1971 catalog.
4. Every wood shelled Standard drum for which the interior finish is known has a Granitone interior finish. Granitone is Lud-Cote by another name. Many early Standard drums had Resa-Cote interiors, with Granitone becoming the overwhelming prominent finish by about 1970.
5. Serial numbers on drums with paper labels are in similar ranges, whether they possess date stamps or Date Codes. This is true for both main line and Standards.

Based upon the above, one can comfortably conclude that Date Codes are introduced in 1971. Further, because paper labels appear to have been first introduced in April 1971 using date stamps, it appears that the Date Code is not introduced until about a little later in 1971. Later in this study, the estimated start date for Date Codes is refined to June 1971.

DATE STAMPS, DATE CODES AND SHELL TYPE:

Drums with paper labels are separated into shell type to determine if wood and metal shelled drums display different patterns. Logically, this approach is appealing, as manufacturing and assembling wood and metal shelled drums involve some different procedures, as wood shells are made in house while metal shells are made by outside vendors. Perhaps a difference in procedure will make evident how paper labels are used. It is possible that this process-based difference might open the Date Code to reveal individual employee numbers, work orders, dates or similar information.

Table 3. Main Line Drums with Date Stamps on Paper Labels

	Late 1963- APR 1971	APR 1971- MAY 1971	JUN 1971 – DEC 1971	JAN 1972 - onward
Date Stamp on shell – Wood and Metal	Yes	No	No	No
Date Stamp on label – Wood Drums	No	Yes - 39	No	No*
Date Stamp on Label – Metal Drums	No	Yes - 16	Yes - 89	No

*Two Black Panther wrapped wood shells had MAR 21 1972 Date stamps.

Table 4. Standard Drums with Date Stamps on Paper Labels

	1968 – APR 1971	APR 1971 - MAY 1971	JUN 1971 – DEC 1971	JAN 1972 - onward
Date Stamp on shell – Wood and Metal	Yes	No	No	No
Date Stamp on label – Wood Drums	No	Yes -11	No	No
Date Stamp on Label – Metal Drums	No	Yes - 4	Yes - 35	No*

* One JAN 3 1972 date stamp on label

Significant differences are evident when one looks at drums with paper labels in this manner. During April and May 1971, the first two months of paper labels, date stamps appear on both wood and metal shelled drums. This is true for main line and Standards. After May 1971 date stamps are generally discontinued for wood shelled drums but continue through December 1971 on metal shelled drums.

Again, this is true for main line and Standards. So, we can say that after May 1971 dates stopped being stamped on labels placed in wood shelled drums but continued to be stamped on labels placed in metal shelled drums. A different procedure for wood and metal shelled drums is identified.

It is not clear why date stamps generally cease on wood shelled drums after May 1971 but continue on metal shelled drums through December 1971. It is not clear why Ludwig uses different dating procedures for wood and metal shelled drums. Looking at the drums themselves does not answer these questions. One should avoid speculation or they risk adding more incorrect “facts” to the legend and lore of vintage drums. Instead, it is more productive to focus on what can be answered by looking at the drums themselves, namely, if a different date indicator is used on wood shelled drums after May 1971.

It seems worth considering the Date Code as a potential candidate. We need to first determine if certain Date Codes appear much more often on wood shelled drums than on metal shelled drums. We then need to determine if those same Date Codes can somehow be linked to June to December 1971.

The following chart shows the 284 drums studied which have known shell types broken down by Date Code, main line or Standard models and wood or metal shell type. They are then grouped by whether they contain a “71” or a “72” in them.

Table 5. Date Codes on Main Line and Standard Drums with Known Shell Types

Date Code	Main Line Metal Shell	Main Line Wood Shell	Standard Metal Shell	Standard Wood Shell	Total
4272	16	13		1	30
11472			5		5
11717		11		5	16
12717		7		3	10
13727	1				1
14717	1				1
14720	1				1
14727	6	15	5		26
20717		2			2
21720	10	15	5		30
21727	1				1
31720	7	13			20
32372	2	1			3
41727			1		1
56717		27		14	41
57717	1	16		4	21
58717		26		2	28
59717		20	1	2	23
60717	1	19			20
61717		4			4
Total	47	189	17	31	284

Table 6. Date Codes Separated by Shell Type

Date Code	Main Line + Standard Metal Shell	Main Line + Standard Wood Shell	Total
4272	16	14	30
11472	5		5
11717		16	16
12717		10	10
13727	1		1
14717	1		1
14720	1		1
14727	11	15	26
20717		2	2
21720	15	15	30
21727	1		1
31720	7	13	20
32372	2	1	3
41727	1		1
56717		41	41
57717	1	20	21
58717		28	28
59717	1	22	23
60717	1	19	20
61717		4	4
Total	64	220	284

Table 7. Date Codes Separated by Shell Type and “71” or “72”

Date Code	Main Line + Standard Metal Shell	Main Line + Standard Wood Shell	Total
11717		16	16
12717		10	10
14717	1		1
20717		2	2
56717		41	41
57717	1	20	21
58717		28	28
59717	1	22	23
60717	1	19	20
61717		4	4
Total “71” Codes	4	162	166
4272	16	14	30
11472	5		5

13727	1		1
14720	1		1
14727	11	15	26
21720	15	15	30
21727	1		1
31720	7	13	20
32372	2	1	3
41727	1		1
Total "72" Codes	60	58	118

Date Codes which contain "71" appear disproportionately, almost exclusively, on wood shelled drums. Of the ten Date Codes which contain "71" in them, 98% (162 of 166) are wood shelled and 2% (4 of 166) are metal shelled. If the "71" in the Date Code indicates 1971 production year, then one would expect that most would be on wood shelled drums rather than metal shelled drums, which continued to possess date stamps. In contrast, Date Codes which contain "72" display a more balanced split between wood and metal shells - 49% (58 of 118) are wood shelled and 51% (60 of 118) are metal shelled, which makes sense because date stamps are all but discontinued on all drums by December 1971 (with a few stragglers – one in January and two in March of 1972).

When the entire duration of paper labels is considered, starting with date stamps in April 1971 through Date Codes, more patterns emerge.

Table 8. Date Stamps and Date Codes by Line, Shell Type and Time Frame

	Date Stamp APR-MAY 1971	Date Stamp JUN-DEC 1971	DATE CODE with "71"	DATE CODE with "72"
Main Line Metal	16	89	3	44
Main Line Wood	39	0	132	57
Standard Metal	4	35	1	16
Standard Wood	11	0	30	1
Total	70	124	166	118

Taking one more step and combining the Date Codes with "71" with the date stamps from June through December 1971, the volume of metal and wood shelled drums seems consistent. This is what we expect to see if the "71" Date Codes are used in place of date stamps on wood shelled drums from June – December 1971.

Table 9. Date Stamps and Date Codes by Line, Shell Type and Time Frame

	Date Stamp APR-MAY 1971	Date Stamp JUN-DEC 1971 + DATE CODE with "71"	DATE CODE with "72"
Main Line Metal	16	92	44
Main Line Wood	39	132	57
Standard Metal	4	36	16
Standard Wood	11	30	1
Total	70	290	118

This analysis strongly supports an interpretation of the Date Codes containing "71" as being from 1971 and the Date Codes containing "72" as being from 1972. Instead of just plucking the "71" or "72" from the Date Code and calling it the year, we can now point to actual data to support this partial interpretation of Date Codes. We sought a group of Date Codes which are present almost exclusively on

wood shelled drums and we found some. With this new information, it is only a small logical step to suggest that Date Codes containing “71” fill the void left when date stamps are discontinued on wood shelled drums and are used from June through December 1971.

Based upon the above, we may conclude that at least a production year is indicated in the Date Code. Therefore:

1971 Date Codes: 11717, 12717, 14717, 20717, 56717, 57717, 58717, 59717, 60717 and 61717

1972 Date Codes: 4272, 11472, 13727, 14720, 14727, 21720, 21727, 31720, 32372 and 41727.

Another observation is possible from the data compiled and presented above. We can get a rough feel of the relative monthly production of drums with paper labels. Although we know that Ludwig did not start using paper labels until mid-April, 70 drums with paper labels and date stamps are in seen in April/May 1971 (an average of 35 per month). There are 290 examples of drums with paper labels with date stamps from June-December 1971 and with “71” Date Codes (an average of 41 per month). There are 118 drums with “72” Date Codes. If the averages experienced seen before are continued, this represents about three months of production. Note that this rough calculation relies upon some new and unproven theories and an incomplete sampling of the drums produced with paper labels, but it still provides a ballpark estimate. It is the best explanation offered so far. Therefore, if the “71” and “72” Date Codes are placed correctly in time, then paper labels likely ceased after about March 1972. The latest documented date stamp on paper labels is MAR 21 1972, which appeared on two outlying Black Panther wrapped toms. This estimated March 1972 date for cessation of paper labels could slightly enhance the serial number-based dating work by putting at least a partial date to drums with Date Codes.

THERE IS MORE WORK TO DO:

The next step is to determine if there is a discernable logic to these particular Date Codes which would confirm or deny this theory. We now can show data and logic behind the appealing theory that “71” or “72” are representative of the years 1971 and 1972. After that, no single explanation has been discovered which addresses all Date Codes in a satisfactory way. For most theories to work, it is necessary to disregard some parts of the Date Code and ignore some Date Codes altogether when they do not fit. Rather than being exceptions to the rules, these outliers are more likely proof that suggested rules are not correct. Presently it is only safe to say that the Date Code appears to include an indicator of year and that more work is needed to figure out the rest of the logic, if any exists.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Paper labels are first introduced in April 1971 with date stamps. They are used on wood shelled and metal shelled drums in both main line and Standards. Date Codes replaced date stamps on wood shelled drums in June 1971.

It was not until the beginning of 1972 that the switch from date stamps to Date Codes occurs on metal shelled drums.

From the beginning of 1972 through about March 1972, Date Codes are used on both wood and metal shelled drums.

The “71” and “72” present within every Date Code are very likely indications of the years 1971 and 1972.

Understanding the different treatment of wood and metal shelled drums with paper labels permits a reliable and supportable interpretation of part of the Date Code.

More investigation is needed to determine if additional information, like an indicator of month, can be shown to be imbedded in the Date Code.