

A Look at the Capstan Glass Fluted Tumbler Series

By Barry L. Bernas

Brief Overview

According to several reports, tumblers were the first glass containers shipped from the South Connellsville, Pennsylvania factory of the Capstan Glass Company. This event occurred on June 9, 1919.¹

Over the next nearly two decade period, the product line for this Fayette County firm was expanded to include jars and bottles. But even with this enhancement, tumblers remained a staple for this firm.

Invariably, I see descriptions or hear people talk about this style of food container in terms of it being a jelly, preserve or juice glass or more recently, even as a whiskey shot glass. For certain, the two spreads could have been one type of food packed therein; however, the later two uses resulted as a secondary benefit to the purchaser after the original contents were consumed.

The Capstan Glass Company didn't manufacture or market table or whiskey shot glasses. Their hands turned out tumblers. This utilitarian item could be used by a vender to package jelly, preserves, peanut butter, mustard, olives, condensed milk, relishes, sandwich spreads, dried meats, pimientos, fruit peels or whatever food stuff the user wanted to put into it.² Once devoid of its product, the vessel was available to be used for any other purpose deemed appropriate by the owner.

Two basic types of tumblers were produced by Capstan employees. The first was a plain version which came sans any outer or inner adornment. Its counterpart was the fluted model. It is this latter version that will be discussed throughout this article.

Of note, this write-up will center only on the paneled tumblers from Capstan which were otherwise undecorated. There are other fluted examples that have colorful bands or images or both that were pyroglazed onto the outer surface of the glass container. These visually attractive tumblers will be unveiled in a subsequent presentation.

General Description

A fluted tumbler has a distinctive shape. Its profile is formed by three separate but joined features. These parts are a finish, side wall and base.

The typical finish is shown in **Figure 1**

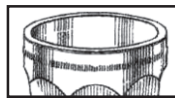


Figure 1

1. It consists of two parts. Topmost is a straight sided circular region. Since it is designed to receive a metal push-down cap, this segment has no side seems along its outer diameter. Directly below this sealing trait is a series of vertically embossed lines separated by an empty space of equal width. Peculiar to a tumbler, this ribbed attribute is called knurling.

As far as I can determine, Capstan's paneled tumblers were only produced out of clear glass. From top to bottom, the angled inward outer surface was either plain or fluted. The slanted inward inner surface has one of the same two attributes as well. **Figure 2** carries a drawing of an outer surface fluted edition.

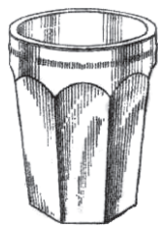


Figure 2

Regardless of their placement site, the panels can have a flat or convex outer shape and feel. In addition, the alignment of the panels on the exterior and interior parts of the vessel's slanted side wall may be one over the other or be offset to either the left or right of one another. In any case, the overlay or nonalignment of flutes allows for many unique patterns for this style of container.

The last part of the fluted tumbler is the base. **Figure 3** has a picture of a representative example.



Figure 3

Typically, the base is about a 1/4 of an inch in depth and can be either round or multisided. Irrespective of the outer design, the underside of the bottom is characteristically the same. Directly in from the outer surface of the side wall is a flat ledge on which the tumbler rests. This level part varies in width depending on the size of the vessel. Inside of this facet is a depressed circular region. Centrally located on it is the embossed Capstan Glass Company trademark.³ Below this nautical emblem is a mold number or letter. Above it can be a mold series number.

Listing Methodology

The vessels that follow will be entered under one of four main topical headings. These are: fluted outer surface-plain inner surface; plain outer surface-fluted inner surface; fluted outer surface-fluted inner surface and other. Within the initial three general groupings, a particular example will be positioned lowest to highest according to the number of flutes on the outer or inner surface of the model in question.

The "other" category will include examples which don't fit into the above three categories.

At the end of each entry, a mold letter, letter-number, number or number-letter will appear in ascending letter or number order. In most cases, the individual mold identifier signifies a different size of tumbler.

Fluted Outer Surface-Plain Inner Surface

Figure 4 has a picture of the first example under this grouping.

The tumbler depicted comes with eight flat surfaced panels on its outer surface. These exterior features are individually straight sided with a rounded upward top and a horizontal bottom. Four are taller and approximately double the width of their smaller counterparts. In a one long and wide and one short and narrow pattern, the panels adjoin around the circumference of the container below the finish. Besides the Capstan logo, the octagonal base has either a mold letter or number embossed on it. Those identified so far are: L, M, S, 313, 314 and 315.

Our next specimen also has eight flat surfaced flutes molded onto its exterior. Like the **Figure 4** model, the



Figure 4



Figure 5

panels on the one in **Figure 5** are straight sided with a rounded upward top and a horizontal bottom. However, instead of being in a one long and wide and one short and narrow pattern, these are all of equal height, width and form. The flutes join together at their sides around the outer surface of the tumbler. The eight sided base on this edition comes with only mold numbers. The ones either advertised by Capstan Glass or reported to me are: 42, 62 ½, 122, 531, 540, 541 and 581.

The remainder of the tumblers under this category show ten, twelve, fourteen and eighteen flat surfaced panels adjoined side by side around their exterior, matching the shape of the ones described for the Figure 5 specimen. Each one has a base outline that conforms to the same number of panels on its exterior side wall.

The ten fluted version has been seen with mold numbers 500 and 527 on its base. Two different finishes have been noted on the twelve paneled sample. Mold number 582 has a standard Anchor finish discussed and depicted under Figure 1 in the preceding General Description section. Conversely, the example with 68 on its twelve sided base has neither a straight circular feature at the lip nor any knurling beneath it. Number 108 is found on the underneath side of the fourteen paneled model while 304 was embossed on the eighteen fluted specimen.

Plain Outer Surface-Fluted Inner Surface

Only three types have been discovered for the second grouping.

On the interior side wall of the first example displayed in **Figure 6** are nine panels that have a curved outward or convex outer surface. With straight sides and rounded upward tops and curved

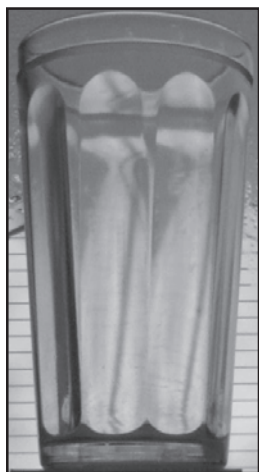


Figure 6

d o w n w a r d bottoms, each of these flutes is of the same height, width and design. Between each panel around the inner circumference of the tumbler is a narrow gap at the top. This design aspect separates an individual flute from its next

door mate at its upper side. As you proceed down the length of any flute, the space between it and its next door neighbor gradually diminishes to a point where the panels touch one another at the bottom end. The base on the following examples is the Capstan Glass Company trademark. Directly beneath this insignia are the reported mold letter-number and numbers O-8, O-15, 5 ½, 15, 506 and 523.

The second edition corresponds exactly to the description of its predecessor except it has eleven flutes around its inner surface. On this model, its round bottom side has the number 4 embossed on it.

Figure 7 shows the final version under this category.

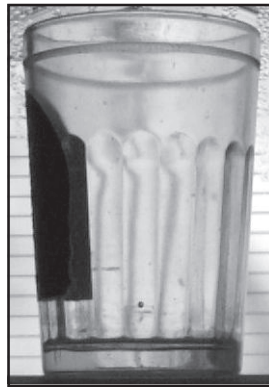


Figure 7

This entry has eighteen panels on its interior which curve outward in convex fashion. Each one of these inner features has straight sides with a rounded upward top and a curved downward bottom. Of equal height, width and form, the panels come up the interior side wall of the tumbler approximately two-thirds of the distance from the base. These flutes are joined together at their sides around the inner circumference of this food container. In addition to the Capstan logo, its round base has the mold number 40 on it.

Fluted Outer Surface-Fluted Inner Surface

At this point, the penultimate group has a solitary member. It can be seen in **Figure 8**.

The mold numbers under this heading come with sixteen flat surfaced panels on the outer surface. These exterior features are individually straight sided with a rounded upward top and horizontal bottom. Of equal height, width and form, the flutes adjoin around



Figure 8

the outer circumference of the vessel below its finish. In addition, there are sixteen panels on the inner surface as well. This set curves outward in convex fashion from the interior surface of the tumbler. The base on this model has sixteen sides. To this point, I've run across three different mold identifiers. These are: 517, 537 and 537Q.

Other

The last of the fluted examples have a trait or two that set them apart from the other paneled specimens documented in previous paragraphs. A separate sub-topical heading will be used to delineate one from the other. Included in this category are fluted editions that were advertised by Capstan Glass but haven't yet been found and other paneled models that were granted either a patent or design patent.

Partial Panel

The initial variety is pictured in **Figure 9**.



Figure 9

Directly under the knurling on its Anchor style of finish are six rounded upward tops. Thereafter, the remaining portions of the corresponding exterior panels are absent. In their place, the outer side wall of the tumbler maintains a plain and decreasing circular surface down through the base. The round bottom section on this sample has the Capstan Glass Company's nautical symbol in the center. Right under it is the mold number 575. Of note, the name AMERICAN STORES CO. is also embossed around the outside rim of the base.

Traditional Jelly Glass Shape

This model appears in **Figure 10**.

You will notice its outer profile is different than the three tumblers under the Plain Outer Surface-Fluted Inner Surface heading. Instead of a slanted outer side wall, the smooth body of this glass container has a slightly inward slant to its top



Figure 10

portion. About two-thirds of the way down the outer side wall, the gradual slant changes into a gently curved inward segment as it approaches the base. Resembling a traditional jelly glass in shape, this Capstan product has twelve flutes on its inner surface. These traits are straight sided and rounded upward at the top and downward at the bottom. Each has a curved outward surface. As you can see in the Figure 10 picture, the interior flutes are of equal height, width and form and adjoin side to side around the inner circumference of the vessel. The round base on this model has been seen with mold numbers 509 and 510 on it.

Separated Panels

Figure 11 contains a drawing of a container which fell within the group of vessels Capstan Glass marketers called their "7" line of deluxe tumblers.

Its core shell has a smooth and curved outer side wall. The finish is a modified Anchor style. Right above the knurling, the ⁵/₁₆ of an inch top portion isn't straight as seen in Figure 1. Instead, the upper ¹/₈ inch segment is angled inward at approximately thirty degrees. The remaining ³/₁₆ inch long piece of the closure remains straight up and down. Right below the finish, the smooth and slanted inward outer surface of the tumbler begins. Approximately ¹/₄ inch below the knurling, a forty-five degree inward slant occurs. From this point until the bottom of the base, a ¹/₈ inch deep section of the outer surface of this vessel is removed except for six, ³/₁₆ inch wide semicircular lines. In effect, the outer pattern on this example has six convex surfaced panels of equal height, width and form. Each has a flat top, a flat bottom and straight sides. Between the rectangular flutes are the protruding demarcation lines mentioned above. The interior of this style of food container is smooth. Its base isn't round or multisided as was the case with prior compatriots. This one is unique because it incorporates the convex contour of every panel along with the semicircular outline of the protruding line in between each flute. The resultant pattern is a curved segment followed by a half circle bump one after the other in a series. Mold numbers reported to date are

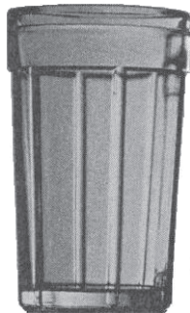


Figure 11

47, 57, 67, 97 and 126.

Advertised but not Found

Within this group, only two examples from Capstan Glass Company advertisements haven't been documented. These are pictured in Figure 12.

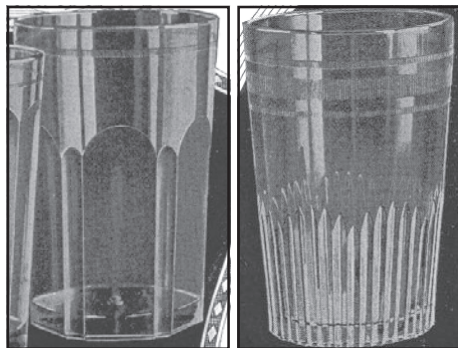


Figure 12

Patented

The drawing under Figure 13 has the same overall design as detailed for mold numbers 500 and 527 in the Fluted Outer Surface-Plain Inner Surface category.

Seven flat surfaced flutes are connected side to side around the outside of this tumbler variation. Each of these has straight sides with a rounded upward top and a horizontal bottom.

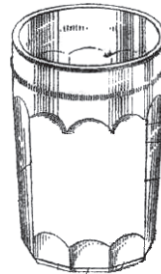


Figure 13

The design change to this edition entails a space that would have been occupied by the other three panels. This segment is unadorned and curved. At its top are three rounded upward tops lining up with the same trait on the other seven panels. Below the convex shaped vacant space are three miniature flutes. Each attribute has straight sides with a rounded upward top and horizontal bottom. The ten sided base on this specimen has the mold number 502 on it.

Peter Kucera was granted a patent for this tumbler on September 4, 1923. According to him, the curved empty space was provided to more easily apply a paper label to the vessel.⁴

Design Patented

The final entries under the fourth grouping can be seen in Figure 14.

On the far left, the fluted model was conceived by Banks D. Brown, the Capstan Glass superintendent. He was granted a design patent for this food container on August 6, 1929. Unfortunately, Mr. Brown didn't state whether the pointed panels were on the exterior, interior or on both surfaces of his tumbler.

The left middle edition in Figure 13 was the creation of the same gentleman. The United States Patent Office issued him a design patent for it on January 13, 1931. Verbiage in the registration paperwork seems to indicate that the polygonal forms were on both the outer and inner surfaces of this vessel.

On the middle-right, a futuristic looking footed tumbler is depicted. Theodore J. Piazzoli received a design patent for it on October 25, 1932. From the sketch, it appears thirty-four flutes with angled inward sides, rounded upward tops and curved downward bottoms are lined up side by side around the inner surface of this food container.

The design for the right-hand edition was created by the same inventor as its mate to the left. Theodore J. Piazzoli's idea was granted a design patent on June 6, 1933. His inspiration may have been the foundation for the "7" line of deluxe tumblers.⁵

Regrettably, none of the four tumblers in the "other" group have yet to be found.

Continued on page 43.

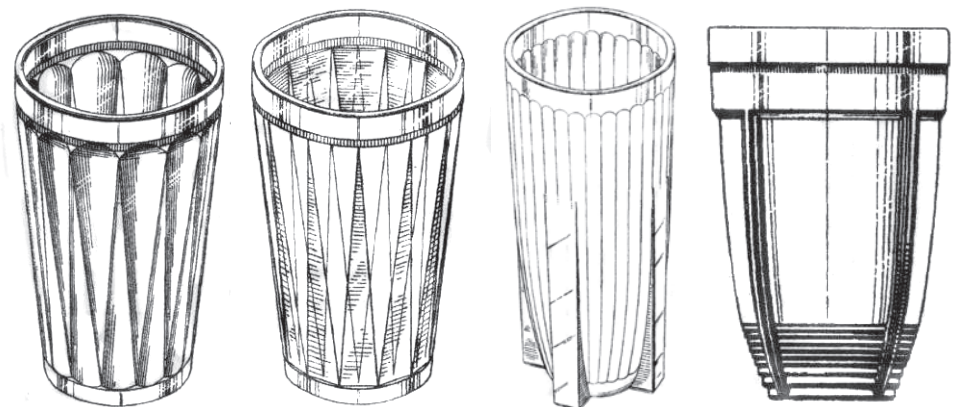


Figure 14



The small but very informative “Rigo / Pretty-Lip / Soother” or pacifier box with its original contents, a shaped pacifier sucking nipple with a “the shield is white sterilized bone... Beware of composition shields.” With recent environmental health warnings, it looks like Rigo was ahead of its time. The use of bone or ivory definitely predates the age of plastics. (Courtesy of the Rubin Clet collection.)

nice in its own right, but it is just a nice old pacifier. The original box that it came in, however, opens up a new story. The label reads “Rigo / Pretty-Lip Soother / Made in England / for the / Richards Glass Co. / Limited / Toronto / and / Montreal.” Produced around 1900, what really sets this box off is that one side of the box is in English and the other side is in French. It was made in England for the French-Canadian market in eastern Canada and ended up in a collection in California.

What I have realized by looking at these old boxes is that there is a lot of beauty in the period of their production along with a history lesson that could never adequately be put into words. The graphics are pleasing to the eye and significant as pieces of artwork. One of the greatest assets we have found in our ACIF organization is that among the 1500 or so American-made baby feeding bottles, there are at least six different bottles known to exist only because one of the ACIF members has only the box that it was sold in. Other than the box, these particular bottles would not be known to exist.



Both sides of the Rigo box, front in English and behind in French.

A Look at the Capstan Glass Fluted Tumber Series by Barry Bernas. Continued from page 39.

Summary

The examples documented in this write-up were either advertised by Capstan or an actual example has been located and verified. I was limited to these two sources because a product catalog from the Capstan Glass Company hasn't been found. Because of the latter limitation, I don't know the full extent of the fluted tumbler line that was manufactured by factory hands for this South Connellsville firm. There may be many more paneled models still on the loose that need to be corralled and branded as authentic. If you can help me increase our knowledge base about this type of food tumbler or just want to discuss any aspect of this article, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

BLB

Endnotes:

¹ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, pg. 11.*

² *Ibid, pg. 55.* Either Capstan Glass ads or actual labeled tumblers were used to compile this brief listing of possible foods that could be packaged into this type of glass container.

³ *Ibid, pg. 10.* This reference has a sketch of the Capstan logo extracted from the trademark paperwork and pictures of how this symbol was replicated on a machine pressed tumbler and a machine blown jar or bottle.

⁴ *Ibid, pg. 63.*

⁵ *Ibid, pgs. 72-73 and 137.* For more information on other design patents issued to Theodore J. Piazzoli, please look for my article titled *Piazzoli Designs from Capstan Glass* in a another issue of *Bottles and Extras*.

Pisgah Forest Pottery by Lindsay Lancaster Continued from page 40.

mud and there were spiders crawling everywhere. Leftwich said so much was lost to flood damage and to silver fish eating up a lot of the paper. Almost all of the books were destroyed along with all of the pottery.

In the library, he did find a couple of letters. Leftwich's eyes welled up when he talked about finding Stephen's description of his very first piece of pottery, and how he made and fired the pot, but the glaze had only half-way melted. Stephen wrote that he was so frustrated, and that “my little mother encouraged me.”

His mother's kind words prompted him to turn the pot upside down and re-fire it. It turned out okay and he ended up selling that first pot decorated with cotton blooms.

In just about every letter that Stephen wrote, he referred to his persistence and “doggedness to stay with things,” a trait which he believed he had gotten from his father, who was a Mason that came from Scotland, Leftwich said.

After a lot of searching and making contacts with people who may have collected some of Stephen's pottery, Leftwich was lucky to find some in the Memphis area.

He happened to be going to Memphis and had found a person with a pot that identically matched the description of Stephen's very first pot, signed Stephen and son, before a name was chosen for the pottery. The piece dates back to around 1907.

“We found that [first] pot,” Leftwich said. “We're pretty sure, as much as we can be.”

In the letter, Stephen also talked about the hardships he faced, and described his first kiln.

Case has a collection of Stephen's pottery at Asheville Art Museum, some of which are his favorites.

“They're really nice and they're sort of special to me,” he said.

Leftwich hopes that someday, there will be a way to fund the creation of a video to have a record of what's there.

A wide range of pottery made at Pisgah Forest Pottery and Leftwich's book are available for sale. Pottery prices range from around \$10 to \$400.

For more information about the pottery, call Tom or Dot Case at 828-684-6663.