

SWAROVSKI VARIATION IN PRODUCTION (VIP) PIECES

VARIATION IN PRODUCTION (VIP) OVERVIEW

Many collectors are fascinated by the older pieces of Silver Crystal which, can in some cases, look very different from each other, despite actually being the same item and in most cases carrying the same Swarovski code number/s. In the early days of the Swarovski Silver Crystal range some items went through a design change or had a component changed during the production run. Other variations were created when a different component was used on a piece if the original one wasn't available. Then there were also differences which were created purely as a consequence of the hand assembly process, although these are generally considered to issues of "placement" rather than a variation as such. Whatever the reason, the old Variation in Production (VIP) pieces are a fascinating and fun topic. To kick off our Crystal Lodge VIP factsheets, we are taking a look at the Silver Crystal animals from A to G.

BEAR NECESSITIES

As well as VIPs, in the early days in some cases, some pieces were made which were exclusive to either the European or the USA/Canadian market. These days, the distribution tends to be global in virtually all cases. You are probably all familiar with the large, small and mini bears which were part of the silver crystal range for many years, but here are all the family, including all 3 sizes of the USA/Canada exclusive bears (giant, king and mini USA). The family photo below shows the bears in graduating sizes. The bear family gives us a chance to see how hand assembly can completely change the appearance of a piece, and also introduces us to a variation to arguably one of the cutest pieces in the range!



Left to right: Giant (USA), King (USA), large, small, mini and mini (USA) bears.

The USA mini bear is a real cutie, and is just 1 ¼" (32mm) tall. He was introduced in 1985 and retired in 1988. There are 2 known variations of "feet" paws, as per the photo below, although the majority of them have the more pointed paws as per the bear on the left. The USA mini bear is the only bear produced by Swarovski to date, to have pointed paws.



USA mini bears with pointed feet paws and rounded feet paws

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The mini USA bear's handsome big brothers, the King and Giant Bears were both introduced in 1983 with the Giant bear a shade under 4 1/2" (112mm tall) and weighing in at a cuddly 1lb 3oz, retiring in 1988. The King bear stands at 3 5/8" (92mm) tall and retired in 1987. Always popular with collectors, these bears can be found with various different head angles and paw placements, due to hand assembly, which gives them distinct little personalities of their own. Here are 2 giant bears which look completely different, yet are assembled using identical components.



Giant bears with different body positions

For the more familiar large, small and mini bears, there are even more versions to look out for! Here are a few examples of the small bear and different head placements to be found:



Now for the large bear:



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And finally, the (globally available) mini bear. These not only have different head and paw placements, but if you look very closely see that the bear in the middle has more rounded “feet paws” whereas the other 2 have more elongated paws, so at some point, the component used for the feet paws was changed, creating another variation.



BEETLE BOTTLE OPENERS

We class the Beetle Bottle Openers as “Animals” rather than “Functional Items” as we are not sure how successfully they could have been used to open bottles, and we’re certainly not about to try it!

There are 4 distinctly different pieces in this range – 2 come in a gold finish and another 2 with a rhodium finish. All the bottle openers were introduced in 1978 and retired in 1983, and it is not known which order they were produced in.

While it is not obvious, the crystal stones between v1 and v2 are not interchangeable, but the variation really becomes apparent when you look at the metal body just above the legs of the piece. This area can be smooth or rough in appearance and that is the difference. Here at The Crystal Lodge, we refer to the 2 types of beetle as smooth and hairy (or rough) versions! Don’t be put off if you can’t find the old “SC” block logo on the crystal body stone – these are sometimes hidden from view under the metal parts.



Beetle bottle openers in gold with smooth finish and hairy/rough finish



Beetle bottle openers in rhodium with smooth finish and hairy/rough finish

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BUTTERFLY LARGE

The large butterfly comes in 3 known variations and this is all to do with the antenna and nose of the piece. This butterfly was first introduced into the Silver Crystal range in 1982 and it retired in 2006. The first butterfly issued is referred to as v1 and this had a small rhodium nose and rhodium antenna with black ball tips. This design was replaced by what we call v2 which had a small gold nose and gold rhodium antenna with crystal tips. Last in the series came v3 which is the one that was available for the longest period of time and the one which collectors will be more familiar with. This one has the gold “mask” face and gold antenna which are also topped with crystal stones.



L-R: Butterfly large v1, v2 and v3

BUTTERFLY MINI

The mini butterfly has 2 variations, there are rumours of a third which had the same antenna as the v1 large butterfly, but we are dubious about this as we’ve never seen one. We will concentrate for now, on the ones that we have evidence of. In both cases the mini butterfly has gold antenna with crystal tips. The difference being that v1 has a small gold nose while the v2 has the “mask” face. The most common variation is v2. The design was available from 1986 to 2007, and we believe that the v1 was only available for a very short period of time.



L-R: Butterfly mini v1 and v2

CATS CORNER

Part of the Pets Corner theme group, the mini cat was originally introduced into the Silver Crystal collection in 1982. There was a slight difference in the cat which was available in USA to the one which was for sale elsewhere. This was to do with head replacement. The design was standardised in 2000, and the mini cat was discontinued in USA shortly afterwards, and then reintroduced again globally with a straight rather than floppy tail, before finally being retired in 2007. This has produced several different looking mini cats, all marketed under the same code numbers, but with each version having a unique look.

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Cat mini with floppy and stiffer tails / Cat mini USA style (left) Cat mini global (right)



Cats mini – floppy tail, flexible tail, stiff tail

The tall/large cat (code 010023) introduced in 1977 and retired in 1991 can also be found with different metal tails in floppy and stiff varieties. As if that wasn't enough, there is another cat which was only available in the USA/Canadian markets which was similar to, but smaller than, the large cat and it was known as the medium cat. The medium cat has pointed ears and has the code number 7634NR52. Introduced in 1983 and retired in 1987 and also has similar tail variations.



L-R: Cats tall with metal tails in stiff and floppy versions
Cat medium (USA only) – stiff and floppy tail (smaller than tall cat and has pointed ears)

CHEETAH

Designed by Michael Stamey the cheetah is 4" (102mm) tall and was introduced in 1994 and retired in 2004. The cheetah can be found in 2 variations as there was a major design change applied to the tail because in the original design the cheetah's tail was lying flat on the shelf and then curls upwards to form a point. This was deemed to be causing excessive breakage if collectors placed the piece down on the shelf too hard or tail first, so the design was modified so that it curls upwards straightaway, and is raised so that it doesn't touch the shelf at all.

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L-R: Cheetah low tail, Cheetah higher set tail

DACHSHUND LARGE

The Silver Crystal large dachshund is one of the more well-known variation pieces, and again, the difference is all to do with the metal tail. 2 versions of the tail were produced with an articulated and braided metal tail which varies between floppy (which is known as v1) and flexible (v2). The third version is a more springy tail which remains straight on display and this is a coiled metal tail (v3). There is no real evidence to suggest in which order the tails were produced, although the v1 floppy tail appears to be the rarest, with the v2 and v3 being the most common. The design was introduced in 1984 and retired in 1991.



Dachshund large v1 floppy metal tail

Dachshund large v2 flexible metal tail



Dachshund large v3 stiff metal tail

DACHSHUND MINI

One unique point to make about the mini dachshunds is that there were 2 entirely different looking mini dachshunds made by different designers, which were both given the same code number. V1 is the USA only issue, designed by Max Schreck which has a metal articulated/braided tail. This one was only available for a short period during 1985 and 1988. Code number for this is 7672 042 000 or 7672NR42. However, overlapping this, comes the frosted tail mini dachshund also allotted code number 7672 042 000, which was designed by Adi Stocker and available from 1987 to 1995. This design was rolled out globally and also assigned article number 014388.

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USA dachshund mini with metal tail



Dachshund mini with frosted tail

The

FOXY FAMILY

In 1987, the large fox was introduced into the Woodlands Friend category, and for the first year in the USA, no black dot was placed on the nose of the fox. The design always featured a black dotted nose elsewhere. In many cases, you can find different head and tail placements on the large fox and occasionally on the mini foxes.



L-R: Fox large (USA) which doesn't have the black nose and Fox large (global) which does!



Different head and tail placements on fox large

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FROG PRINCE

In 1984, Swarovski introduced the classic “Prince Frog” and the initial version produced had clear eyes. However, it soon became clear (no pun intended!) that the eyes weren’t really easy to see within the design, so in 1985, the clear eyes were “discontinued” being replaced by 2 black eyes. This black eyed prince frog remained in production until the end of 1991 with no change of code number.



Frog Prince clear and black eyed versions

HARRY GOSLING

Another Silver Crystal variation piece is Harry Gosling. Harry, his brothers Tom and Dick, plus their Mum, known as Mother Goose were introduced globally into the “Barnyard Friends” category in 1993. The whole family retired in 1999. Harry is the only variation piece in this set. To tell them apart, Mother Goose is larger, but if you can’t tell from a photo – she is also the only one to have a closed beak – presumably because she can’t get a word in with those 3 noisy open-beaked offspring! Tom is the Gosling looking forward and has his neck upright and is the only one to have a raised foot, Dick is looking backwards and Harry is leaning forward. Harry is the variation piece as the neck replacement can mean that, in some cases his neck is only around ½” (12 mm) off the shelf and almost parallel to it, or in various poses to around ¾” (19mm).



Goose mother, Goslings Dick and Tom



Gosling Harry – different styles of neck placement