

FLUGELHORNS MANUFACTURED BY F. E. OLDS AND SON, 1959-1979

INTRODUCTION



The newspaper clipping at left, from the Fullerton News Tribune of July 28, 1959, announces the “Flugel Horn” as one of several new models being introduced in 1959. The serial numbers of early flugelhorns in the Olds Register support 1959 as the introductory year. There are a few listings with earlier dates, but these are carryovers from the old, original Olds database, and are suspected to be either errors or (possibly) prototypes.

The first known Olds company document to mention the new horn is a Price List dated January 11, 1960. Included in the listing is a heading for the *L-12 FLÜGEL HORN (but spelled without an umlaut in the text), followed by a long paragraph describing the flugelhorn as a “new sound.” Significantly, the model number is preceded by an asterisk, as are the model numbers for several other instruments on this list. A note at the bottom of the brochure indicates that these models were available but not yet

shown in the catalog. This document, dated as it is very early in 1960, strongly supports 1959 as the first year of flugelhorn productions for F. E. Olds and Son. The umlaut in the name was dropped early on, but Olds Company sales literature continued to use the two word “flugel horn” nomenclature until the 1977 catalog, when the Clark Terry Flugelhorn was introduced. In this article, we will use the modern single word version except in direct quotations.

FLUGELHORN PATTERNS

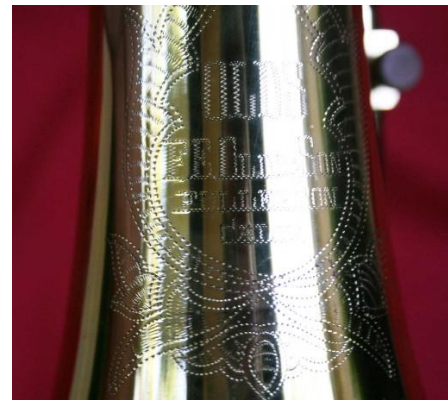
1. First Pattern (L-2 (?) / L-12, Yellow Brass Bell, 1959-1961)
2. Second Pattern (L-12, Re-O-loy Bell, 1961-1979)
3. Third Pattern (V-12 Super Star, 1974-1979)
4. Fourth Pattern (L-13T Custom “Clark Terry”, 1977-1979)
5. Fifth Pattern (Irving Bush’s Custom Crafted Prototypes, 1979)

1. FIRST PATTERN (L-2 (?) / L-12, YELLOW BRASS BELL, 1959-1961)

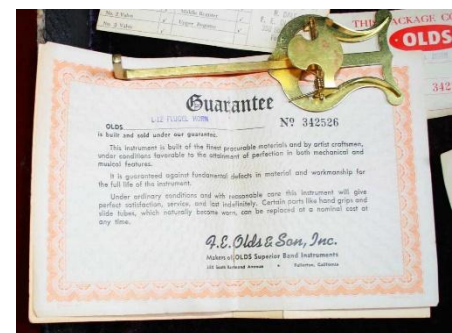


First Pattern L-12 Flugelhorn, serial no. 276074 (photos from Reverb). Dated to 1959, this is an early example of the short-lived first pattern Olds flugelhorn. The yellow brass bell distinguishes it from the later pattern.

F. E. Olds and Son had been making trumpets for thirty years when they produced their first flugelhorn. They started making instruments other than their traditional trio of trombone, trumpet, and cornet in the late 1930s and by the mid-1950s were marketing a full line of band instruments. Aside from their professional quality brass instruments, though, Olds production was aimed squarely at the educational market. In the US, unlike Europe, flugelhorns have never been common in school band lineups and so were likely not perceived as having much sales potential.



First pattern L-12 Flugelhorn, serial no. 342546 (photos from Centex Brass). A slightly later example of the first pattern flugelhorn. As mentioned above, the January 1960 price list refers to model number L-12. The first catalog to list the new flugelhorn, though, dated to 1961, calls out this horn as model number L-2. This appears to be the only place that the L-2 model designation is used. After this, all references revert to using L-12. An even more convincing bit of evidence is the guarantee card for this horn, which clearly lists it as an “L-12.” I assume that “L-2” was a typo, and this article will use L-12 exclusively.



2. SECOND PATTERN (L-12, RE-O-LOY BELL, 1961-1979)



Second pattern L-12 Flugelhorn, serial no. 867614. Flugelhorns in general are notoriously prone to intonation problems, but judging from contemporary reports, these issues in the first pattern L-12 appear to have been more severe than expected and led directly to several changes intended to improve this situation. In his splendid biography of Zig Kanstul^a, Dale Olson says that the new model flugelhorn was introduced on May 10, 1961, and incorporated several design changes intended to

address the intonation problems of the first pattern. Dale doesn't detail exactly what those changes were, but he does mention that the new variation can be identified by its Re-O-loy (red brass) bell.

A 2025 post on *Trumpet Herald* by member **nieuwguyski**, who compared both versions of the L-12 side-by-side, adds key details.

Olds reduced the height of the horn overall, reducing the top-to-bottom height of the front bow, and reduced the top-to-bottom height of the bell bow even more. So they shortened the horn by reducing the height while keeping the length the same.



The second pattern L-12 is a very good example of a professional quality flugelhorn of the period. It doesn't have the intonation adjustment capabilities expected in today's flugels, but it's still a fine player. Olds produced a special mouthpiece, the Olds no. 17, for this horn. The rim is similar to the Olds 3 cornet mouthpiece, but the cup is significantly deeper, and it has a Small Morse (Bach) Taper flugelhorn shank.



*Olds no. 17
Mouthpiece*

- a. Olson, R. Dale: *Zig Kanstul: Last of the Great Masters*; A. I. Press, Fullerton, California; first printing, January 2017; p. 147.

3. THIRD PATTERN (V-12 SUPER STAR, 1974-1979)



Third pattern V-12 Super Star Flugelhorn, serial no. 947167. Photos by the owner, Super Star enthusiast Mark Robinson.

The market for flugelhorns, of course, has never been as large as that for trumpets or cornets, but sales numbers for the V-12 were disappointing even so. By all accounts, the V-12 Super Star is an excellent playing horn, but right from the start it was criticized, I believe unfairly, on two counts.

The trumpet-like horizontal arrangement of the valve slides immediately called to mind the cheap, “student-level” flugelhorns produced in Europe in large numbers and



widely available at the time. The Huttel flugelhorn shown at left, serial no. 468, was made in West Germany and is typical of the breed. This instrument's 0.460-inch bore indicates that Huttel lifted the valve section unchanged from one of their student trumpets. To be

honest, it's not a bad beginner's horn, although the intonation could be better and the inexpensive bottom sprung valves are a bit slow. There are better options for a low-cost flugelhorn these days, but in its defense, it is very shiny and makes a nice wall decoration.

Although it's not exactly clear when this took place, at some point during the mid-1970s Olds replaced the Olds No. 17 flugelhorn mouthpiece with a new model, the Olds 7A. To date, the only documentation we've seen on this mouthpiece is in a catalog titled *Olds Educator Approved Musical Instrument Accessories*. This catalog is undated but looks to be from the mid-to late 1970s. It would be nicely symmetrical to think that the introduction of this mouthpiece coincided with the introduction of the V-12 in 1974, but there is no documentary evidence to support that conjecture.



*Olds No. 7A
mouthpiece*

The 1978 price list cataloged the V-12 at \$525, the same price as the L-13T Custom "Clark Terry" and near the top of the Olds price range. It's easy to understand how someone looking to purchase a new top-flight flugelhorn might take one look at the Super Star, see its resemblance to a cheap beginner's model, and look elsewhere. It's also true that the Olds derived the V-12's valve block from the V-102 Super Star trumpet, but the Company did it correctly and redesigned the valve section using a flugelhorn appropriate bore of 0.438-inches. This in no way compromises the quality of the design.



*Super Star cornet serial no. 912153, showing
the 3rd slide finger ring and 1st valve saddle.*

To today's players, it may seem odd that Olds, who had been putting triggers on trumpets and cornets since at least 1950, did not add what is now a common flugelhorn feature to this horn. It's important to remember that in the 1970s very

few flugels had any method of intonation adjustment at all. Olds was in cost reduction mode in the '70s, and no doubt this was a factor, but my son, who is a

trumpeter who occasionally doubles on flugelhorn, brought up a point I had not considered. The modern trumpets he plays have third valve rings and first valve saddles, just as the Super Star trumpets and cornets did. Having the same system on his flugelhorn makes switching between them that much simpler. Already designed, cheaper to build, and easier to use? To a company strapped for cash, it must have sounded like a win-win.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the other criticism leveled at the V-12 Super Star when it was introduced just might have a kernel of truth in it. The instrument shown on the right is the first model flugelhorn built by Schilke, introduced in 1967. This was an odd duck, cobbled together from a trumpet valve block (again in a trumpet bore size!) and (according to the article below) a bass trumpet bell section. Many of these horns made after 1972 also used the infamous Yamalloy valves. Even the most fervent Schilke enthusiast will admit this horn was a failure. Schilke tinkered with it so much that hardly any two of them are identical, and they only made about 125 of them in the design's 15-year production run. Of course, this design shares nothing with the top quality professional flugels Schilke produces today.



The Schilke community accepts as a matter of course that Olds directly copied Schilke design features in the Super Star line of trumpet, cornet, and flugelhorn. Here's what the late Jim Donaldson, writing in *The Schilke Loyalist*, had to say:

The Schilke flugelhorn was used as inspiration by F.E. Olds & Son, right down to the hexagonal valve buttons and caps, in the Olds Superstar (sic) model flugelhorn, an even more interesting horn. I am grateful to Lawrence Van Ameyde, who used to own a Superstar flugel, for this information. Olds briefly went on a Schilke copy kick and released a few models clearly inspired by the look, if not the feel of Schilke instruments. Perhaps not coincidentally, these models were released by Olds, then owned by Norlin, in the late 70s, shortly before the company went out of business.^b

Pointing out that Super Star valve buttons and caps are not, in fact, hexagonal – the valve buttons are octagonal and the caps dodecagonal – is perhaps splitting hairs a bit too fine, and it is very difficult to argue that Olds was not copying the well-known Schilke look. Regardless, the Super Star is an excellent player, and it is among the very

few production flugelhorns, even today, that have intonation adjustments on both the first and third valve slides.

- b. After Jim Donaldson passed away in 2017, the pages of *The Schilke Loyalist* were preserved on the Everything Trumpet website: <https://everythingtrumpet.com/schilke/>.

4. FOURTH PATTERN (L-13T CUSTOM “CLARK TERRY”, 1977-1979)





Fourth pattern L-13T Clark Terry Flugelhorn, serial no. 99374 (photos from Centex Brass). While many well-known trumpet players endorsed Olds instruments over the



Clark Terry at the Monterey Jazz Festival, 1977

years, the P-13T Custom “Clark Terry” Trumpet and the L-13T Custom “Clark Terry” Flugelhorn were only the second Olds set of models to be named for a famous trumpeter, following the M-10 Mendez Model Trumpet and M-5 Mendez Model Cornet.

Because it lacks any method to adjust intonation, the L-13T could be said to be a step backwards to the older L-12 design. This may have been a response to the criticism the Super Star endured due to its trumpet-like valve block layout. Certainly, this horn was not terribly popular when it was introduced, and as a result the L-13T is the rarest of all Olds flugelhorn patterns. It was also the most expensive flugelhorn Olds ever offered, and this may have contributed to its relatively poor sales. Today, though, the L-13T Clark Terry

Flugelhorn enjoys an excellent reputation as a fine playing horn and is the most sought after of all Olds flugelhorn models.

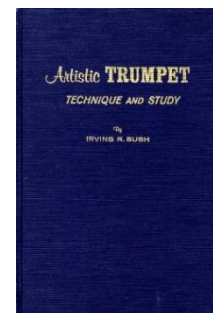
5. FIFTH PATTERN (IRVING BUSH'S CUSTOM CRAFTED PROTOTYPES, 1979)



Fifth Pattern Custom Crafted Prototype Flugelhorn, serial no. A27397. Developed in 1979, Olds' last year of existence, this model was, it seems, a classic case of "too little, too late."

Irving R. Bush (1930-2009), "Big Irv" to his many friends, was a multi-talented musician, instrument designer, and educator. He was for many years a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra while simultaneously enjoying a successful career in Hollywood, jazz, and show bands. He was also an educator: his trumpet method book, *Artistic Trumpet: Technique and Study*^c, is a foundational work of modern trumpet pedagogy, and he served in the faculties of the University of Southern California and California State University, Los Angeles. Most significantly in the

context of this article, he was a talented instrument designer. The trumpet, cornet, and flugelhorn mouthpieces he designed and sold during his lifetime were very popular in the Los Angeles area and are still available today. In the early 1970s, he consulted with Benge on trumpet design. When he began consulting with Olds in the late '70s, he came to a company in dire need of design expertise – Foster Reynolds had died in 1960, Zig Kanstul departed the company in 1972, and Dale Olson resigned as Director of Research in 1969, although he remained in a consulting role for a few years afterward.



*Artistic Trumpet,
by Irving Bush*

- c. *Artistic Trumpet: Technique and Study*: Highland Music Co.; Hollywood, CA; first printing 1962. This work is still in print in a revised edition somewhat unfortunately titled *Trumpet Players Blow with Good Vibrations*.

The management of the Olds Company's then owners, Norlin, can be politely



Olds P-12 Custom Crafted trumpet serial no. 892551.

described as remarkably lacking in knowledge of both the financial and design aspects of the musical instrument business. Mr. Bush spearheaded the design of the Custom Crafted trumpet line, which included Bb, C, and D/Eb models.

These were excellent horns and are highly sought after in the used trumpet market today. Following the introduction of these new models, he turned his attention to the flugelhorn.

While I have not had the opportunity to make a side-by-side comparison of this pattern with an L-13T Clark Terry, the large, somewhat rectangular bell sections look very similar, and this example's bell diameter is 6½-inches, which matches the dimension given in the 1978 catalog for the L-13T. Since this horn uses the valve section of the P-12 Custom Crafted trumpet (albeit properly redesigned to a 0.438-inch bore), it is difficult not to conclude that this design is the marriage of an L-13T bell and a re-sized P-12 valve section.

Mr. Bush presented the horn shown here, serial no. A27397, to Bob Di Vall, then Principal Trumpet for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and his name is engraved on the bell. Mr. Bush also presented other examples to the remaining members of the Philharmonic's trumpet section, and to a few other well-known trumpet players. For a much more complete history of Olds' final flugelhorn pattern, see the article [Irving Bush's Olds Prototypes](#) on Robb Stewart's website. In his article, Robb also shows photos and details of the first of these prototypes, which was Mr. Bush's personal horn.

CONCLUSION

The flugelhorn has never been considered a mainstream orchestral or concert band instrument in the USA, and flugelhorn production has never achieved more than a miniscule percentage of the output of any of the large American manufacturers of brass instruments. Olds was certainly no exception: of the 9,084 entries in the current Register, only 121, or 1.3%, are flugelhorns. Their limited production, though, doesn't mean that Olds flugelhorns are forgotten. They continue to be well represented in the used market and bring respectable prices when they show up for sale.

Jazz, on the other hand...

Jazz, that distinctly American musical genre, has long embraced the flugelhorn. As early as the 1930s, Big Band leader Jimmy Lunceford, always in pursuit of that oh-so-smooth "Lunceford Sound," equipped his entire trumpet section with flugels. More recently Miles Davis and Clark Terry brought the flugelhorn to the fore as a solo instrument. Today, the flugelhorn is more popular in the USA than ever before. Artists including Chuck Mangione, Stephane Belmondo, and the amazing Yazz Ahmed (don't miss her spectacular 2017 album *La Saboteuse*!) continue to highlight the flugelhorn. No one is suggesting, of course, that the popularity of the flugelhorn is ever going to equal that of the trumpet, but there is no doubt that it has earned its rightful place in the jazz lineup.