

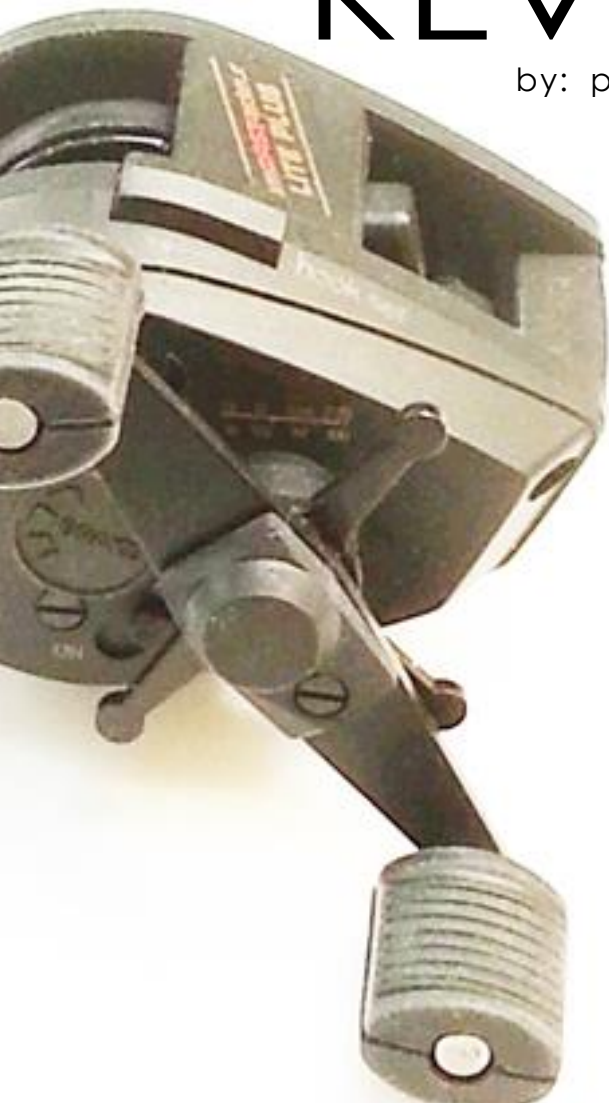
part 4

LITE Family
Concept 2000
MAXXAR Family



graphite REVOLUTION

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amBASSadeur

LITE



With the rapid disappearance of the 1021/22 and the 800 reels it is easy to think that ABU's attempt with graphite reels ended in failure, but this is not so. ABU sold huge numbers of graphite reels, especially in America. The reels behind this success were the LITE models and the many variants under other names that followed them.

The Lite series introduces the label amBASSadeur, a smart PR-stunt for reels which ABU aimed specifically for the popular Bass fishing in the USA. The amBASSadeur LITE and LITE Plus was introduced in 1988, followed by the LITE Plus SPRINT, and the LITE Plus LH in 1989. The LITE Plus WINCH was released in 1990. These models were manufactured in Sweden, all the variants which followed on the LITE models were made in the USA.

LITE reels were close relatives of the 1021/22 and the 821/22/23, but there are differences in both design and construction. The most significant change is perhaps that the metal brake plate is dropped and that mechanical parts are mounted directly on the frame's side walls. It's easy to think that this weakens the construction, and to some extent I suppose it does, but it's rare to see a LITE reel where this design causes a problem. Instead they are reasonably stiff and sturdy designs. Although these reels are meant to be simple and cheap they offer several useful features. Magtrax brake on Plus models, high speed 6,3 : 1 ratio on the SPRINT model, power with 3,8 :1 ratio on the WINCH, fast cast thumb bar release on all models and hook set device on LITE Plus models.

The reels manufactured in the USA needed to carve a niche for themselves and a number of new model names were introduced. Once more it is hard to understand the strategy behind this choice and I personally feel ABU would have been better off with a more dedicated image profiling of the amBASSadeur range. With the confusion which followed regarding the country of origin ABU could just as well have produced some reels in America and some in Sweden, even if they carried the same name. Well, ABU had different thoughts about this, and the family grew to a considerable number of models.



*Ambassadeur
Lite*



*Ambassadeur
Lite 35th Anniversary*



*Ambassadeur
Ultra Mag*



*Ambassadeur
Pro Plus*



*Ambassadeur
Max*



*Ambassadeur
Mag Plus*



*Ambassadeur
USA 1*



*Ambassadeur
Ultra Max*



*Ambassadeur
Black Max*



Born in the USA..

ABU reels are made in Sweden. Wrong, not all of them are, although it may seem even ABU have forgotten the actual country of origin sometimes... Lite reels were made in Sweden and the other models in this family of reels started life in ABU's American factory..



Black Max



USA 1

A wealth of models... all basically the same, and the difference between them are most often just cosmetic and in name only.



Ultra Max

Frame technology shares much with the 800 family reels, but is simpler with no internal metal plates to fix mechanical components to. These reels have no quick change spool option and you will have to remove the side plate to get access to the spool. Many of these models come in these both right hand and left hand versions.

NEW



One reel I have yet to find..

This Ambassadeur Max photographed in the 1992 ABU Catalogue poses a mystery to me. Despite of many years searching for the Max in this cognac color I have only been able to find this model in black. Was the cognac color ever produced by ABU or was the photographed reel just a one off for advertising? ...or is there something I'm missing here? Sure would like to add cognac to my collection...

1992.. a significant year!



1992 saw the fruits of ABU's cooperation with Achim Storz and his Austrian Design team. This resulted in more than 50 reel models which were either brand new or upgraded and improved. Achim Storz, best known for his work on Porsche designs, left a considerable mark on many of the new ABU products. The most significant new designs were the Concept 2000 reels (Pro Max, Gold Max, Black Max) and the egg shaped MAXXAR and its many sisters.

The Pro Max 2-speed baitcasting reel, a Concept 2000 family member, was seen as the industry's premier achievement in 1992 and won awards for its advanced design. It is a remarkable reel with interesting shape and features. ABU calls it a low profile reel, which it isn't if I'm to be frank, but the round shape makes it a very pleasant reel to handle. The flip up front hood is a novelty aimed to give better access to the spool, which it does, but access is still not perfect. The 2-speed gear box allows you to choose your setting or let the reel shift ratios automatically. This is a clever and technologically advanced feature. Unfortunately it soon became clear that the Concept 2000 reels suffered from the same rapid aging problems as the earlier graphite reels, scratches and decals which faded away was impossible to avoid. And this is my main complaint for these reels, I find it almost impossible to forgive ABU for making them in this poor quality when it comes to finish. What good is it to have an advanced reel which works great when that same reel looks like trash? You do not feel pride to own one, and even if the reel functions perfectly, you're ashamed to use it. This is ABU at their low point in taking their customers seriously, and in living up to the reputation of quality which they still enjoyed.

The smaller egg shaped MAXXAR wasn't much better in respect to finish. But this was a cheaper reel and I can almost live with the degenerating finish. The inside however is also cheaply made, poor quality parts give these models many problems. As long as they work the way they were intended they are quite good, though, and I have found them to be superb for the young who has not yet learned the tricks of multiplier casting. These reels are light, a perfect match for small hands and easy to handle with good open access to the spool and an easy to operate release thumb bar. The fact that they are true low profile reels, also give them very good balance on the rod. The magnetic cast control has respectable performance and even a child can achieve quite impressive casting distances.

Both the Concept 2000 reels and the MAXXAR type came with a number of different names..

Replacing the XLTs..



Concept 2000 reels can be seen as ABU's follow up on the XLTs. Functionality and ergonomics were given high priorities and Austrian Achim Storz gave them an innovative shape. Pro Max, top model in the range, came with automatic 2-speed retrieve, 6 stainless steel bearings, Automag self-adjusting spool control, Camlock quick change spool, Fast Cast thumb bar, flipping switch and flip up hood. 2 sizes were available, Pro Max 1 – same size as the 521/XLT 1, and Pro Max 2 – same size as the 522/XLT 2. 1992 was the year ABU introduced their MATRIX, basically a system similar to «balanced tackle» a long used approach by ABU since the 40's to optimally matching rod and reel and suggesting the suitable rod to each reel model. The MAX reels, ABU's family name for the Concept 2000 reels, were listed in the MATRIX as:



Rare blue Gold Max

PRO MAX		GOLD MAX		BLACK MAX	
1	6,3/3,8:1 - 2-speed	1 SPRINT	6,1:1	1	5,1:1
2	6,3/3,8:1 - 2-speed	2	5,1:1	1 LH	5,1:1
		1 2-SPEED	6,3/3,8:1	2	5,1:1
		2 2-SPEED	6,3/3,8:1		

Pro Max IAR 1-speed followed in 1993.

The PRO MAX marks a return to simple operations... the complex control panel of the 1021/22 is thrown away and sorting the reel settings becomes a minimalist job where it's next to impossible to do anything wrong...





good & bad

Technically advanced reels which comes in two different sizes. Graphite frames, metal foot and spacers and plastic covers. Scratches easily and print fades away fast, almost impossible to keep good looking! Few mechanical problems, but they are fragile and needs attention and care. Highly interesting gear system which offers two ratios and both manual and automatic shifting. Brake is a little weak and wears out quickly if the reel is used hard, casting performance is average to good and the magnetic cast control works well. The flip up hood may seem fragile, but works well. It doesn't quite give you the access to the spool you would like though. Advertised by ABU to be low profile reels, but they are quite bulky and not really in the low profile category. Great for collecting as good reels are getting scarce, but not very sought after and the value is low.

Last Swedish made LITE reel...

The Max series was introduced in 1992 and these two models were the last of the LITE family reels to be produced in Sweden. They are basically LITE reels given a work over. The new side plate with a depression offers better palming performance, feels good, new finish is ABU's final attempt to improve on the lousy scratch resistance, didn't help much as the MAX reels are among the most difficult ABU reels to maintain, and the Ultra Cast design is mainly just a name gimmick, Ultra Cast reels find it hard to compete with the casting distances of reels like the Ultra Mags and XLTs.

P L U S

NEW



A NEW, LOW PROFILE BAITCASTER WITH THE SLEEK LOOKS AND DYNAMIC PERFORMANCE OF REELS PRICED MUCH HIGHER. THE MAX PLUS SERIES FEATURES STAINLESS STEEL BALL BEARINGS AND THE LONG DISTANCE CASTING ADVANTAGE OF ULTRACAST DESIGN.

AMBASSADEUR® MAX PLUS

FEATURES

- Ultracast™ Design
- Two stainless steel ball bearings
- Magtrax® magnetic spool control
- Low profile, ergonomic design
- Graphite construction
- FastCast® Thumbbar™
- Flipping Switch
- Exclusive hook set button
- Disengaging line guide
- Flip-up thumbrest
- Precision machined gears
- Multi-disc drag
- Mechanical brake
- Dual grip power handle
- Made in Sweden

Model	Code	Reel Wt. (Oz.)	Gear Ratio	Line Recovery Per Handle Turn	Line Capacity (Yd./Test)
Max Plus	01435	7.5	5.1:1	21"	100/12
Max Plus Sprint	01436	7.5	6.3:1	28"	100/12

BALL 2 BEARINGS

ULTRA CAST DESIGN



Replacing the LITEs

...with the shape of an egg

Models:

- Maxxar*
- Ambassadeur 500*
- Pro Plus*
- Black Max 1 IAR*
- Mag Plus XT*
- Lite Max red*
- Max Lite Blue*
- KX 100*
- MX 200*
- Kingfisher 1000*
- USA 1 Dark grey*
- USA 1 light gold*

1992 saw the first appearance of the replacement model for the LITE family. This egg shaped reel was designed by Achim Storz and exemplifies the new organic style of ABU reel design. Very pleasant to handle and perfect for the young who have not yet learned the skills of multiplier casting. But sadly, no improvements were made to the quality and these reels are as difficult to maintain and keep good looking as the LITE models. Cheap plastic materials must take the bulk of the blame here, but there are also mechanical issues to observe. Today it's hard to find good reels unless they are left overs with no or minimal use behind them. Study them carefully before you buy is my advice, you may find problems with line guides, brakes or reels may have damages such as chipped graphite or broken plastic parts. If you find a good specimen you have a good casting reel, but a rather weak brake system as this was never very strong even when the reels left the factory. As with the previous model you should take care to service these reels, but don't take them apart if you don't need to, they are sometimes tricky to assemble. All of the many models were manufactured in the USA and most models only sold in a few markets.



My conclusion



The age of ABU's graphite revolution spans the period from 1983 to around 1993. These ten years saw a huge number of new reels, and marks the end of the Swedish ABU as this company was known during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. New owners, new people in charge, new policies and new strategies.., all pushed ABU through a big change. The new ABU emerging was different, more multinational, more correct for its time, ...perhaps, but less concerned with quality and fulfilling the remarkable reputation of always being the best. Some of the reels released during these ten years are reels ABU can truly be proud of, but some are reels I bet ABU would rather forget they had ever made. Some of the many models are so far from the usual ABU standard. It seems they come from a different company. And that's precisely what they did. Outsourcing design and production led to a new breed of ABU reels which lacked the heart and soul of the reels originating in Svängsta. I have always thought about how this change came about, but perhaps it's not so hard to comprehend? Svängsta is a small place, deep in the middle of the Swedish woods. Few people live there, almost all of them used to work in one way or another for ABU. This setting creates a special atmosphere, people were genuinely proud of their ABU and you could feel it. Every time you lifted an Ambassadeur reel out of your bag, you sensed some of the pride with which it was built. All of this is gone with the new generation ABU reels made abroad and by people who cared less about quality and reputation, and more about fast dollars and profits.

Even so, amidst all of these events, ABU managed to make some pretty good reels, some of them even astonishingly good – and they dared to show courage and aspiration when they designed reels that no one had seen the likes of. 1983 to 1993 is an important chapter in ABU's history, it is an important chapter in the history of the fishing reel too, and I for one think we cannot know ABU unless we also know this part of their history.

There is a saying in a famous song.. «what comes up must come down..» so is that how the ABU history ends? No, it seems ABU have learned a few lessons, the latest new reels gives us good reason to hope for a bright future. This started with the innovative design of the EON models and is continued with the latest REVOs. ABU back in style? Well, not really there yet, but working hard on it, it seems...