

# The attraction of the Abumatics and 500-series reels

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Abumatic 60 reel in mint condition, introduced in 1957.

In 1957 ABU introduced its first two Abumatic models. They were the Abu-Matic 60 and the simpler and less expensive Abu-Matic 30. The name Abu-Matic, inspired by the automatic transmission in American automobiles, later became Abumatic.

These so-called spincast or closed-face reels were designed to be used on a baitcasting rod with a trigger grip, the type that already existed for use with multipliers (baitcasting reels). Compared to multipliers the spincast reels had the advantage that they were easier to use (no risk of backlash) and less expensive. Spincast reels had been invented in the USA and were first marketed there in 1949 by the Denison-Johnson Reel Company (the 'Model 10' sidewinder reel) and the Zero Hour Bomb Company (the Zebco 'Standard 1A'). ABU was the first manufacturer outside the USA to produce spincast reels and beside their production for the Scandinavian market, they were soon exporting large quantities of these reels to the USA, their primary target. By the end of 1958 ABU had sold no less than 200.000 Abumatic model 60 reels alone - a large part of them in the USA.

The reason for the popularity of the Abumatics over their American counterparts was first of all their technical superiority. While most of the American spincast reels had the drag knob on top of the reel housing, most Abumatic reels - with the exception of the cheaper

models - had the ingenious 'Synchro' (later 'Syncro') drag system integrated in the handle, which allowed the drag to be operated without letting go of the handle and thus to reduce tension instantly to prevent line breakage in critical situations. This together with the superb engineering and high overall quality of the Swedish reels, such as stainless steel and solid brass gearing, tungsten carbide line pick-up and hard-chromed stainless steel winding-cup, soon made the ABU spincast reels the most popular brand. When the Abumatics were internally redesigned from 1961 onwards (e.g. model 160 replaced model 60 in the USA in 1961 and in Scandinavia in 1963) and the reels were equipped with a twin-shaft spool socket, just like the ABU 505, which was introduced in 1962, they became even sturdier. The redesigned models now also featured two line pick-ups. This modification became necessary to avoid patent infringement when in 1960 an American manufacturer was granted a patent on the same release system ABU was using for its Abumatics.

But next to their technical quality there was something else as well that caused the popularity of the Abumatic reels: the seductive appearance of the reels. When compared to e.g. the very popular Johnson 'Century 100B' spincast reel, a typical model from the mid-1950s, the Abumatic with its more pointed cone and sloping carter had a more streamlined and modern looking design. And while most of the Johnson reels of the 1950's were green, the Abumatics had more striking colours. In combination with the black housing the bell covers were deep red, warm orange or golden yellow; a few models had blue or green bell covers and other colour variations occurred as well. The origins of the typical ABU reel colours as used from the 1950s into the 1980s date back to May 1951, when five colours were chosen for test models of the new Record Ambassadeur reel.



Johnson Century 100B reel, introduced in 1955.

These colours were red, black, green, blue and gold. To test the market response for the introduction of the reel, three of these colours - black, green and red - were presented to the public when the reels were shown at the popular Sankt Eriksmässan exposition in Stockholm in August 1952. The visitors were asked to vote for their favourite colour and the winning colour would then be used for the production models. By a large majority, the voters selected the black colour, followed by green. However, ABU director Göte Borgström preferred red and stuck to that. So the first Record Ambassadeur reels were produced in red and were marketed in December 1952. These red reels proved to be a great success.

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**Type 1 prototypes**  
 1 red reel made in March 1951 (mock-up)  
 1 reel each colour made in May 1951

The trend of the early 1950s. The automobile colours presented by General Motors for 1950 were just about the same as the first five colours ABU selected for their prototype Ambassadors in May 1951.

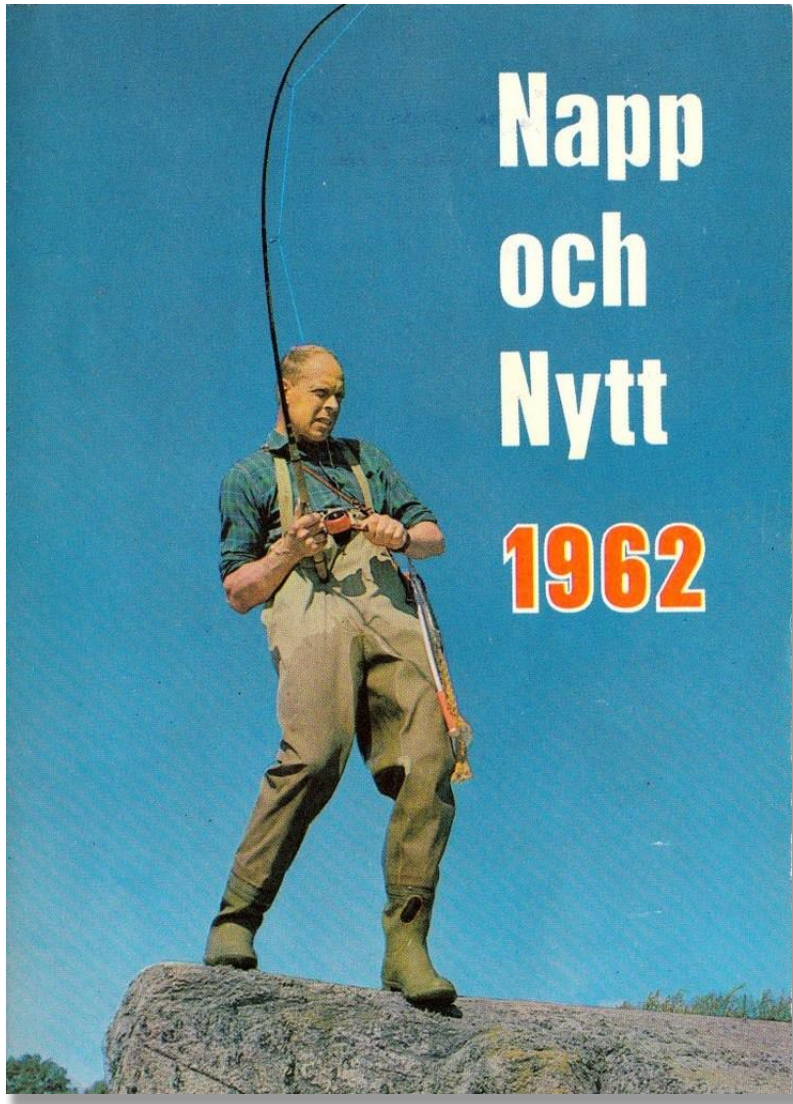
Following the success of the red Ambassadeur reel, the more expensive model of the first two Abumatic reels introduced in 1957, the model 60, was (partly) red too. The cheaper model 30 usually had a green bell cover; a small amount of them had a blue one. Later other colours for the bell covers were used as well. In 1967 the models 120 and the larger capacity model 150 were introduced. Both had a synchro drag with an adjustable screw instead of a star drag wheel. These models were given an attractive orange bell cover: a lighter colour than deep red for a slightly simpler reel.

The same principle of colours indicating models was used for the half-encapsulated 500-series of spinning reels, that started with the introduction of the ABU 505 in 1962. This high end model with a synchro adjustable star drag had a deep red cowling: the same colour as the Abumatic model 60 (later 160) with the same features. And exactly the same goes for the ABU 503 and the Abumatics 120 and 150: all introduced in 1967, all with a synchro drag with an adjustable screw instead of a star drag wheel, and all with an orange cowling or bell cover. In the USA the ABU 503 was marketed as ABU 520 Auto-Spin, in order to correspond with the features of the Abumatic 120, that was already a popular reel over there.

After first favouring the ABU 505 spinning reels, I later developed a preference for the somewhat simpler 503 model. The reason was a matter of personal taste: as the 503 lacked the star drag wheel, I found it looked even more simple and straightforward and thus more stylish. And as I almost never change the drag setting while fishing anyway, the adjustable nut was good enough for me and also had the advantage that no line could catch around the star wheel. And frankly, I very much liked the orange cowling!



The Abumatic models 170 (a larger capacity 60/160) and 150 (a 170 with an adjustable screw instead of a star drag wheel) as advertised in the USA in 1971. The 170 has a gold bell cover instead of the usual orange colour for that model.



Cranking in an ABU 505 on the cover of the 1962 catalogue.

In 1980 ABU decided to discontinue its manufacturing of spinning reels in Sweden and move the entire production of these reels to subcontractors in the Far East. This was effectuated in 1981-1982. It meant the Swedish made models were discontinued altogether. They were replaced by different models that were cheaper to produce, both technically and in terms of lower costs of labour and reel parts. As could be expected, these Far East reels were a far cry from the former Swedish reels. Yes, they still carried the name ABU, but they hardly deserved it; they actually harmed and devaluated ABU's fine reputation. And... they were not nearly as pretty.



My own trusty old ABU 505.



Above: a fine ABU 503 from the first year of production, 1967. One of the most cherished reels in my own modest collection.

To the right: a 1968 Garcia advertisement for the ABU 520 Auto-Spin, as the ABU 503 was marketed in the USA.

**THE MOST COMPLETELY AUTOMATIC,  
EASIEST-TO-USE SPINNING REEL EVER...  
NO BAIL TO LIFT, NO ADJUSTMENTS TO MAKE**

If the new Garcia Abu 520 Auto-Spin looks different from any spinning reel you've ever seen before, there's a good reason for it. It *is* different. Completely different. And every one of these differences adds up to greater convenience and ease of operation than you ever thought a spinning reel could deliver...until now. The 520 is a true spinning reel, made to use the same light lures, the same rods, and with the same freedom from backlash as conventional spinning reels. But that's where the similarity ends. With the 520, there's no bail to flip out of the way. To cast, you just touch the face of the reel with the forefinger of your casting hand, and you're ready to cast! No drag adjustments to bother with, either. The pre-set Power Retrieve is precisely adjusted at the factory to perfectly protect the 8-lb. test *Bonnyl* on the reel. The setting is tamper-proof, too, yet it may be changed with a screwdriver or a coin if you should ever wish to change line weights. Try a Garcia Abu 520. See how easy spinning has become!

**HERE'S WHAT MAKES THE 520 SO SPECIAL**

Finger-tip line control...line finds your finger automatically • Exclusive Synchro-Drag...reduce drag, then return to original setting, instantly with a turn of the handle • Positive, anti-reverse handle • Oscillating spool rewinds line properly for long, smooth casts • Spool does not turn—no line twist • Positive, wearproof line pickup of hard-chromed stainless steel • Corrosion-resistant finish • Sculptured handle knob • Spool filled with 200 yards of 8-lb. *Bonnyl* • Extra spools, empty or pre-wound, available • "Service Guaranteed for Life!" policy.

520 (Power Retrieve Auto-Spin reel) .....Code No. 1520

**EXCITING SYNCHRO-DRAG** works with the factory pre-set Power Retrieve which is precisely set to protect the 8-lb. *Bonnyl* on the reel. But if you want to reduce gear drag tension in an emergency, you simply back off on the handle...and the drag tension is instantly reduced. Begin reeling in again, and the full retrieve power picks right up... Like having two drags in one.

**POSITIVE LINE PICKUP** reaches instantly for the line as you begin your retrieve. No lost motion, no delay in beginning your retrieve. Both the winding cup and the positive-action pickup are highly polished stainless steel, hard-chromed for perfect smoothness. This extra smoothness means less friction, for longer, more effortless casts. Extends life of your line, too.

**EASIER CASTING** than any other spinning reel. Easier because there's no bail to flip back out of the way, no lifting the line with your finger. With the 520, you simply touch the face of the reel with the index finger of your casting hand, and the line automatically swings up into the exact position on your finger, ready to cast. Then you cast as you would an ordinary spinning reel. Simple? You bet!

**garcia** **ABU 520 AUTO-SPIN**

## The cause of it all

### **A little story about what started my admiration for the ABU spinning reels, and in particular for the famous 500-models.**

Somewhere in the early 1960s, when I was about seven or eight years old, my uncle Max returned (to Holland) from a holiday in Sweden with an object that aroused both surprise and admiration among his angling friends. It was a remarkably flashy and futuristic kind of spinning reel. He explained it was a Swedish novelty that had only recently been for sale over there. The little wonder looked delightful: a very simple and compact design with a striking rough black and shiny red colour combination. But quite frankly, I couldn't make head or tail of it. It was totally different from the dull grey spinning reel of the guy that always fished the canal near our house. You could see no rotor turning around the spool and there was no bail either, so it puzzled me how it might work.

"This here is...", uncle Max said solemnly, and he paused to build up the tension, "this here is an ABU five-o-five... the newest reel in the world! The spinning reel of tomorrow, just as it says on this here box. No bail, but an automatic pick-up and a nice cover around the spool. Nothing to go wrong. Absolutely fool-proof!" He recommended his little beauty like a market vendor, but as for me he could have saved his breath, because no doubt the possession of such a technical wonder was far beyond my reach. "And we're going to fish with it, my boy, the two of us! In Polsbroek! For perch! I'll bring along a rod for you too and let you try this reel." A breath-taking invitation...

So a few days later we were off to Polsbroek, a little village amidst the Dutch polders, where uncle Max and his brother had rented a private area of fine fishing water somewhere behind a farm at the end of a soggy country road. I remember a little wooden bridge with a small stream running under it that emerged from a densely wooded piece of wilderness and flowed into a large pool in the meadows that was surrounded by pollard willows and lazy dairy cows. We sat on the bridge and fished the ditch that, according to uncle Max, was packed with perch: "See, they all pass down here when they swim from one stretch of water to the other, so you might say we're sitting along a perch highway." And right he was. One perch after the other grabbed our worms and ripped our floats merrily down. Some lunkers were nearly a foot long, which, according to my standards at the time, was one size above colossal!

Uncle Max showed me how to operate the Swedish reel: hold it with two fingers above and two below the stem, put your index finger on the black ring at the front, just a little tap and the line released. Then lower the worm and float, or cast them a little further on with a gentle flick, turn the handle a bit forward - click - and... you're ready to strike and reel in again. A wonder of simplicity and functionality. I got the feeling that with this spinning reel in my hand I possessed enormous power: I was invincible! An ABU 505... one day I would buy one too, that's for sure. I didn't dare to think how many times of washing my father's car still separated me from that moment of triumph and bliss. But my time would come! ■



The beautiful ABU 505 in the first version, introduced in 1962. My uncle Max had one of those...