

# A REVIEW OF THE ABUMATIC 170i: THE OLD VS. THE NEW

by

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ABU Sweden made the original ABUMATIC 170 from 1965 to 1982. This legendary closed face reel is now built by conglomerate Abu for the last couple of years. But, just how good is this reproduced reel? Today I will be reviewing the Abumatic 170i by comparing it with the original Swedish model. The Abumatic 170i used in this review was borrowed from a local tackle shop in South Africa because I have sold mine due to a specific problem encountered with this reel. More about this later. Mostly, I use baitcasters to catch bass, but sometimes I will use an Abumatic for very small crank baits, spinners (e.g. an ABU Droppen) or just for the fun of it!

Let's start with a few side by side pictures:





As seen in these pictures, the remake 170i looks rather similar in appearance to the original. However, the Swedish crest on the new Abumatic is a nice addition to this reels proud heratige. The body or the frame of both reels are made of diecast aluminum which is more durable than plastic or graphite as it is commonly known in the trade. The finish of the 170i body seems to be anodised and enamelled, but I am not sure. The frame of the 170 is anodised and definitely stove enamelled. Moreover, both nose cones are made of solid aluminum that is anodised in cherry red. So far, not much difference between these two closed face reels, or is there? Look more closely...

Yes, the opening on the nose cone on the reproduction is much wider than the original model which in theory means further casting of a lure. However, I have casted with both Abumatics and could not see or feel a difference. We will get to this later.





Next, we remove the side plates: Similar set up on both reels, but the oscillating block on the 170i is made of a black plastic while the original 170 is made of a white Teflon/Nomex compound that is more durable. Also, the side plates differ significantly from one another. On the original, the cover is made of aluminium and on the reproduced reel the side plate is made of graphite. Not a big issue for me on the latter material used.

Moving on to the nose cone, rotor cup and spools used. As previously mentioned, both reels have an anodised nose cone that is durable. However, the reproduced reel's cone are threaded to ensure a secure fit, while the original have a bayonet design. In my mind, the threaded type is a much more refined feature than the bayonet type.



Both rotor cups are made of stainless steel.



However, the 170's rotor cup is also deep chromed to ensure that the nylon line do not cut grooves in the rotor cup above the twin pick-up pins. This is a serious flaw in the current 170i. In the beginning of this article, I mentioned that I owned a modern Abumatic 170i, but sold it. This was deemed necessary, because the nylon monofilament formed grooves in the rotor cup due to the lack of a hard chromed finish to protect it from wear. Moreover, a chromed rotor cup also cast further than a bare stainless steel one, because nylon glides much easier over this finish. Therefore, I believe the wider nose cone opening on the 170i is rendered a useless feature. Moving on, both reels have twin pick up pins to wind the line on the spool. However, the pins on modern 170i each turn on a small brass bushing, while the original 170 has static pins. These revolving pins help to counter line twist and is a great feature. Just remember to oil them after every fishing trip, because they quickly run dry and can become stuck.

The modern Abumatic comes with two spools, one die cast black anodised aluminium and one of graphite (or polymeric as they call it on the box).



In contrast, the ABUMATIC 170 comes with one, three piece, clear anodised aluminium spool. In both cases, the spools are attached to the frame using the bayonet design. In my book the one piece die cast spool on the 170i is sturdier than the original one, because I have seen some of the original three piece spools became "wobbly." In other words, the top and rear flange of the spool can each be turned in different directions and not function as a unit making it difficult to remove from the bayonet holder.

The star drag wheel on the 170i is indexed (see below), while the star drag on the Swedish model is not. Although this feature does not affect the latter reels performance, I actually enjoy this little refinement on the 170i.





Both reels have aluminium handles, but the original have a smaller grip made from hard plastic while the remake have a larger more comfortable soft rubber paddle grip. The 170i's handle and star drag wheel are both painted red and is not properly anodised as the classic 170. Unfortunately, this painted finish is not durable and is easily chipped.



Not a performance issue, but cosmetically your reel will look awful, especially if you use it at the beach to catch small bait fish. Interestingly, the box depicts the reel as “All saltwater protected” which is debatable...



The body sleeve in which the pinion turns, is made of aluminium and is not the best choice for use in saltwater. Everybody knows aluminium does not rust, BUT pits and corrodes until the part breaks down. Just look what saltwater did to an Ambassadeur 7000's side plate if the anodizing got chipped and saltwater is not rinsed off properly!





Back to the review, the original 170's body sleeve is made of solid brass which stand up way better to saltwater than aluminium.

Now we come to the heart of any reel, its gears.



The Swedish model has a stainless steel pinion gear and the main drive gear is made of solid brass. A typical set up for quality vintage reels. In contrast, the conglomerate 170i has a brass pinion and zinc die cast main gear. This is a no brainer, solid brass and stainless steel gears and the precise manufacturing process used by ABU Sweden to produce its parts make the 170i closed face reel lagging far behind gear wise. However, at R795-00 (or 50 USD) for a new 170i a fisherman cannot expect to get anything better in this price range. Furthermore, the remakes transmission runs on a 4 bearing drive that consists of three ball bearings (one shielded and two open races) and one anti reverse bearing which make it smoother than the original. However, I cannot comment on the quality of the ball bearings used, but the quality of the anti-reverse is poor. It consists of a standard plastic V shape moulded cage with six small cylinders. (Kindly refer to Alan Hawk's review of the Suveran and Soron reels that discusses these type of bearings and the quality thereof (also listed on Wayne's website!)).



In contrast, the original have no ball bearings and uses an anti-reverse dog in true vintage fashion. The main friction point, between the handle and the main drive gear (handle sleeve), is taken care of by using a sintered bronze bushing that traps lubrication and can run FOREVER. I have never seen one of these bushing types worn out, not even on abused reels that were not even serviced in years! Drag wise, the 170i uses a carbon matrix drag system which out performs the original drag system due to the material used and the size of the carbon fibre washers. However, the full potential of the carbon matrix drag cannot be fully utilised because the line is coming off over the edge of the rotor cup that is not very smooth due to the bare stainless steel rotor cup. A chromed cup will probably do more justice to this super drag washer material used.



Lastly, both reels use a plastic trigger button, but the ABUMATIC 170 has a metal pressure plate to protect this button from the brass pin that releases the pick-up pins in the rotor cup. Nice refinement for such an old reel.



Now, let's sum up what you have just read: The new Abumatic 170i is based on a classic Swedish design that stood the test of time. Both reels are made of a die cast body with a high quality anodised nose cone. The two rotor cups are made of stainless steel, but only ABU Sweden have finished this critical part in chrome to protect your line. If conglomerate Abu can chrome the rotor cup as indicated in my review, I may just recommend this reel. On the plus side, the modern 170i's twin pick up pins revolve on a brass bushing which is a great feature and also have the smooth carbon matrix drag system. Both reels have anodised aluminium spools, but the remake has a more solid one piece spool. Lastly, the original 170 has solid and precise brass and stainless steel gears that can never be matched by a die cast main gear.