

PRINT THIS OUT AND KEEP FOR YOUR USE

Steel Needles

Steel needles were used on the most common hand crank record machines made from 1890s to the 1930s! The Reproducer or “Sound Box” is the circular device at the end of the tonearm. Each Reproducer had a small round thumbscrew that was tightened and held the needle into place. The metal needle became the standard to follow for record technology, for almost all phonograph companies at this time.

What is the difference between a Gramophone, Phonograph and Talking Machine?

There isn't much difference as these are terms used to call these old historic phonographs. Many companies called them different things to avoid patents and being sued. Whether it's an hand cranked outside horn, table top or floor model, it is a “phonograph”.

How many records should I play per steel needle?

One time, one song, about 4 minutes of play, and then discard properly. Record needles are cheap and are can be bought in bulk, so make sure you have plenty on hand.

Does a steel needle damage a record?

No. A new steel needle will not hurt a shellac 78 rpm record if you are playing the right kind of record disc with the correct type of Reproducer. If the tone arm doesn't swing smoothly or the Reproducer is at a wrong angle, too heavy or unbalanced, or wrong for your machine, then records may be damaged even by new steel needle. If the record is heavily worn, cracked, chipped and the grooves are not clean and prominent, then a metal needle may skip or travel due to the poor condition of the record. These records are usually put to the side.

Edison Diamond Disc and Pathé records required a special stylus made specifically for their brand of records. After the flat “lateral groove” record became the standard, both Edison and Pathé made “lateral” groove records that used the metal needle. Some Brunswick reproducers had several stylus' on them to play Diamond Disc, Pathé and the standard “lateral” discs.

Do not play record albums from 1950 and newer on your phonograph with a metal needle. These were made of soft materials such as plastics and made specifically for an electric pickup/stylus made for that phonograph. Playing them can cause severe damage to the grooves of the album.

Rotating a needle after a play won't give you extra life of a needle. Victor Talking Machine Co. literature stated, "It is unreasonable to think that after playing one selection you can turn the needle and use it a second or more times without detriment to the record. The worn point of the needle becomes a scraping tool from the grinding it had in the previous reproduction, and is bound to scrape and injure the grooves of the record if its use is attempted for a second reproduction." New needles can be found at VictrolaNeedles.com

Bamboo and Fibre Needles

Another needle is the fibre, or bamboo, needle. You can get about a dozen plays from a fibre needle, depending upon your cutting tool and experience of sharpening. The volume and tone from a Bamboo or Fibre needle is muffled/very soft and not as clear and vibrant as a metal needle. Fibre needles are gentle on records but a drawback is fibre needles sometimes wear out before a record is finished playing. Bamboo needles can still be found today as some people are making them at home and selling them. Older original stock may be available too for sale. Some people make their own using bamboo chopsticks and a cutter. Some people even try using toothpicks. I'm not a fan so I suggest sticking to what works for a hundred years. No fiddling with sharpening.

Tungs-tone Needles

During World War I, restrictions were placed on commercial uses of steel, so Victor Talking Machine Co. developed a needle with a reproducing tip made of tungsten, a metal that never made the list of restricted materials and are no longer made.