

## ***ROYAL FACTORY ISHAPORE No 1 Mk III\****

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*Type 56 RFI SMLE*

### **SOME BACK GROUND...**

Most Royal Factory Ishapore SMLE variants are very common. In general terms there are Five prominent variations of the Indian SMLE.

I won't go into any significant detail on all five of these variants but I do want to talk about two of them. I will be referring to the Type-41 and the Type-56 variants because they have relevance to the rifle used in this article. I am using these 'Type' designations to identify Sub-Variants of the Indian N°1MkIII\* Short magazine Lee Enfield. The number represents the year of introduction.

**Type 1941 Indian SMLE:** These under went a Factory Repair (or rebuild) at some point (perhaps several times). This was done to supplement new production. This has been referred to as a "Salvage Program", since many of the rifles returning from the jungles of Burma were no longer serviceable but were a good source of parts. Many of these rifles have gone through the Indian FR program more than once and are comprised of Australian, British and Indian manufacture components.

A total of 150,000 Type-41 variants were manufactured between 1941 and 1975 (This program overlapped the transitional period from British rule to an independent India). It is important to note that the 'Salvage Program' is reported to have continued past 1975. These are considered common SMLE variants in the global sense. That's over 4,400 refurbished rifles per year over a 34-year window. I think that's a pretty significant allocation of resources during a difficult war-torn period in India. All weapons were renumbered to match between 1941 and 1975 and marked with FR stamps on the left side of the wrist.

*Refurbishment stamp on the left hand side of the action's wrist (below the safety).*

***N°1Mk III\*  
FR 42***



***Type 1956 Indian SMLE:*** Slightly Re-designed SMLE's of an independent India most of which were manufactured between 1956 and 1965 (there have been rare sightings of the type 56 SMLE dated as late as 1987 'Claven'). SMLE's made in 1965 are considered to be relatively rare as India was actively transitioning to the 7.62mm NATO 2A/2A1 at this time and turn-out of the Post-56 .303 SMLE production wound down.

*What distinguishes the Indian Type 56 against the other SMLE variants?*

The square nose cap design was adopted by India in 1951 when they phased out the "Waisted" appearance. The new design required fewer machining steps which gave a better sight picture, enhanced protection to the muzzle and the swivel lug was removed. It's not graceful, or terribly attractive but these noted benefits were supported by reduced manufacturing costs, and in some ways, increased efficiency.

*Type 56*



*Pre Type 56 – waisted style*



The Charger Bridge anchor is squared (not rounded). Another good example of interest to reduce the number of machining steps.



*Ishapore Type 56*



*1917 SSA*

**The example SMLE used in this article is a type-56 Royal Factory Ishapore manufactured in 1964.**



**Having said that - there is something different about this Type-56.**

1. Some parts have new Parkerizing and some have almost no Parkerizing left;
2. The bolt knob has 100% Parkerizing which tells me it has not seen much in the way of ammunition;
3. All of the numbers match (Stock, Bolt, Receiver, Barrel, Nose cap, Magazine & More);
4. Cocking piece is WW1 to 1920's vintage;
5. There is no FR stamp on the left side of the wrist;
6. The nose cap retaining screw is stripped, the head is mushroomed and has seen a lot of use;
7. The stock is Indian (no tie-plate) and is post 1924 vintage made of Circassian Walnut (Not Luan Mahogany). The butt-stock is a later Indian part.
- 8.

Fore stock is of the post No1MkIII pot belly style without the dished out volley sight modification. The fore stock enjoys the brass action screw instead of the rivet method, which was common on late Ishapore rifles (as seen on the right).



***This rifle has been issued as evidenced by a company number, dents and wear to the phosphate finish around edges and radiused surfaces (with the exception of the bolt and barrel which are brand new);***



**The rifle seems a hodgepodge of parts from different eras but with matching numbers and no FR mark.**

**Was this rifle manufactured in 1964 utilizing older spare parts?**

**OR**

**Was this rifle refurbished by a regimental armourer and not by Royal Factory Ishapore thus explaining the absence of a FR mark?**

**OR**

**This rifle saw RFI refurbishment at some point after 1964, which did not observe the standard FR marking convention**

It's anyone's guess really. In the 15 years I have been studying Lee Enfield's one of the commonalities I have observed with Ishapore SMLE's is a consistent level of inconsistency. This is one of the distinguishing features that I like about Ishapores. They are often shrouded in mystery and you never really know what you're getting until you unwrap the shipping box.

The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 was a culmination of skirmishes that took place between April 1965 and September 1965 between India and Pakistan. This conflict became known as the Second Kashmir War fought by India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir, the first having been fought in 1947.

My estimation is that this rifle was refurbished sometime in the late 1960's, or early 1970's, in preparation for continued conflicts with Pakistan. During that time it was known that certain non-essential conventions were overlooked in order to meet projected production targets.

This rifle however was not re-issued after refurbishment as evidenced by the new finish on typically hi-wear parts (such as the bolt knob). This rifle sat in cosmoline, crated up and stored in war stocks. A significant number of the Indian SMLE's that have recently entered Canada appear to share a number of these traits.

### **RIFLECHAIR RATING**

I have a small romance with the Short Magazine Lee Enfield, and in that sense, I am quite biased. They carry better than the No4 enfield variants having a balance point just forward of the magazine (while loaded). The balance point on the No4 enfield is right on the magazine, which makes carrying these rifles with one hand awkward.

Whenever I compete in NSCC style competitions it is my trusted CNo4Mk1\* that is my 'Go-to Rifle'. Having said that, the record for the **"Mad Minute"** still belongs to the No1Mk3 SMLE.

Trials with this particular 1964 RFI SMLE puts it almost on-par with my 1950 Long Branch CNo4Mk1\* which was free floated and bedded at some time by a Regimental Armourer. In that sense the rifle is an outstanding shooter capable of consistently achieving '3.5 inch' ten-round groupings at 100 metres while in the prone un-supported position. In other words, these rifles can shoot very well.

To secure an excellent grade Lee Enfield in Canada you must be prepared to pay a market value in the neighbourhood of \$700 or more. With this in mind an Indian SMLE for \$450 starts to have a bit more appeal. As prices for military surplus rifles continue to go up, Indian SMLE's may be entering the realm of an investment opportunity that can likewise provide many hours of shooting fun.

**For the old or new shooter looking to open a door into this interesting genre of shooting sports the Indian SMLE is awarded 9 out of 10 stars on the Riflechair.com Scale of 'Gotta Have'.**



#### Reference:

India's Enfields: Col. Edwards

The Lee Enfield Rifle: Skennerton