



# Model Designations and Years

By Roy Canfield  
Franklin Club Historian

Helping people understand Franklin's entire model designation system and its nuances is this article's primary purpose. One nuance is modern and period publications sometimes state models the way Franklin did, and sometimes not.

At this point, no Franklin document has been discovered which fully explains the evolution of their model designations. The currently known uses and explanations are described in this article's Sources section.

*Franklin Model Designation and Year List* is a revision of *Franklin Models & Model Years* first published in the HHFC's 1995 Register of Franklins. It was later added to the club website's Tech page as *Types and Series*.

Hopefully this article's *List* will replace the current ones mentioned. Any future revisions will be on the club website's Tech page. Revisions deemed significant will be published in an ACN issue.

Franklin's system can be confusing at first but once you have a basic understanding — and if you are willing to tolerate variations and evolutionary changes — it is a rational system.

---

## Background

---

Franklin's terminology for their car and truck chassis **model designations** varied over the decades; they started with the term **Type**, changed to **Model**, and ended with **Series, Model**.

All Franklin cars and trucks were made (1902 – 1934) by the H.H. Franklin Manufacturing Company (HHFMC) of Syracuse, New York, USA.

While the HHFMC initially sold the vehicles they made, on June 25, 1906 the Franklin Automobile Company (FAC) was formed to be Franklin's 'sole distributor'.

Domark and Franklin truck/industrial/aircraft engines (1933 and later) are not directly related to Franklin cars; their separate engine model designation system is described in *Air Cooled News* (ACN) #111 pages 26-28.

---

## Type or Model?

---

Franklin mostly (yes, mostly) used **Type** for 1902 through 1908 and **Model** from 1909 through 1911.

The terms **Type** and **Model** can be considered interchangeable. Examples of variations between Franklin's use of the terms **Type** and **Model** can be found in the Sources section.

Term	Year or Series Span	Example
<b>Type</b>	1902 thru 1908	1902 Type A
<b>Model</b>	1909 thru 1911	1910 Model G
<b>Series, Model</b>	Series 1 thru 8	Series 1, Model G
<b>Series</b>	Series 9 thru 11	Series 11-B
<b>Series, Model</b>	Series 12 thru 19	Series 19-B, Model 194

## FRANKLIN MODEL DESIGNATION & YEAR LIST

**Type A** (1902) <sup>1,2,3</sup>

Type A (1903) <sup>2,3</sup>

Types A, B, C (1904)

Types A, B, C, D, E, F (1905)

Types D, E, G, H (1906)

Types D, G, H, J, L (1907)

Types D, G, H, J-1, L (1908)

**Models D, G, H, J-2, J-3, K-1, K-2, L-1, L-2** (1909) <sup>1,4</sup>

Models D, G, H, K-1, K-2, K-3, K-4, L-3, L-4 (1910) <sup>4</sup>

Models D, G, H, K-5, L-5, M, O-1 (1911) <sup>4</sup>

**Series 1, Models D, G, H, L-5, M** (1912) <sup>1,4</sup>

Series 2, Models D, G, H, K-6, M, O-1 (1912) <sup>4</sup>

Series 3, Models D, G, H, M (1913)

Series 4, Model M (1914)

Series 5, Model M (1914)

Series 6, Model M (1914)

Series 7, Model M (1915)

Series 8, Model M (1915-1916) <sup>3</sup>

**Series 9-A** (1916-1917) <sup>3</sup>

Series 9-A (1918)

Series 9-B (1918-1922)

Series 10-A (1922)

Series 10-B (1922-1924)

Series 10-C (1924-1925)

Series 11-A (1925-1926)

Series 11-B (1927)

**Series 12-A, Models 12-5, 12-7** Airman (1928)

Series 12-B, Models 12-5, 12-7 Airman Limited (1928)

Series 13, Models 130, 135, 137 Airman (1929)

Series 14, Models 145, 147 Airman (1930)

Series 15, Model 151 Transcontinent (1930-1931) <sup>5</sup>

Series 15, Model 152 Transcontinent (1930-1931) <sup>5</sup>

Series 15, Model 153 DeLuxe (1930-1931) <sup>5</sup>

Series 16-A, Model 163 Airman (1932)

Series 16-B, Model 164 Airman (1933)

Series 19-A, Model 193 Airman (1934)

Series 19-B, Model 194 Airman (1934)

Series 17-A, Model 173 Twelve (1932)

Series 17-B, Model 174 Twelve (1933-1934) <sup>3</sup>

Series 18-A, Model 183 Olympic (1933)

Series 18-B, Model 184 Olympic (1933)

Series 18-C, Model 185 Olympic (1934)

The list to the left contains all complete model designations (model years) Franklin put into full production and/or advertised and grouped by relationships. Not included are prototypes and models never made, such as Models I ('eye'), N, Z, 140, 1550.

## Series 12-19 Model Evolution

A simplified evolution of Series 12 thru 19 model designations (wb = wheelbase) is:

- Series 12-B, Models 12-5 (119" wb) and 12-7 (128" wb) evolved into the Series 13, Model 130 (120" wb)
- Model 135 designation evolved into the 145, then 151 (125" wb)
- Model 137 designation evolved into the 147, then 152 (132" wb)
- Model 153 designation evolved into the 163, 164, 193, then 194 (132" wb)
- Model 173 evolved into the 174 (144" wb)
- Model 183 evolved into the 184, then 185 (117"/118" wb)

Franklin abbreviated, for example, Series 18-A, Model 183 to Series 183, and sometimes simpler to 18, 18-A, or 183.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Franklin typically used the term **Type** from 1902 thru 1908 and **Model** beginning with the 1909 model year although variations can be found in factory publications. The terms, Type and Model, can be considered interchangeable until a few years later when Franklin added the term **Series**, for example, **Series 1, Model D**.
- <sup>2</sup> Franklin often stated 1903 (instead of 1902) as their first model year and did not always state Type A. Mr. Franklin's Jun 19, 1902 diary entry states "Model A light roadster with individual seats..." [ACN 28:23]
- <sup>3</sup> No chassis number (aka car serial number, VIN) data has been found delineating between model years.
- <sup>4</sup> Models J, L, K, O ('Oh') need more examination to substantiate and/or correct listings.
- <sup>5</sup> Why Franklin stated "1930—1931 — Series 15" in FSB 593 instead of the common "1931" is unknown. Perhaps Franklin did not inform state motor vehicle departments in time so early ones were considered "1930".

## Series, Model

Franklin's Series and/or Model designations are typically more meaningful than model years, especially beginning with the "new series" which was retroactively called Series 1 after Series 2 was introduced. Example: Series 1, Model G.

"NO 1912 ANNOUNCEMENT. The practice of our making annual announcements of new models will be discontinued from now on, and there will be no so-called '1912 Announcement of Franklin cars'. Instead of advertising 1911 or 1912 or any year's models we will simply advertise the Franklin car. Our aim will be to put production on as nearly a continuous basis as possible. When radical changes are made dealers will be given confidential advance notice. The series to follow the present 1911 models will not begin before August or September." [Franklin Dealers' Bulletin (FDB) page 2, March 16, 1911.]

Franklin's standard format was the capitalized word **Series** ('initial cap') followed by one space and then a number (Arabic numeral/numerical digit), for example, **Series 8** (not Series-8, or Series8).

A few Franklin publications formally state the number written out as a word, for example, Series Nine, One-Fifty-One. Consider these as examples of differences by the sales and engineering departments.

Series 9 through 11 used only the term *Series*. Series 1 through 8 and Series 12 through 19 used the terms *Series, Model* – for example: Series 1, Model D.

If *Series* and *Model* is still confusing, consider a modern (2023) cell phone example analogous to Franklin's use:

Franklin **Series 15, Models 151, 152, 153**

Samsung **Series Galaxy, Models S22, S22+, S22 Ultra**

The "-5" and "-7" in Series 12, Models 12-5 (short wheelbase) and 12-7 (long wheelbase) perhaps started with the idea of 5- and 7-passenger bodies, as a baseline.

Though the Series 12 evolved into the Series 130, the numbers 5 and 7 (*without* the hyphen) were similarly used in the model designations 135, 137, 145, and 147. The 5 and 7 are the baseline number of passengers, as described above.

For Series 15, in numeric order from base model to most expensive, Models 151, 152, 153; while 153 DeLuxe started a new numbering sequence using 3, for example 173, 183, 193.

The Series 15 twelve-cylinder prototype car's model was called both 1500 and 1550. See ACN #35 page 20 for more info. The ending 0 in 1500 or 1550 does not fit any other designation method they used, before or after. Did it mean it was a prototype? Would 155 or 165 have been used for the production version? Logical guesses.

## Variant Letter, like Series 9-B

Starting with Series 9-B, Franklin introduced variant letters to indicate a set of significant design changes. They added a dash (hyphen) and a capital letter to the Series number rather than using the next number like they did with Series 1 through 8.

Franklin used variant 'dash letters' like Series 11-A for their first version and Series 11-B for their second version.

The "-A" was applied retroactively only after the "-B" was introduced, except for Series 10-A. Variant letters were used with Series 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

"Series 10-A" was used from the beginning per July 29, 1922 HHFMC letter in a Bowen-Empress advertisement, *Automotive Industries*, October 5, 1922, and also in "New Franklin Has Remodeled Cooling System", *Automotive Industries*, August 31, 1922, page 408. The first Series 10-A was shipped September 1, 1922 and (3 months later) the first 10-B was shipped December 4, 1922. Perhaps 10-A was used from the beginning because the 10-B was well along in the planning stages before the 10-A was released for production?

**Variant Exceptions.** 12-B, with a dash/hyphen, is the standard. Exceptions to Franklin's formal usage of a dash (hyphen), like 12B, can be found in publications such as Service Charts and some Franklin Service Bulletins (FSB).

A common practice, and not just with Franklins, is to not say the words *dash* or *hyphen*. For example, most people say (and sometimes type) "10B" rather than "10 dash B" (10-B). Franklin's formal model designation always included the dash/hyphen. Perhaps even John Wilkinson (Franklin's original designer and first chief engineer) may have written 10-B but said 10B.

In yet another variation – "License Information" in, for example, FSB 489 and 560 state Series 9-B as Series 9, Model B though it may have simply been convenient – at the time – to format all relevant entries one way. Nowhere else is it currently known for Franklin to call it, for example, a Series 9, Model B; they simply wrote it as Series 9-B.

You may see 9-C, 15-B, 16-C in some period documents which seem to have been a new model's designation during its development; 9-C became the 10-A, 15-B became the 16-A (163), and 16-C became the 19-A (193). While 15-B has been seen in an aftermarket or Franklin vendor's catalog, presumably the catalog was updated before Franklin decided to use 16 (16-A, 163) instead of 15-B and/or Franklin did not tell them of the change.

## Factory Abbreviation Examples

**Series 12-5-B** (or simply **12-B** or **12-5-B**) are abbreviations for **Series 12-B, Model 12-5** (1928). 12-B was used when it applied to both the 12-5-B and 12-7-B; 12 was used initially, and when 12 applied to all.

**Series 135** (or simply **135**) are abbreviations for **Series 13, Model 135** (1929). 13 was used when it applied to all: 130, 135, and 137.

**Series 145** (or simply **145**) are abbreviations for **Series 14, Model 145** (1930). 14 was used when it applied to both the 145 and 147.

**Series 183** (or simply **18-A** or **183**) are abbreviations for **Series 18-A, Model 183** (1933). 18 was used initially, and when 18 applied to all: 183, 184, and 185.

Perhaps a visual example of one abbreviation method they used will help: **Series 18-A, Model 183**.

The above examples of factory-established formal abbreviations were typically used in engineering drawings, Instruction Manuals (owner manuals/user guides), Parts Catalogs, and Service Bulletins.

All known full factory model designations are in this article's *Franklin Model Designation and Year List*. Known factory model designation abbreviations are included in the current *Index of Air Cooled News & Franklin Service Station*. Other common grammatical abbreviations are, for example, **S. 1** (with a space) for **Series 1** and **Ser.6** (without a space) for **Series 6**.

## Model Names

Some Franklin models also have names such as *Six-Thirty* (*Six-cylinder—Thirty* horsepower, aka 6-30), *Airman*, *Twelve*, and *Olympic*. Body styles also have names but that is not the purpose of this "Model Designations and Years" article.

## Model and/or Calendar Year

For Franklin, "years" are mostly *model years*, though some are *calendar years* (January 1 - December 31), and some are both (for example: Series 5, 7, and some 9-Bs).

Industry-wide, model years typically begin in the summer or fall of the preceding calendar year. For example, the Series 12 was formally announced on October 2, 1927 as the 1928 model year.

Though *model years* were (and still are) commonly used, Franklin seemed to not care for them; and apparently used them only because they were commonly used and/or the US states' government motor vehicle agencies required them.

From Franklin's perspective, it may have been practical to avoid 'discussions' with US state government motor vehicle agencies. Various state laws required a 'breaking point' between production years (presumably the same as model years) per December 29, 1932 internal memorandum; see ACN #35 pages 14-15 for text.

Franklin seems to have later conceded to the popularity of the term *model year* in later published 'License Information'. For example, Series 1 as 1912, Series 8 as 1915-1916, and the first

Mr. Cole

TO Production Manager FROM Service Manager

ATTENTION: Mr. A.R. Weigel. March 15, 1932.  
Copy distributed 5/31/32.

The twelve cylinder models will be known as Series 17, Model 173, starting with Serial No. 73-10157 and Engine No. 5157.

The suffix number will be applied the same as on the Series 16 models, designating the different body types and should remain the same.

L.R. Hodge.

LRH:WC.  
Just car shipped 4/28/32 to Suf. Delt  
next " " 4/30/32 " Miami

Series 9 as 1916-1917. The 1915-1916 Series 8 perhaps should have been called the 1916 model year (and was at least once). And 1917 is stated in an article introducing the Series 9 [*The Automobile*, July 27, 1916, page 136].

Reportedly, some vehicle registrations or titles list the year the car was originally sold instead of the factory's stated *model year*. While the author has heard this multiple times over the years, and believes it may be true, he has yet to see an original supporting example and would like to see one or more Franklin examples supported by period information (such as a title and/or invoice) and not, speculatively, someone's typographical error.

## Sources

Examples of Franklin's currently known model designation uses and explanations are below.

The 1904-1905 Revised Price-List, Parts and Equipment (parts catalog), May 15, 1910 states "Types A, B, E, F" on the front cover and "When ordering always specify model and serial number of automobile" on each page listing parts.

Two 1905 sales catalogs (HHFCL A-05-02 and A-05-03) use *Model* per the dictionary definition and *Type* as Franklin's term for their models. They both use *Type* throughout except the options and specification pages say *Model*.

The Franklin Commercial Cars 1907 sales catalog (HHFCL A-07-03) states Model J and Model L throughout except the specifications page says Type J and Type L (the opposite of the 1905 sales catalogs).

1908 catalog (A-08-02) uses only *Type*. 1909 (A-09-01) and 1910 (A-10-04) sales catalogs use only *Model*.

The earliest Franklin document discovered so far equates to what they later called 'License Information' is a 2" x 4" sales handbook in a leather 3-ring binder (courtesy of Hank Manwell). The title page of this sales handbook states February 1920 but within it are prices for May 17, 1920.

Franklin Service Bulletins 471, 489, 522, 560, 593 contain "License Information", Franklin Dealers' Bulletin 383 (see Series, Model section), Parts Catalogs, and L.R. Hodge's March 15, 1932 Series 17 memorandum pictured in this article (courtesy of Tom Hubbard).

The information in this article is based on the author's unpublished research documented in *Understanding Franklin Numbers* and *Numerical Nitpicking* [the HHFC Library (HHFCL) and some individuals were given copies in 1995]. Some information has been published on the Club's website, [www.franklin-car.org](http://www.franklin-car.org), including the *Index of Air Cooled News & Franklin Service Station*.

## Suggestions and Conclusion

That was a lot, wasn't it? Hopefully it is helpful to you now, or in the future.

Please consider writing Franklin model designations the way Franklin did — full or abbreviated — and not just the model year. It is a way to help others learn details about Franklins and show respect to the individuals who created, produced, and supported Franklins — much like pronouncing and spelling a person's name the same way they do.

Given the Franklin model designation system is somewhat unique using it can be important, for example, in advertising for parts/restoration needs. Consider saying, "Searching for a Series 11-A hood" instead of "Searching for a 1925 Franklin hood". The Series 11-A designation is considerably more helpful as the 1925 10-C and 1925 11-A hoods are completely different.

Please consider using **Type for 1902 through 1908** and **Model from 1909 through 1911** as a simple approach, based on how and when Franklin mostly (yes, mostly) used them.

While model year and/or abbreviated model designations will likely continue to be the most popular approach, examples of ways to include both are:

**Type A (1903) or 1903 Type A**

**Model M (1911) or 1911 Model M**

**Series 3, Model D (1913) or 1913 Series 3, Model D**

**Series 9-A** [with the dash/hyphen]

**Series 9-A (1917) or 1917 Series 9-A**

**Series 16-A (1932) or 1932 Series 16-A**

**Series 163 (1932) or 1932 Series 163**

**16-A (1932) or 1932 16-A**

**163 (1932) or 1932 163**

---

GRH (Gratitude, Respect, Humility) — The reviewers who kindly accepted the author's request and contributed greatly are Erik Allen, Sarina Bosco, Missy Brown, Cathy Canfield, Paul Fitzpatrick, Jeff Hasslen, Bouvard Hosticka, Trillian Hosticka, Gordon Howard, Keith Kilmer, Tom Kleinschmidt, Brad Martin, Bob Metro, Darla Metro, Mason Polston, Tom Rasmussen, David Reddaway, Andrew Sullivan, Michael Whitehead (in alphabetical order by surname). And Guy Roese who introduced the author to Franklins; you may recognize his name from the Trek's Long-Distance Driving Award.

*Aura Vincit* (Air Conquers) and *Semper Sursum* (Always Aim High) — both Franklin slogans. — *Roy Canfield*