

Cleaning Cans by Jim Burruss (Brother of John known to us as Jeb)

When we were younger, my brother and I began our beer can collecting craze. Like most kids, we were somewhat limited to what we could find in stores and in trading at swap meets. However, we were also lucky enough to come across a number of nearby “dumps” to fish through, where we gathered many different brands and older cans. Additionally, since we lived near the Lake of the Ozarks, this also meant finding a lot of beer can treasures discarded by visiting tourists, who brought their “beers of choice” on vacation trips with them.

As you can imagine, after exposure to the elements, some of the cans had rusty tops and a light rusty sheen on the painted portion of the can. As fate would have it, we lived in Jefferson City, Missouri, and there was a Chesebrough-Ponds manufacturer in town. We somehow made the acquaintance of someone there and during a conversation regarding beer cans and rust, this person mentioned a chemical that might help remove the rust from the metal tops and some of the printed / painted cans. They supplied us with Oxalic Acid in a powder form, which did the trick in removing rust and returning many of the cans to an almost pristine condition.

Collecting and restoration was a unique and collaborative effort on our parts. Our Grandfather was a daily Lipton Tea drinker (the instant powdered version) and he bought it in jars that perfectly fit two 12 oz. beer cans inside, stacked on top of each other. Our mother set us up in our basement area near the washing machine, where there happened to be a floor drain. We’d first fill the cans with plain water, being mindful of not wasting the “potion” on the inside of the can; we needed to make it last as long as possible. We’d then fill the jar with about 2 inches of warm water and add a teaspoon of the powdered Oxalic Acid. We then stirred it up until the powder was dissolved and submerged the cans in the jar for an overnight soak. The next day, we’d don our latex gloves, use a soft brush to scrub away the residue and rust, wash and rinse them, dry them off, and set the cans out to dry the insides. This process worked every time and was highly effective, for after “the treatment”, you’d never know they had been treated. (One caveat though: not all the rust came off...it has to be a light surface rust that hasn’t permeated the paint or metal.)

I’ll be forever grateful for sharing in beer can collecting with my older brother, John. In fact, I still have about 200 of my favorite cans from our childhood. John never lost his fascination with beer memorabilia and went on to become a premiere beer opener collector, with a collection that was quite impressive and enjoyed with both other collectors and good friends. I will also always be grateful that his years of collecting brought him so much joy. Thanks to everyone who was a part of it.

Thanks for a great write-up Jim.

Note: 2lb Oxalic Acid Bottle can be bought for \$19.99 on Amazon.com (will last a long long time)



The John Stanley Process For Cleaning Openers

Cleaning openers has always been a passion of mine. Good or bad I like to clean and polish openers. Collectors are split about 50/50 on whether to clean or leave "original". I always say I have never seen rust help the value of an opener. Cleaning does take some effort and my process follows.

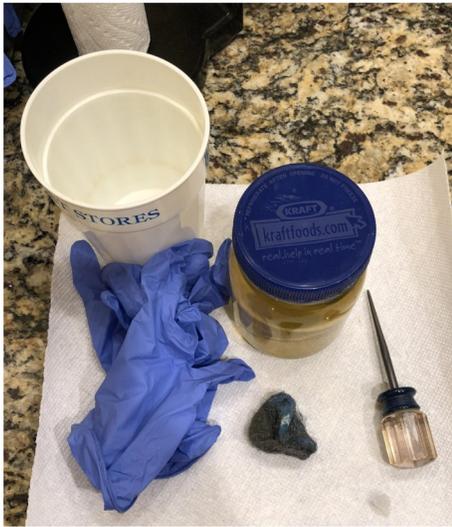


If openers/corkscrews are rusty I start with soaking the piece in a solution of Oxalic Acid. Above left is a jar of old radiator cleaner (which is Oxalic Acid) that Harold Queen (deceased JFO member) got a case of at auction 20 years ago. He gave me two jars like the one above and I have cleaned a few hundred openers using Oxalic acid in those 20 years using up one jar. Back in the 1980s when I first started cleaning you could get Oxalic Acid at a drugstore but now you can get on Amazon.com (see previous page). Above middle shows a glass jar I have used for many years (an old mayonnaise jar with a plastic top). It works well for openers up to 5" long and then below I show a glass meat loaf maker I use for larger openers. Above right shows the B-31-UL Tosetti placed in the jar. As you can see the opener leans against the side and that is preferable to letting it lie flat which still works but it is easier to remove the opener when it is leaning.



B-31-UL Tosetti before cleaning.

The John Stanley Process For Cleaning Openers (Continued)



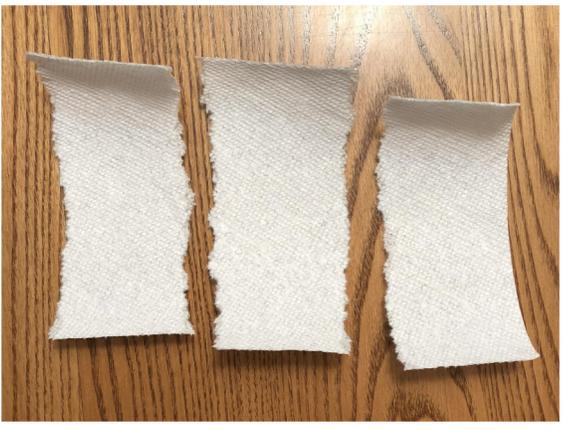
Above are items I use when cleaning with Oxalic Acid. The acid jar and then a plastic cup I keep the jar in. A short punch tool to lift the opener out of the acid but if the opener or corkscrew does not have a keyring hole I pour the acid into the plastic cup so the opener/corkscrew can be removed. Note over time sludge builds up in the bottom of the acid jar and this is a good time to rinse the sludge out. You do not have to but I use latex gloves when using acid or polishing openers and corkscrews. Above right is the B-31-UL Tosetti after the acid bath and using a SOS pad to remove the acid residue (you can use fine steel wool instead of a SOS pad). Below is my work table with a Craftsman dual buffing wheel (6" cotton buffing pad on the right side and a 6" extra fine brass wheel on the left side). A shop vac to clean the mess up afterwards, a vice, a Dremel tool and a fan for summertime heat. The Craftsman wheels have a guard and I recommend one (a lot less messier) but if you really want to get "down on it", remove the guard.



The John Stanley Process For Cleaning Openers (Continued)



The extras that you need when polishing. Above a 6" cotton buffing wheel (on Amazon: Dico 527-40-6 1/4-Inch Spaced Spiral Sewn 6-Inch Diameter 1/2-Inch Thick Buffing Wheel). Wells Lamont Heavy Duty work gloves (on Amazon: Men's Winter Work Gloves with Leather Palm, 100-gram Insulation, Suede Cowhide, Large (Wells Lamont 5130L). Matchless White Compound bar (<https://www.matchlessmetal.com/compounds.php>). Bars are different colors but white works best on steel openers. Safety goggles and nose mask (very fine particles fly when buffing so not good for the lungs or eyes). Below Dremel tool with various wire brush bits used (both brass and steel).



Before I start polishing I make three finger tip pads (left thumb and index and right thumb) from paper towels and using shipping tape to hold together. When you polish steel openers even with padded gloves the openers become very hot.

The John Stanley Process For Cleaning Openers (Continued)



Hard to see but I do have the paper towel tips on my index and thumb fingers of my left hand because I use my left hand to hold the opener and just have a thumb paper insert on my right hand. Me with the gear on and then holding the B-31-UL Tosetti before polishing begins, then polishing both sides, and finally I also polish the edge all the way around to complete the process. Below is an E-4 Keeley wire opener. Any opener with raised lettering will have black residue build-up from the white compound. I use the Dremel with a brass brush to clean the lettering and finally I clean each fret on both sides.



The John Stanley Process For Cleaning Openers (Continued)

Below: B-31-UL Tosetti after polishing. Much better looking than the original dirty opener. Time for fresh acid (jar last 200-300 openers). I use 3 tablespoons of Oxalic acid and hot water to dissolve.



The dissolving acid working on the A-13 Drewrys car opener. Below left: before acid, middle: is after acid treatment and right: opener after polishing.



Finally a G-5-UL Park Brew opener: Top two pictures are before any cleaning. Very rusty but I knew this style usually cleans up well and it certainly did. Good luck and ask any questions.