

THE ATYPICAL LC

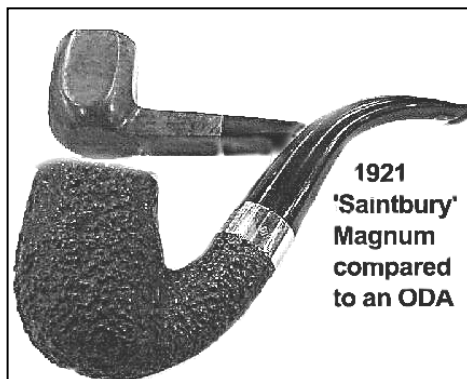
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This paper addresses what has become my favorite Dunhill shape, the rarely found extra-large three-quarter-bent billiard, commonly referred to as an 'LC.' Richard Esserman, a veritable and generous font of knowledge, to the point of 'co-authorship,' often refers to this pipe as a 'mini-magnum' but in this respect he is wrong. The LC is much, much smaller than a magnum, and rather than a step down from a magnum, should be viewed as a step up from the typical 120 — or as I would put it — a 120 rightly sized, a pipe acceptable to devotees of the super-large, and 'just right' for the rest of us.

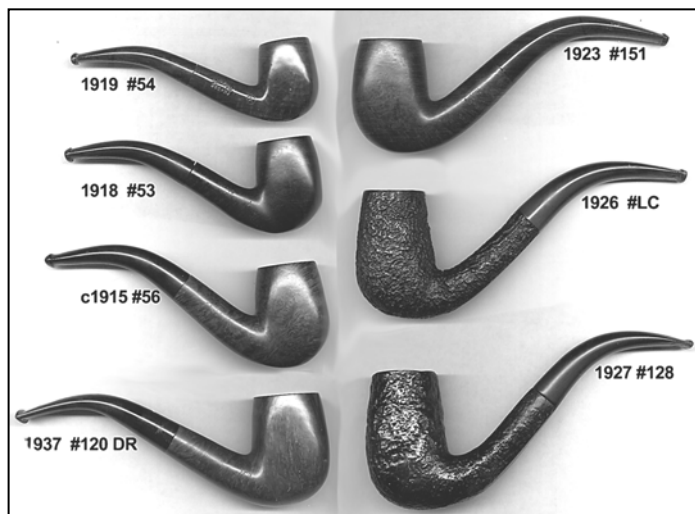
To my knowledge the 'LC' has been shown in Dunhill catalogs only on three occasions and always with the shape designation "LC," but the LC actually encompass several shape numbers/letters and is an atypical pipe with a number of variations, the stamped shape number/letter being of only limited use in determining which variation. But first a bit of history.



The three-quarter-bent billiard was a very popular pipe in the early twentieth century and was featured among Dunhill's initial carvings in three sizes, in ascending order, shapes 54, 53 and 56, approximating respectively modern-day group sizes 2, 3 and 4. After World War I, Dunhill began experimenting with larger pipes, most spectacularly a three-quarter-bent magnum, the first, a special presentation piece made in 1921 for the noted Sherlock Holmes impersonator, H. A. Saintbury.ⁱ



About that same year, it appears that Dunhill also expanded its traditional three-quarter-bent line, introducing shapes 120, 151 and 128, approximating respectively modern-day small group size 5, large group size 5 and large group size 6.ⁱⁱ Sometime before 1926 (I think likely, even as early as the late-teens) the letter shape "LC" was introduced, a three-quarter-bent billiard modern-day group size 6 pipe that most probably fitted sizewise between the 151 and 128.ⁱⁱⁱ



As the 1920s progressed, the larger three-quarter-bent billiard shapes tended to increase in size. As noted earlier, by the late-1920s the typical 120 had increased in size to that of the original 151, and in terms of bowl size (but not overall length) *a few* pipes stamped 120 are found with bowls as large as pipes stamped LC (In this paper I refer to these oversized bowl 120's as '120LC's'). Similarly, by the late 1920s *some pipes* stamped LC are found as large as, and indistinguishable from, pipes stamped 128.

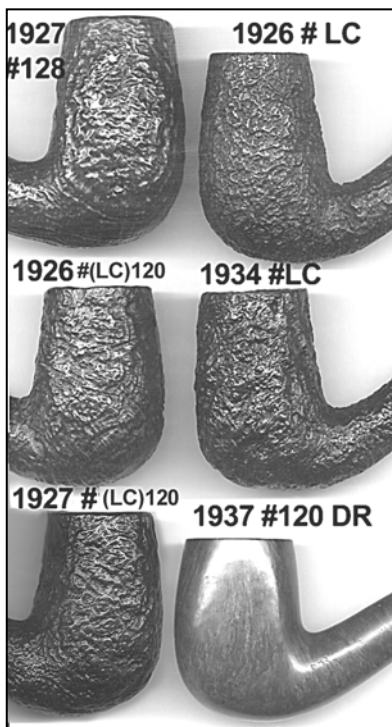
All of this apparently led to a general reconsideration of the large three-quarter-bent billiard line, for the 1930s saw an apparent end to the occasional 120LC, an apparent disappearance of the 128, and an apparent disappearance of the very largest LC's. Or, in short, a three-quarter-bent billiard line that progressed in size: shapes 54, 53, 56, 120 and LC. In this 1930s three-quarter-bent billiard line, pipes stamped 120 are consistently found in the same size as found today (2" bowl height, 6" overall length). Pipes stamped LC are typically found about the same size as was typical in the mid-1920s (2 3/8" bowl height, 6 1/2" overall length), but a fair number of somewhat larger-size pipes stamped LC are also found.

With less variation between individual LCs, this situation appears to have continued into the post-World War II period, but in fact there was almost no LC production from the early-1950s until 1976.^{iv} In that year, there was a spectacular outpouring of variously styled large bent shapes stamped 612 and 622 (the former having a tapered bit, the latter a saddle bit), *a handful* of which were carved along classic LC lines, in-

cluding at least two with broad, 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ "-high bowls (these two pipes being the only LC's I have seen meriting the label 'mini-magnums'). A few further examples followed in the next couple years, the ones in 1978 being stamped only 'ODA,' but the end of the decade also saw the end of LC production, even in limited numbers.

In my view, that which we call today the Dunhill LC is essentially shorthand for an extra-large three-quarter-bent billiard, a step up in size from the 120, which over the years has been variously stamped (i) "LC" from the 1920s through the 1960s, (ii) "128" in the 1920s, (iii) *a few* (not most) of the pipes stamped 120 in the late 1920s (the 120LC's)^v, and (iv) *a few* (not most) of the large three-quarter-bents of the late 1970s (mostly in 1976) stamped 612 or 622 (or in 1978 simply ODA) — as used in this paper, 'LC' refers generally to all these rarely found pipes.^{vi}

Within this universe of extra-large three-quarter-bent billiards referred to as LC's, however, there are some noticeable variations in all aspects of the pipe and not always confined to any particular stamping or era.

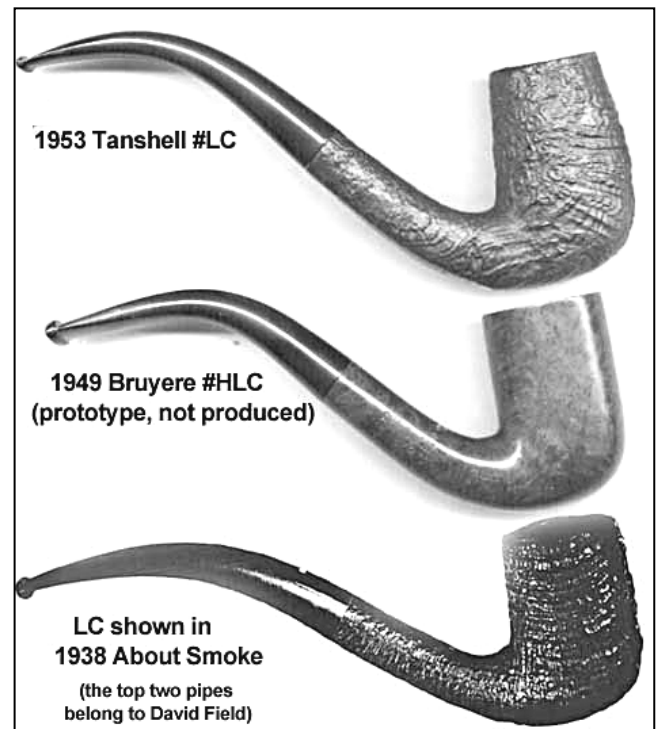


Bowl: The typical LC bowl is about $\frac{3}{8}$ " taller than that of the typical 2"-tall 120 bowl. However, some LC bowls can be found a bit shorter, perhaps as short as $\frac{1}{4}$ ", while others, albeit rarely, are considerably taller. The rare taller bowls are found occasionally among the production of the late 1920s stamped either "LC" or "128," with some measuring $2\frac{1}{2}$ " to $2\frac{5}{8}$ "-high, or, likewise occasionally, from the production of the late 1970s, stamped either "612" or "622," with a few bowls measuring $2\frac{5}{8}$ " to $2\frac{7}{8}$ "-tall.

In addition to height, the breadth and shape of

bowls also vary. Most commonly, the LC bowl is a tall chimney-style type, narrowing gradually and evenly to the top. Depending upon height, bowl diameter at the broadest near the bottom of the bowl is approximately $1\frac{5}{8}$ " to $1\frac{3}{4}$ ". This might be considered the 'classic' LC bowl shape and is found in all years and in all stampings. However, also through all the years of production and including all stampings other than the 120LC, a broader bowl variant is found, more a tall 'LB' than chimney billiard, and tending to narrow only near the top. In many respects this broader bowl pipe appears to be an oversized 151 (as that pipe was redefined in the mid/late-1920s), as opposed to an oversized 120. There is a third variant, perhaps least often found, with a classic billiard bowl, often a 120LC with basically straight bowl sides and little or no narrowing toward the top. In 1949 Dunhill made up a prototype, never put into production,

stamped "HLC," using this third variant bowl style. While some pure examples of each of these three bowl variants are found, most LC bowls 'tend' to one of these three styles.



Overall Length: Excepting the 120LC, the LC generally runs $6\frac{1}{2}$ " to 7" in length, most commonly around $6\frac{1}{2}$ ", with the longest length to my experience only found among one or two 612 examples from 1976. The 120LC is the exception, with an overall length of 6".

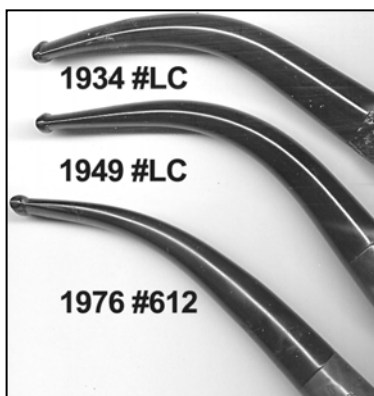
Notwithstanding the shorter overall length, I consider 120LC to be an 'LC' because the large bowl is so distinctive and immediately suggests 'LC,' but it might be argued otherwise. Similarly, the couple 1976 LCs that are 7" in length with broad $2\frac{7}{8}$ "-high bowls (the ones I concede are 'mini-magnums') are different enough from other LCs in larger appearance and feel, that it might well be argued that they, too, should be considered a separate shape rather than 'true' LC's.

Shank/Bit: One of the most desirable features of an LC is a 'Swan Neck' shank and bit. The 'Swan Neck' or elements of it, is most commonly found in LC's dating to the 1920s, significantly less common in those of the 1930s, and rarely found later. The 'Swan Neck' is composed of three principal elements:



(i) the shape of the upper portion of the bit; (ii) the length of the shank; and (iii) the shank/bowl junction.

The upper portion of the typical pre-World War II bit breaks to a horizontal plane and then dips, or at least appears to dip, to the lip. The upper portion of the post-war bit in contrast usually breaks a tad further along the bit and then not to a horizontal plane, but rather to a gradual rise to a lip above the horizontal. It should be noted, however, that while the 'break to the horizontal' of the pre-war bit is always real, the 'dip to the lip' in most pre-war bits is more of an illusion, effected to varying degree by the thickness of the bit at the break and by the gradual narrowing of the top plane of the bit to the lip, while keeping the bottom plane level. But whether actual or illusory, this 'break to the horizontal & dip to the lip' is essential to the 'Swan Neck;' without it you have a goose.



The second element is the length of the shank, which is found from typically extra-long in the 1920s to distinctly short in the post-war period. However, there are always exceptions; for instance the late-1920's 120LC's always tend to be shorter shanked because of the shorter overall length. One might suppose that given otherwise identical lengths and diameters, the briar/vulcanite proportion shouldn't matter, but in fact it very much does. A long expanse of shiny smooth vulcanite simply lacks the elegance of craggy sandblasted briar, and I have never seen a short-shanked LC that suggests, at least to me, 'Swan Neck.'

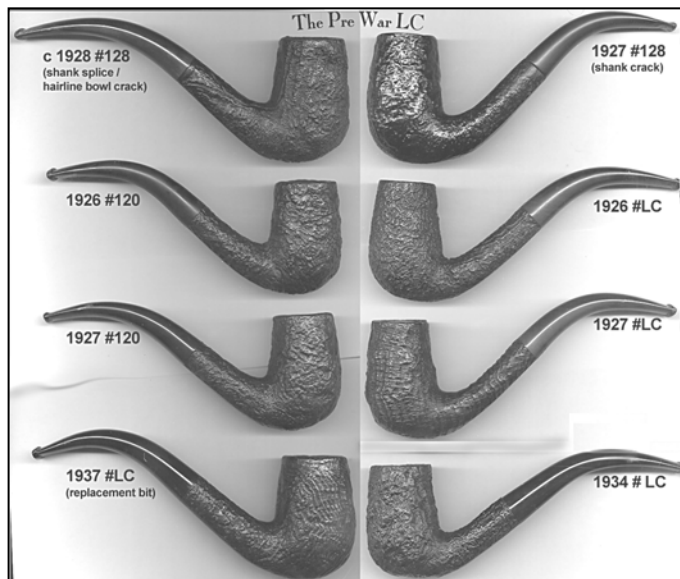
Lastly, the shank/bowl junction — a multi-faceted matter — as much carving style as actuality. Clearly actual is the inner angle between the top plane of the shank and the back plane of the bowl, which tends to be more acute than typical on a few pipes and flatter than typical on a few others. The overly flat angle seems to effectively preclude a "Swan Neck." Another varying facet of the shank/bowl junction is the degree of shank thickening as it meets the bowl. All thicken, but those that do so least provide the greatest sense of elegance. Lastly, a few of the early LC shanks tend to leave the bowl a tad on the horizontal rather than at an immediate upward angle. A comparatively thin shank with a slight, gently concave curve meeting a chimney style bowl, seems to be part and parcel of this 'tad of horizontal,' and overall effects an ideal balance to an extra-long shank and a bit that 'dips to the lip,' or in short, the epitome of 'Swan Necks.'

This 'epitome,' however, is also structurally quite delicate, a beautiful yet dangerous pipe to either carve or own.

Up to 1976, the LC appears always to have been fitted with a tapered bit. In the late-1970s, however, both tapered and saddle bits were offered, stamped 612 and 622 respectively, or in 1978 simply 'ODA,' regardless of bit style. I know of no saddle bit LC that might be considered to have a 'Swan Neck,' nor do I think it possible.

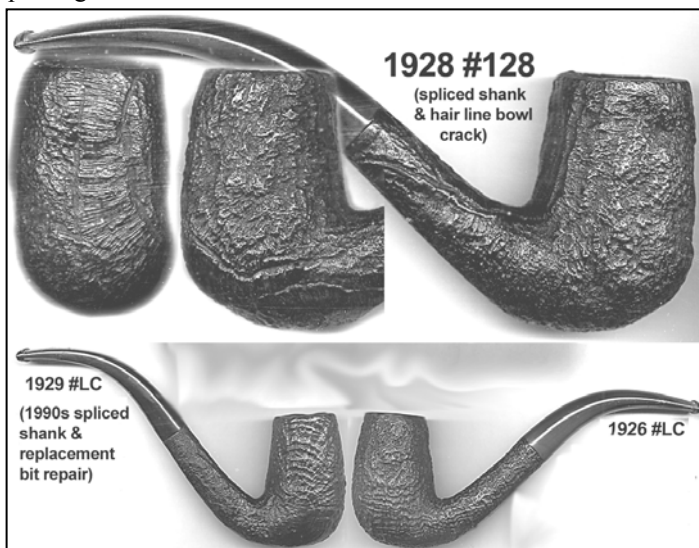


From the foregoing discussion of shape variations, the reader may assume that they are the product of conscious decisions, and perhaps so. Then again, the LC was not a pipe annually produced in large numbers by pipemakers well familiar with shape, for equally familiar and demanding retailers and smokers. Rather, the LC was infrequently produced in very sparse numbers by master pipemakers who no doubt enjoyed the challenge of carving a special pipe for pipe smokers who would cherish the individuality of the rarely obtainable. And because it is an extra-large pipe, those individualities, which might be lost on a smaller briar, are magnified. Or, to paraphrase the way Richard Esserman once put it to me, you're not looking at variations, you're looking at the individuality of different carvers.^{vii} Indeed, looking at four LC's from 1926 and 1927 — two stamped "LC" and two stamped "120" — one could speculate that essentially two carvers were carving the same shape, the work of one carver being stamped "LC," and that of the other, "120."



LC's are almost always found in the Shell finish. Of course there are exceptions. A TanShell from 1953 is known. A Bruyere LC is pictured in a 1928 Dunhill catalog, but I know of no surviving smooth finished LC from before World War II, and only a few from the post-war period, up to the late 1970s.^{viii} In the late-1970s, however, some Roots were produced (most probably from somewhat softer Grecian briar). On the other

hand, because it is a large pipe offering ample briar for sandblast effects, even if smooth LC's from before the war were available, they would probably not be the preferred finish. Indeed, one of the most appealing aspects of the pre war LC is the wonderfully craggy and varied sandblast sometimes found painted on an ample Algerian briar canvas.



Collecting LC's presents no small challenge. They are rare, elusive and expensive regardless of era or stamping^{ix}, and because of the variations in shape, there never seem to be 'duplicates.' Other Dunhill shapes allow you to accumulate, upgrade and trade. The LC collector, on the other hand, accumulates and hoards, fully understanding how a mother's love can blind her to her children's most horrible faults. Indeed, given the rarity of the shape, it is virtually impossible to collect LC's without learning to accept and even love, faults that would otherwise be unacceptable. For example, a spliced original shank and a hairline bowl crack in an excellent smoking pipe with an exceptionally crisp and craggy blast. It's easy to disregard a crack and splice knowing that you may not see a finer LC blast in your lifetime. Another, dropped by a repairman in the Dunhill factory, with the shattered shank break necessarily spliced at a somewhat more acute angle giving the pipe a taller, elegant rise. Hardly a piece for the trash bin; rather, one smokes the piece knowing that if the tragic drop had occurred in the 1920s rather than the 1980s, it would have been considered serendipity, rather than tragedy, no doubt leading to production of what would have been a highly desirable 'tallboy' LC variant.

In my experience there are five general "condition" problems found with pre-World War II LC's. Three are fairly typical of all larger pipes of that era, bowl and shank cracks, broken bits and worn sandblasts, but the two others are more prevalent than normal. Probably because of the length and often delicacy of the pre-war LC shank, there seem to be a far higher percentage of spliced-shank LC's than one would expect. And, 'rough tops' for the chimney-bowl style pre-war LC's, seem to be the norm, undoubtedly because in that bowl style the bowl thins considerably at the top. While it is never easy to find pre-war pipes in very excellent/pristine condition, it is that much more difficult in the case of the LC, for it is a delicate pipe despite its size, which typically has been heavily smoked. In short, a pre-war LC in very excellent condition is a rarity among rarities.^x

BILL MAULDIN

10/29/21 - 1/22/03

[Cartoonist for *Stars and Stripes* during WWII, later worked for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from 1958; battled injustice and pretense with irony and humor.]



The Prince and the Pauper

"So I told Company K they'd just have to work out their replacement problem for themselves."



Collecting LC's, then, is a decided challenge most every way you look at it, but then again, it is when you are smoking another favorite pristine pipe and you find yourself wondering why — warts and all — you're not smoking one of your LC's, that you come to the realization that the challenge of collecting these 'rightly sized' three-quarter-bent billiards is but a minor inconvenience.

Notes:

ⁱ Richard Esserman believes that the bowls for the initial Dunhill bent magnums, through 1923, were purchased from the BBB factory. With bores measuring $1\frac{3}{4}$ " across the top, these pipes are referred to as "wide bores." The first known three-quarter-bent magnums that appear to have been wholly carved by Dunhill date to 1924 and reflect the LC shape. Production of these three-quarter-bent billiard magnums is known to have continued through 1928, with a large number (eight known) likely produced for a suspected Dunhill exhibit at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1926 (*any information would be greatly appreciated*). After 1928, only one other of these bent magnums is known, dating to 1937, but Dunhill produced magnums in other shapes from at least 1925 through 1939. For a listing of all 44 then-known magnum pipes see a table prepared by Richard in the Autumn 2001 *Ephemeris*, Issue 50, page 39.

ⁱⁱ Later in the 1920s, the 120 was increased in size to that of the 151, and the 151 shape was changed to a shorter but broader bowl pipe; initially, however, it appears that the 120 and 151 were simply size differences within the same classic three-quarter-bent billiard shape.

ⁱⁱⁱ While an initial size progression of shapes 54, 53, 56, 120, 151, LC, and 128 is logically appealing, the early size relationship between the LC and 128 is somewhat speculative, as I know of no actual or catalog examples of the 128 prior to the late 1920s. *Each LC is unique, so I am interested in hearing from readers about any such, but this is most particularly so with regard to LC's from 1925 or earlier, and 128's of any year.*

^{iv} Unlike the ES and 482, which were incorporated into the post-World War II ODA line as the 850 and 835 respectively, the LC was not. Indeed, for all intents and purposes, the one shape glaringly absent from the Dunhill line during the second half of the 20th Century was the extra-large classic three-quarter-bent.

^v I recently saw a 1970 TanShell 120 with a $2\frac{3}{8}$ "-tall bowl, and which I consider to be a '120LC.'

^{vi} In 1922 Dunhill organized the Parker Pipe Company to finish and sell Dunhill "fallings," pipes in the initial steps of production found to be flawed, and at least two pre-World War II Parker "LC's" are known. Following the war, Parker production grew increasingly independent of such "fallings" but not completely so, as is evident from a large number of Parkers in the LC shape that appeared beginning after Dunhill's limited late-1970s LC production.

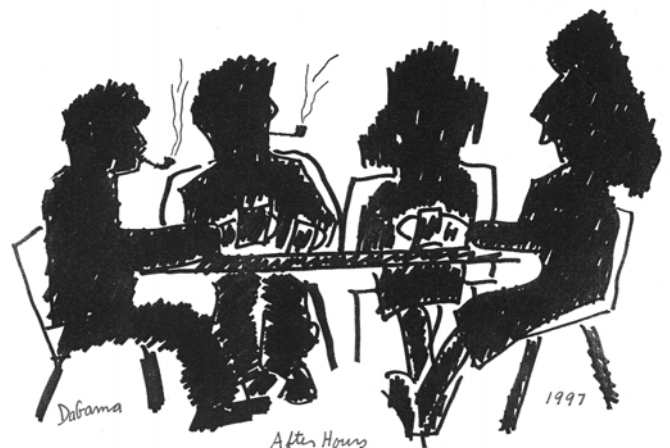
^{vii} Richard also recounts being told by retired Dunhill employees that in the 'early days' the master pipemakers would compete

with each other, developing and closely guarding their carving secrets, in some cases becoming so identified with a particular shape that when the carver retired, so too was the shape. In attempting to determine and account for the differences between individual LC's, one begins to appreciate the truth of this recollection, and I suspect that if one could bring together a sufficient number of pre-World War II LC's for comparative examination, one would be able to fairly comfortably group them by pipe-maker.

^{viii} Prior to the 1960s Dunhill smooth finished pipes were made from very hard Calabrian briar (the Bruyere finish) or moderately hard Corsican briar (the Root finish), subjected in either case to an aggressive (compared to today) oil curing process that was unforgiving in bringing flaws to the surface. Further, hard briar is slow to grow, which can result in unacceptable grain inconsistencies within a briar block because it encompasses many decades of briar growth. The larger the pipe, the more these potential pitfalls are accentuated, perhaps explaining why smooth finished LC's are rarely if ever found — the economics could have hardly justified the risks.

^{ix} A survey of 150 'mailers' from 1985-1995 showed four pipes stamped "LC" or "128" offered for sale or auction (actually all four were stamped "LC," none were stamped "128"), all of the typical or smaller size variety. Interestingly, an equal number of magnums were offered, in three cases in conjunction with LC's, suggesting that like magnums, smokers/collectors part with them only in death.

^x When one compares this to the Dunhill magnum three-quarter-bent billiard, one finds almost the reverse. The magnum is a much sturdier pipe, generally found lightly or moderately smoked, and often protected by a case. Thus, magnums tend to survive in far better condition.



DaGama

After Hours

1997