Mills BONUS Bell Machine

Produced between 1937 and 1943

If you're into three-reelers, and you've seen the Mills "Horse Head" you probably want one or have one. Practically all of the "Feature Bell" machines had their variations in payouts or added number, dial or advancing number indicators. Only the Mills "Horse Head" is really different. The machine is actually called BONUS, and when you play it its easy to see why. A new set of display symbols sits at the top of the machine in a large built-in marquee. It consists of five windows in which the letters B - O - N - U - S are unshuttered and revealed one at a time as matching letter symbols are hit. The trick is that the letter symbols have to be hit in order, with "B" first, "O" second, "N" third and so on. Hitting an "O" before the "B" won't register, nor will "S" before the "U". You can't get the cart before the horse.

In the manner of the Pace KITTY, all of the new letter symbols were on the first reel. Win or lose, as a player hit "B", then "O", then another "B" (which didn't count, or hurt), then "N" to get up to "B - O - N" it took a lot of willpower not to hang around and try for the last "U - S" letters. The odds of hitting each are 20:1 based on the number of symbols on the reel. But BONUS has a way of making players hang in there for the special payout of eighteen coins.

Coupling the "B-O-N-U-S" letters to that first reel, and to the payout slides, is a complicated thing and it takes a lot of machinery. When BONUS first came out in January 1937 it didn't really work all that well. The problem was reel synchronization, for once the letters are out of sync it is hard to tell if and when the bonus payout will be made. Because of this BONUS and its side vender model got off to a slow start. Some early serials are 416,979 and 428,306 with a 430,000 serial for the side vender. In 1939 a reengineered model was introduced called NEW BONUS in which the bonus display mechanism has been simplified and the synchronization problem solved, or easily adjusted from the back. This time the machine caught fire and by the time America entered WWII -- and all slot machine production stopped -- BONUS was the largest selling Bell in the Mills line. Typical late serials for the NEW BONUS are 466,130 and 468,880. Revamps made during WWII were refinished as the GOLD BONUS -- 479,120 is a typical serial -- and post-war revampers converted a number of the pre-war machines to half dollar play. Many of the NEW BONUS machines were running into the nineteen-fifties.



PRICE GUIDE

Condition	Price Range		
Incomplete	$ 550	to	$ 900
Rough	$ 900	to	$ 1,200
Fair	$ 1,200	to	$ 1,500
Good	$ 1,500	to	$ 1,800
Excellent	$ 1,800	to	$ 2,000
Restored	$ 2,000	to	$ 2,500