
CRICKETS & BULLFROGS

by Johnny Duckworth

The ornate floor machines from the turn of the century include two incredible models based on the coin drop technique. The first model to hit the local saloon in 1904 was the “Cricket” produced by the Mills Novelty Company. The Cricket was quickly copied (only months later) by the Caille Company, and they named their new machine the “Bullfrog”. You can only imagine how frustrating that would have been to have someone not only copy your invention but then mock it as well. Caille had named it this way for the simple fact that Bullfrogs eat Crickets.



Caille Bullfrog



Mills Cricket

You can also aim for the fixed jackpot high on the left side, but you will need more than lady luck to hit it. This jackpot which is on both models has an adjustment screw in the back of the cabinet. When turned, it moves the coin entry in or out. When adjusted slightly out, a coin will slide through the slot. You might look at the coin entry from the front and think your coin will fit but only the proprietor would know the real answer.

These overgrown coin drop machines are much like the smaller counter top models; produced from the late 1800's, all the way up through the 1930's. They were designed in the same fashion with a pin field under glass, coin chutes, pockets below, and a single chute for the fixed jackpot on the left side above the pin field.

The Cricket and Bullfrog are very exciting to play as you shoot your coin from the top right side of the machine on a spring loaded plunger into the playfield. You will then watch your coin fall through a maze of pins zigzagging back and forth, in hopes that it will land in one of the nine chutes at the bottom. If your coin does land into one of the chutes, a red flag will pop up in a round window above that chute, and then with the pull of the handle you will dump all the coins from the corresponding pocket into the payout cup below.

These machines were set to rake off anywhere from 10%, all the way up to 75% of the money inserted in them depending on the greed of the operator. There are two metal flaps on the mechanism above each of the payout pockets which can divert coins to the front pockets or the rear cash box. As you can imagine no operator would want to give you your money back, so most of the coins were diverted into the cash box. I have also worked on a Mills Cricket where an operator had moved the pins around on some of the chute openings. This way the coin would no longer fit into those chutes as the operator wasn't satisfied with only earning 75% and he wanted even more.

These models were also found to be fairly simple to cheat and would need to be placed out in the open of an establishment to be watched. A dishonest player could use a simple iron slug in the machine and once shot into the playfield area they could use a strong magnet and control the slug under the glass and move

it to the desired pocket below. A well trained thief could empty your machine in no time if you weren't watching.

Cheating was a problem with all the upright slot machines of that era. Thieves would drill a very small inconspicuous hole through the cabinet in the edge of the wood around the wheel. Then while the wheel was in play they could use a stiff wire to push through the hole and stop the wheel on the color played. The problem with this type of machine however was most of the higher payouts were bugged and there was no way to stop the wheel on a bugged color.

The Mills Cricket and Caille Bullfrog play the exact same game even though they are dressed a little different. The Cricket has some fancy wood carvings on the front cabinet panels where the Bullfrog has added round columns with castings on the left and right side. The Bullfrog also has some ornate cast iron plates on

each side of the cabinet. The plate on the right side is all for show but the plate on the left side has a locking door to gain access to the cash box. Since the Bullfrog was the later of the two machines it does have some improvements. The upper jackpot can be emptied on the Bullfrog by turning a key in a lock on the left side of the cabinet where the Cricket would need the back door removed. One other improvement with the Bullfrog was you can have a coin loaded and played by only using the plunger; this is also spelled out and underlined on the instruction card. The Cricket requires a pull of the handle to load the coin and then the plunger to fire it across the playfield.

Collectors hang onto these old floor machines as they are very entertaining to play and they don't turn up very often. If you ever get the chance to play one, you should try your luck. You will find it very hard to stop and walk away after the first coin is played in one of these great machines.



Bullfrog Coin Head



Cricket Coin Head



Bullfrog Jackpot Release



Cricket Jackpot Release



Bullfrog Jackpot Interior



Bullfrog Jackpot



Cricket Jackpot



Bullfrog Front Plate



Cricket Front Plate



Bullfrog Side Plate



Bullfrog Cash Box Door



Cricket Cash Box Door



Bullfrog on Left



Bullfrog on Right