A Minimalist Way to Identify SAE Sockets, Version 1.3

By R. G. Sparber

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I came up with a potentially useful way to mark Metric sockets. Preliminary tests show that it works. This got me thinking about my SAE sockets. Those fractions are sure a pain.

I used the same strategy as for my metric sockets: multiples of 5 have no dots. All others have a dot for each count above a multiple of 5. For example, 3/8 has 3 dots. 5/8 has no dots. For 7/8, I would have two dots because 7 is 5+2.

I decided to separate the sockets into groups.

On the far left are my ½ and ¾ inch sockets. It didn't make sense to have a quarter-inch category for one socket, so I tossed in the ½ inch too.

In the middle are sockets in increments of 1/8 inch. The one on the left has 3 red dots, so it is 3/8 inch. The one on the right has no dots, so it is 5/8.

The grouping of sockets on the right is in 16^{ths}. The smallest one has 2 dots. This could mean 2/16, but then it would be in the 1/8 inch group. Besides, it would be much smaller. So it must be 5+2 = 7 sixteenths. The middle socket has 4 dots, so this is 5+4 = 9 sixteenths. And the one on the right has one dot, so is (5 x 2) + 1 = 11 sixteenths.

It is understandable if you feel that this is insanely convoluted. Only by living with this scheme will I know if it works for me. I was pleasantly surprised by how well it worked for my metric sockets.

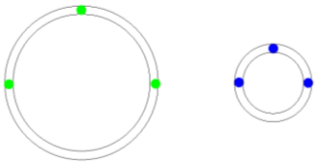
A received a number of winning suggestions:

C.M. "Mike" Wierick and John Herrmann said to use different colors for SAE and metric for those jobs that required both.

Craig Marshall suggested converting all fractional sizes to 32^{nds}. He also suggested making a recess in the socket that could be filled with paint. This could be done with a carbide spot drill or end mill. If five colors are available, the size could be spelled out. John Herrmann made the same suggestion but using 16^{ths}.

Marv Klotz independently suggested everything that others said and then added the idea of using the resistor color code.

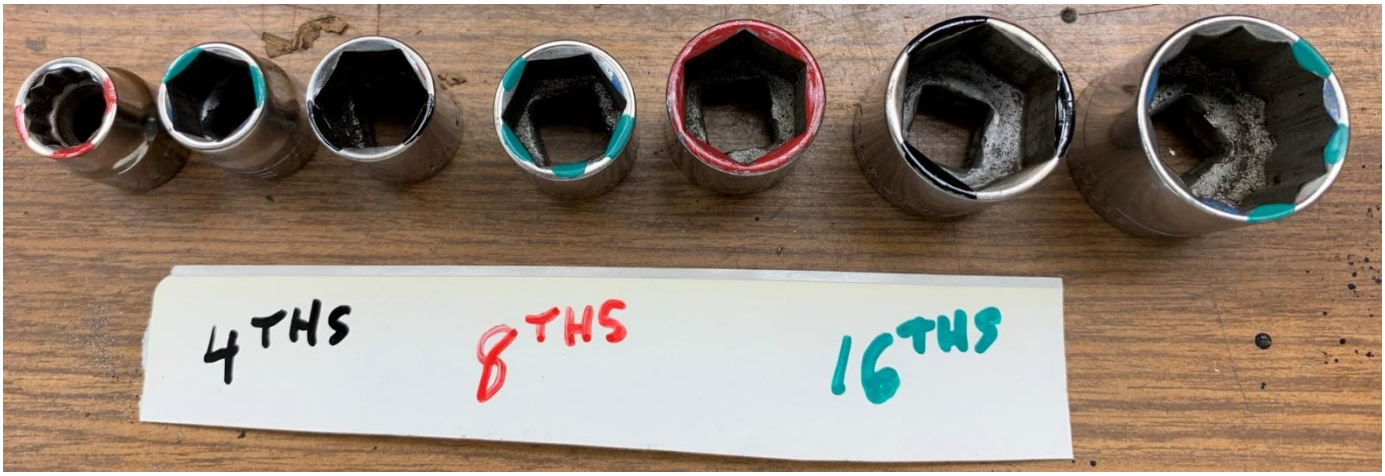
These great suggestions got me thinking about other ways to simplify the markings. Rather than using red dots on all of the sockets, I could use different colors to signify if it is in **halves**, **quarters**, **eights**, or **sixteenths**. For example, 3 green dots means ¾. Three blue dots means 3/8. I would still have no markings on 5/8, 5/16, and 15/16 sockets. My choice of colors was driven by high contrast. I tried yellow, for example, and it was too hard to see.



Dave Kellogg suggested grouping the dots so your eye doesn't have to search so much. On large sockets, the grouping can be repeated. He also pointed out that this scheme can be applied to Allen wrenches.

John Herrmann and Dave Kellogg suggested placing markings on the drive side of each socket too.

Here is a test of using unique colors to represent the denominator. I'll live with it for a while and see if it becomes second nature. Note that I decided to color the 5/8 socket all the way around rather than making it blank.



I do find that not having the color dots at 90° from eachother makes it harder to find them in a glance. Compare the 3/8 socket with the 9/16 socket.

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