

The IPOTAD Collection

The Accented Hair Kennedy Half Dollar

Proof JFK Set

Accented
Hairs

Cameo'd 1964
JFK

Proof Type
Set

PR Commem
Halves

Walker Short
Set

Two Cent
Pieces

Misc Stuff

What exactly is an Accented Hair Kennedy?

The Accented Hair variety of the Kennedy Half Dollar was the first obverse die used to produce the proof coins in 1964. So, of course, it exists only in proof and only for the year 1964.

As the story goes, JFK's widow Jackie Kennedy did not like the design of the hair on the President's bust and demanded that it be revised. Imagine that, a First Lady complains and the US Mint hops to and retools the die just to make her happy!

According to most authoritative sources, approximately 1% to 3% of the production of 1964 proof Kennedy halves are the first obverse die, or the Accented Hair variety. This would put the population at between 40,000 and 120,000 pieces before over 40 years of attrition. (NOTE: My own opinion is that the mintage was somewhat higher).

The Accented Hair tends to be plagued by problems to a much greater degree than the second obverse die; in particular, milk spotting and obverse hairlining. Because of this, it is far more difficult to find in high grade than many realize. Genuine two-sided cameo pieces in high grade are particularly scarce, and high grade deep cameo examples are rare.

The nice thing about the variety is that many dealers either don't know about it, don't care or don't know how to detect it. This makes for some excellent cherry-picking opportunities for those who know what to look for. There are multiple diagnostics used to determine the variety, and I'll go through each of these.

The most frequently mentioned diagnostic is the extra strands of hair above the ear that form what appears to be a wishbone shape. Take a look at the following pictures:





Accented Hair Variety



Regular Kennedy



Accented Hair Close-up



Regular Close-up

On the Accented Hair, there is an extra long strand to the left with a shorter strand running parallel to the right of it about 50% of the length of the long strand. To the right of the ear is a heavier cluster of strands that doesn't exist on the regular coin. This is what forms the "wishbone".

Note that it is common for dealers and collectors to confuse a very strongly struck regular coin with the Accented Hair variety. A strong strike is not what produces the coin, but rather the correct obverse die (#1).

The other obverse diagnostic is that the lower left serif of the "I" in Liberty will be truncated or shortened when compared to the second obverse die (regular Kennedy). Note the difference in the following comparison:



Truncated Serif (Accented Hair)



Normal Serif (Regular)

In addition to the obverse diagnostics for detecting the variety, there are two reverse diagnostics to check. The first is what is known as "broken rays". On

reverse diagnostics to check. The first is what is known as "broken rays". On the Accented Hair variety, the rays that intersect the stars below "UNUM" will appear to be broken:

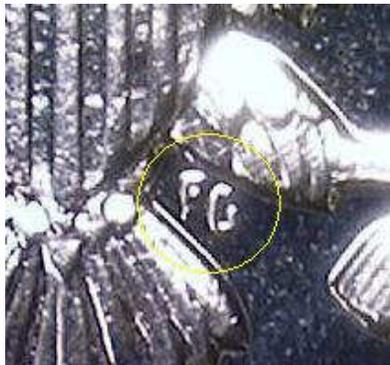


Broken Rays (Accented Hair)

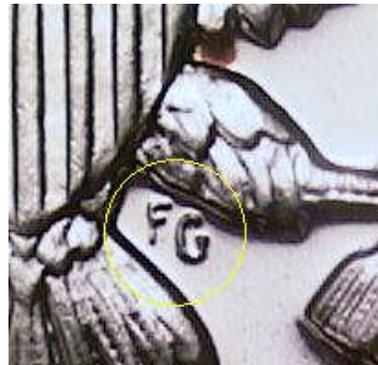


Solid Rays (Regular)

The other reverse diagnostic is known as the "straight" or flat G. Take a gander at these two pictures:



Straight G (Accented Hair)



Flared G (Regular)

Note how the thingamabob of the "G" on the regular Kennedy has serifs at the top, and the G of the Accented Hair has straight sides with no "flair".

Something important to note about the reverse diagnostics is that they are not 100% reliable in determining the variety and should not be used as a stand-alone assessment tool. This is because reverse die #1 was also paired with obverse die #2. These are known as the "transitional variety" and, while rather uncommon, they do exist. Matter of fact, I came across one while shooting the pictures for this page.

There you have it. Everything you ever wanted to know about the Accented Hair, but were afraid to ask. Now, go forth and cherry-pick the hell out of those dealers!