Levi's at the Thrift Store

FREE RESELLER GUIDE | Styles, care tags and condition

By Doug, Reseller Traffic Lab. Adapted from the RTL web guide published October 7, 2026. PDF edition: October 8, 2026.

Start with the model number and fit, but never buy on the number alone. Size, wash, fabric, age, condition and buyer demand can make two pairs with the same model number perform very differently.

Before you buy: check these three spots

Spot	What to inspect
Crotch	Look for rubbed fabric, thinning, wear, repairs or holes. Early wear matters even when the fabric is still intact.
Hems	Check wear, fraying, repairs and alterations. Measure the actual inseam rather than relying only on the label.
Belt loops	Look for loose stitching, tears and repairs at the attachment points.

Factor flaws into the buying decision and disclose them clearly in listing photographs. A flaw alone does not establish whether a pair is worth buying.

A useful research sequence

Identify the style. Check the complete label. Measure the jeans. Inspect the condition. Compare carefully matched sold evidence before buying.

Read the full web guide and view its label examples. Keep this PDF on your phone as a sourcing reference.

Six styles to recognize

This is a recognition list, not a ranking of eBay sell-through rates. Use eBay Product Research or carefully matched sold listings before buying inventory.

Style / fit / fly	Sourcing note
501 Original Straight / button fly	Check fabric, wash, country, age clues, measurements and condition before assuming one pair compares with another.
505 Regular Roomy straight / zip fly	Older USA-made, unusual-wash and desirable-size examples may need different research from ordinary modern pairs.
511 Slim Slim thigh and leg / zip fly	Compare size, fabric content, condition and recent sold listings; the model number alone is insufficient.
514 Straight Modern straight / zip fly	Treat as regular inventory unless another feature creates specific demand.
517 Bootcut Slimmer thigh, wider hem / zip fly	Vintage, USA-made and Orange Tab examples can differ from recent production. Confirm the date and complete model information.
550 Relaxed Roomy thigh, tapered leg / zip fly	Often associated with relaxed 1990s styling, but production spans multiple periods. Measurements and fabric matter.

Actual fits vary by gender, production period, fabric, wash and size. Confirm the individual garment.

Read the complete care label

Photograph both sides. Important numbers may be split between the front and reverse.

Find the style or PC9. The PC9 identifies product style and finish; it is not automatically the production date.

Check the button stamp. On many older pairs, the number behind the top button is a factory code that may also appear on the label.

Identify the tag format. Production codes changed over time. Decode a number only after the label era and layout make sense.

Confirm the conclusion. Country, construction, hardware and other details should agree with the proposed date.

Date-code examples are format-specific

On the particular label formats illustrated in the web guide: 0696 reads June 1996; 0802 reads August 2002; 0304 reads March 2004; and 3Q '02 reads third quarter 2002. Do not apply those interpretations blindly to another label design.

For applicable 1980s MMY labels, 046 can indicate April 1986 and 127 can indicate December 1987. Some later labels use four digits, such as 0988 for September 1988. The label style and surrounding construction must establish the decade.

Compare the actual label-format illustrations in the web guide. These examples do not authenticate a garment.

Older details: clues to research

Detail	What it can tell you
Big E	Original capital-E red tabs generally point to pre-1971 production. Modern reproductions can also use Big E styling; confirm label and construction.
Orange Tab	Introduced for fashion-oriented products in the late 1960s. Later reproductions and revivals mean color alone is not an exact date.
SilverTab	A line strongly associated with loose and baggy 1990s styling. The name has also returned on newer products.
Selvedge	A self-finished denim edge inside the outseam. Regular 501 production largely moved away from it around 1984; later premium and reproduction jeans brought it back.
Made in USA	Remaining U.S. sewing/finishing operations closed around late 2003 and early 2004. Later limited or contracted USA-made products exist. This wording does not establish value alone.
Black batwing care label	A black batwing label appeared around 1991 and overlapped with red versions into the early 2000s. It is a label format, not the SilverTab line.

No single clue is proof. A modern reproduction can combine Big E styling, selvedge and an older-looking patch. Read the modern label before calling it original vintage production.

Sourcing and listing checklist

At the thrift store

[ ] Read the model number and identify the general fit.

[ ] Check whether the jeans are men's, women's, youth or a special line.

[ ] Read the fiber content: stretch blends and 100% cotton can fit and sell differently.

[ ] Photograph the complete label, back patch, pocket tab and button stamp.

[ ] Measure actual waist, rise, inseam, thigh and leg opening.

[ ] Inspect crotch, hems, knees, pockets, zipper and belt loops for wear or alterations.

[ ] Search sold listings using model, gender, size, wash, fabric, country and verified era.

[ ] Compare sold quantity with active competition before deciding what the pair is worth to you.

Photographs and facts buyers need

[ ] Front and back views showing the silhouette.

[ ] Back patch, pocket tab and complete care label.

[ ] Fly and reverse of the top button when relevant.

[ ] Actual measurements, not just printed size.

[ ] Clear photos of wear, repairs, stains and alterations.

[ ] Accurate fabric, country and model copied from the garment.

Sources and further help

These are the research references used by the RTL web guide. Consult the original sources and the complete garment when investigating a particular pair.

Levi's official FAQ
Fit information, Big E background and label history.

Levi Strauss: The Story of Selvedge
Official selvedge history and production changes.

Levi's: What is a PC9?
Official product-code explanation.

Levi Strauss 2003 plant-closure announcement
Primary company statement filed with the SEC.

JeansZa: batwing care labels
Specialist visual examples; conventions require complete-garment context.

Related RTL resources

Check eBay Sold Prices Before You Buy

Vintage Nike Tag Guide

Plaid and Check Pattern Names

Label formats vary by product, country and period. This guide is a research starting point, not an authentication, appraisal or guarantee of resale demand.

Return to the Levi's web guide for its visuals and future updates.