

MARVEL CIRCULATION ANALYSIS

Edition 1.0

July 2003

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INTRODUCTION.

This project is intended to be a follow-up to the circulation data compiled and reported in the *Standard Catalog of Comic Books*¹. It should be noted that although the *Standard Catalog* was used as the data source for this project, it is not endorsed or associated with the *Standard Catalog* in any way.

I became interested in this project when I was visiting some comic book related message boards on the Internet and came across a thread discussing the impending return of Rob Liefeld's *Youngblood* characters. Most of those who posted on the thread were very negative towards Liefeld, and Liefeld himself felt compelled to post to the board. In one of his postings, he argued that his run on *Captain America* was not a failure, and that sales for his run on the title were higher than they were before he took the reigns. After looking up the numbers in the *Standard Catalog*, I was surprised to find that he was in fact correct!

While perusing the Catalog, it became clear to me that the circulation numbers would be easier for me to follow if they were presented as graphs rather than just text. The *Comics Buyer's Guide* used to run occasional graphs using Marvel's circulation data, but those graphs weren't reprinted in the *Standard Catalog*. Moreover, comparisons between different titles were not presented, and I felt that might be interesting.

This project is intended to grow in stages, and should be viewed as a work in progress. Over time, additional data will be culled from the *Standard Catalog* and added to this document. As unusual or interesting circulation patterns come to light, they will be highlighted in the text accompanying each graph.

How to read the graphs. At this time, three different types of information have been used to create the graphs in this project: average annual paid circulation (as reported in the Statement of Ownership); direct market orders; and Diamond Comics pre-orders. The caveats for the Statements of Ownership and Diamond pre-orders are described in detail in the *Standard Catalog of Comic Books*. The *Standard Catalog* does not define "Direct Market orders," but I assume that these represent data from Heroes World at the time that Marvel was trying to self-distribute its publications.

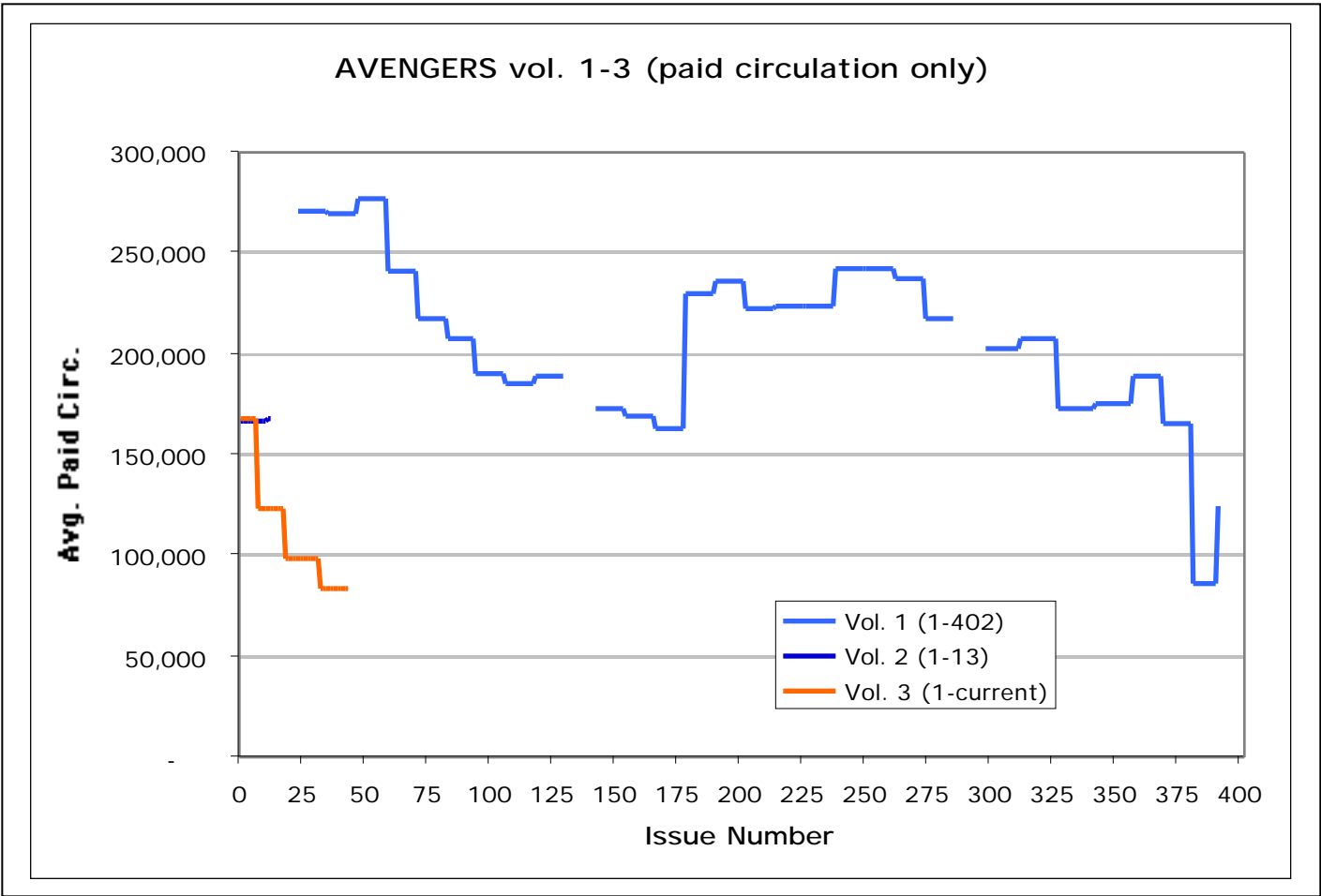
¹ J.J. Miller, M. Thompson, P. Bickford, and B. Frankenhoff. 2002. The Standard Catalog of® Comic Books. Krause Publications. ISBN 0-87341-916-2

Data that comes from Direct Market orders or Diamond pre-orders is clearly marked as such in the graphs. Circulation data that is not marked should be assumed to be from Statements of Ownership. In most cases, missing data is allowed to interrupt the plotting on the graph, and this is why many of the graphs have gaps in them.

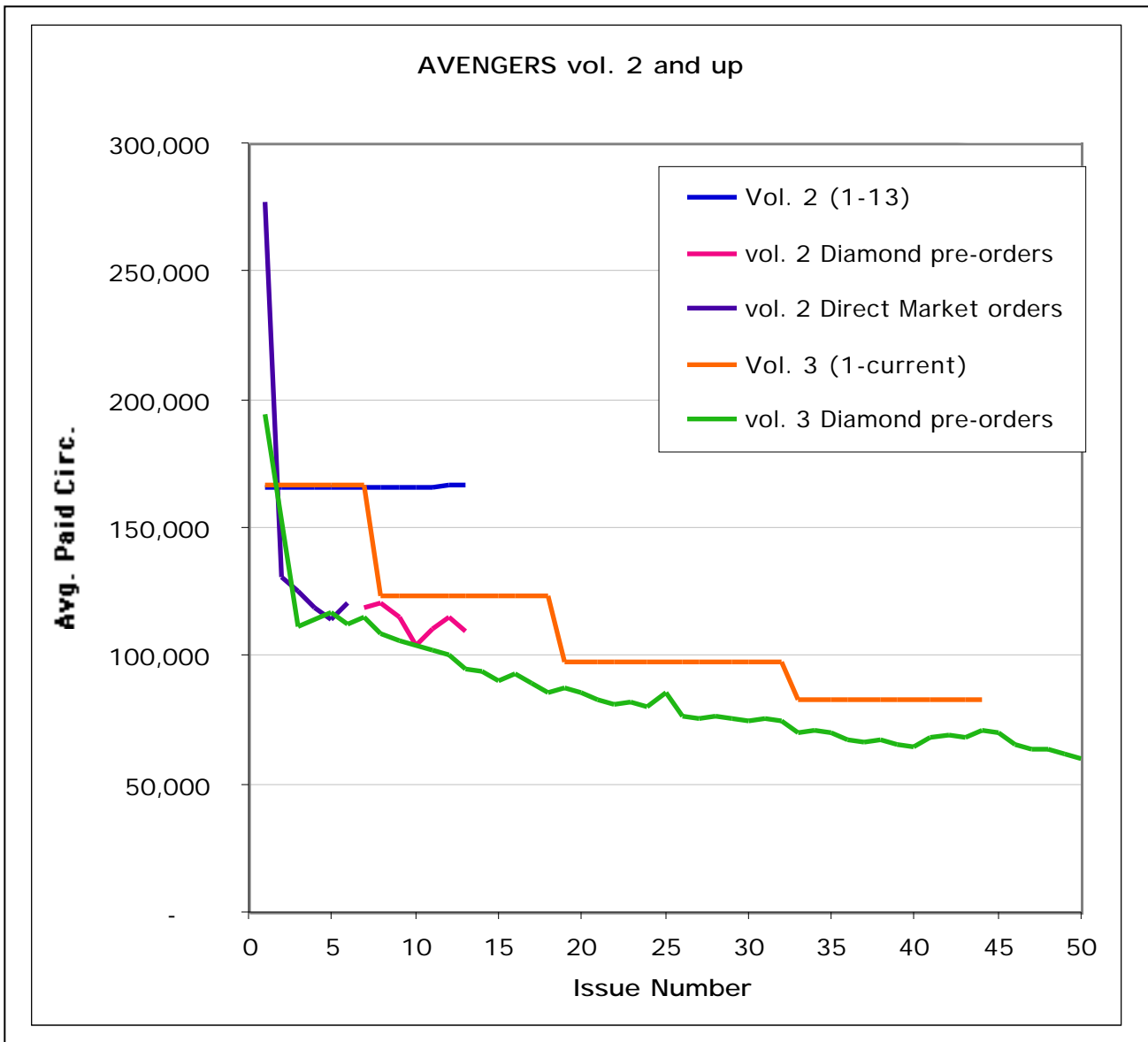
Circulation for most Marvel comics in the early 1960's will probably never be known with certainty. Statements of Ownership at the time did not need to be filed in the first year of a publication's history, and the filing date was October. Thus, many titles didn't have Statements of Ownership published until 1965 or later.

Most graphs have "issue number" on the x axis. It is important to remember that issue numbers are not necessarily directly correlated with time. For example, some titles shifted from monthly to bi-monthly frequency, some have had short spurts of bi-weekly publication. Thus, a particular distance on the x axis does not necessarily correspond to a particular length of time.

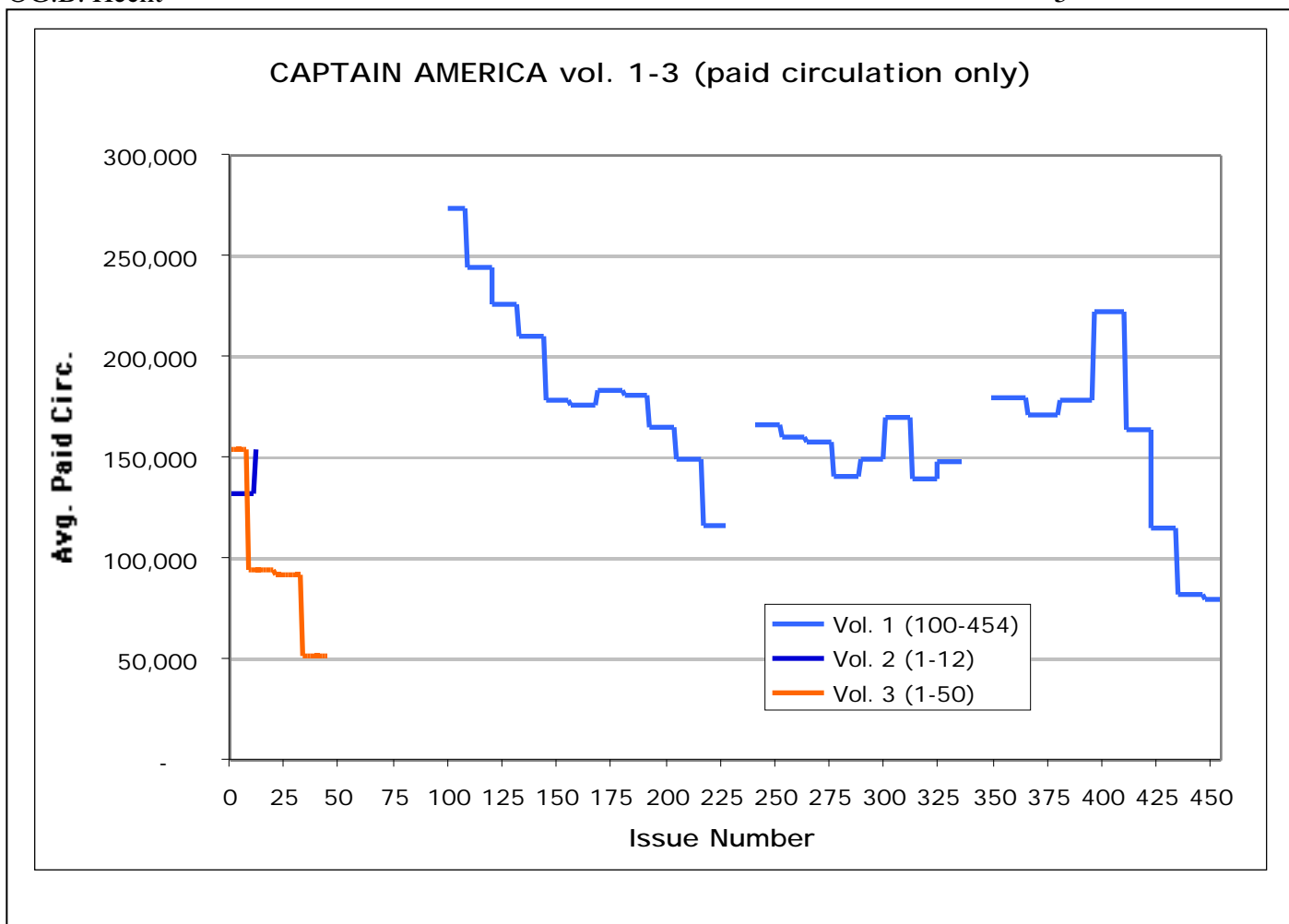
A few graphs will have time ("year") on the x axis. In these cases, it is important to remember that a given distance on the x axis does not always correspond to a constant number of issues published for a title.



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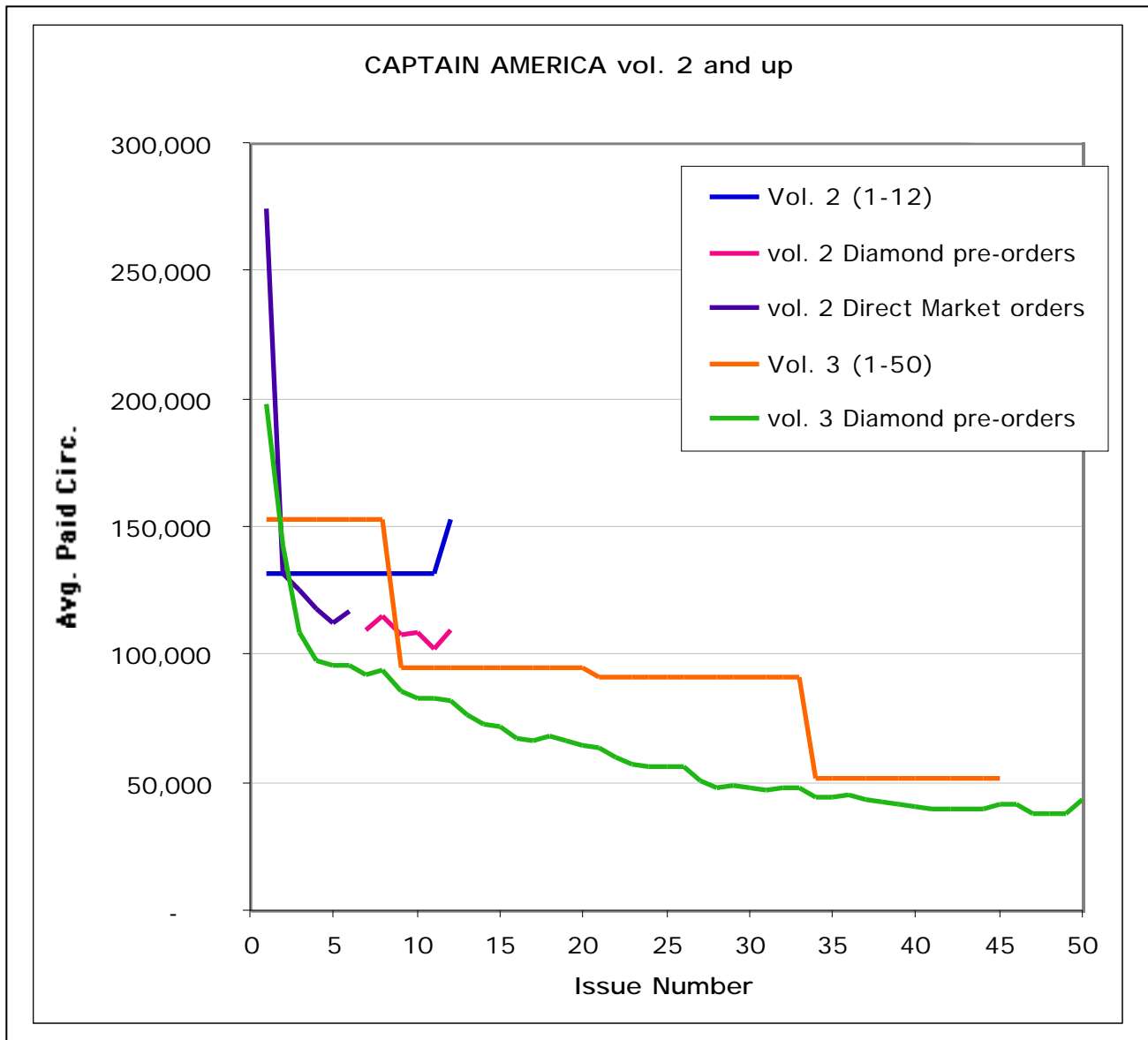


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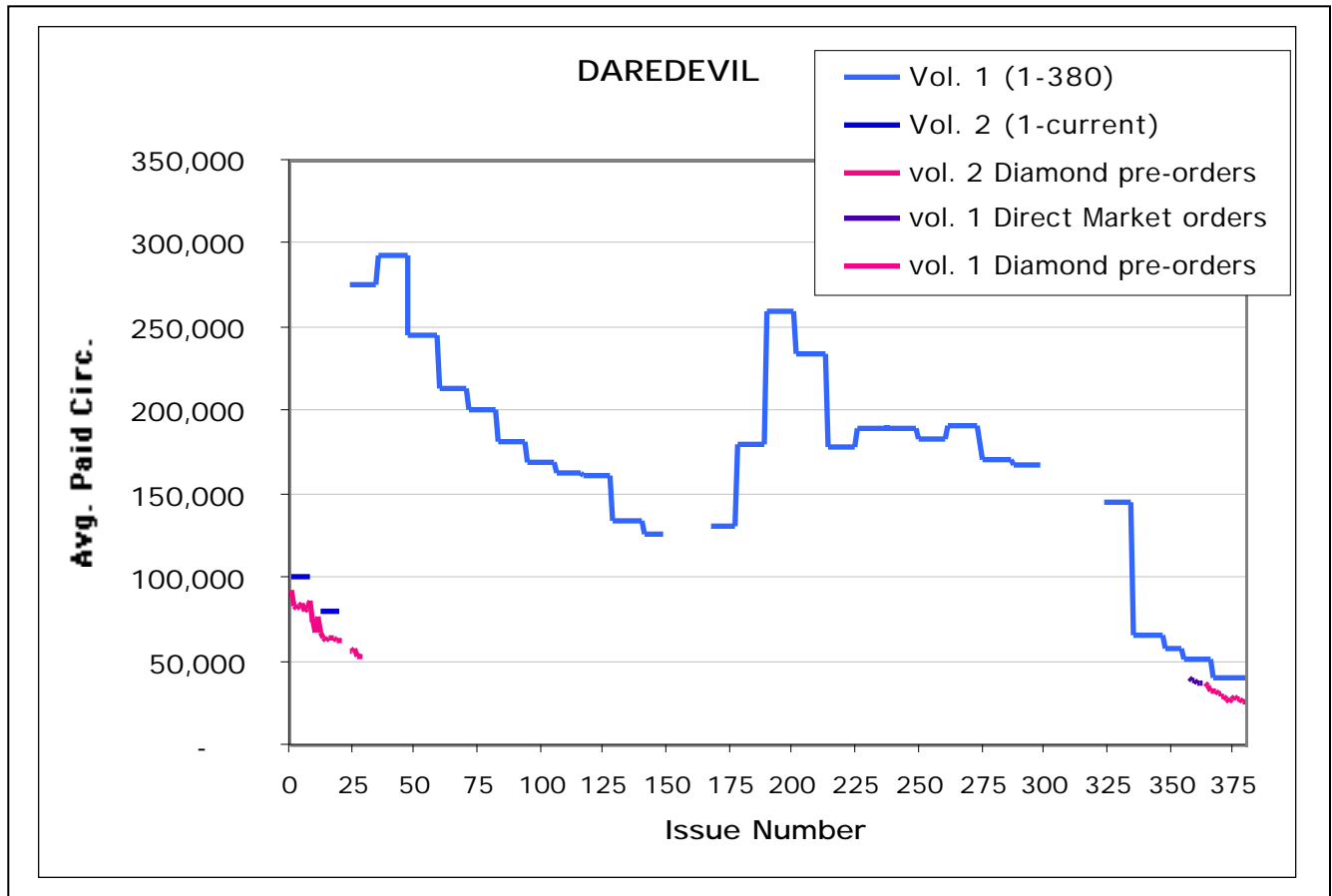
This chart shows only the total paid circulation numbers. The next page shows another chart with more details regarding volumes 2 and up (which would have been too crowded for this chart). The peak around vol. 1 #400 reflects the overheated comic book market of the early '90's. It is interesting to note that Jack Kirby's return to the title in the late 1970's (#193 - #214) does not appear to have boosted sales. Given how the "Heroes Reborn" issues were trashed by the critics and the fans, it is surprising to see that sales actually were higher for volume 2 than for the last couple of years for volume 1.

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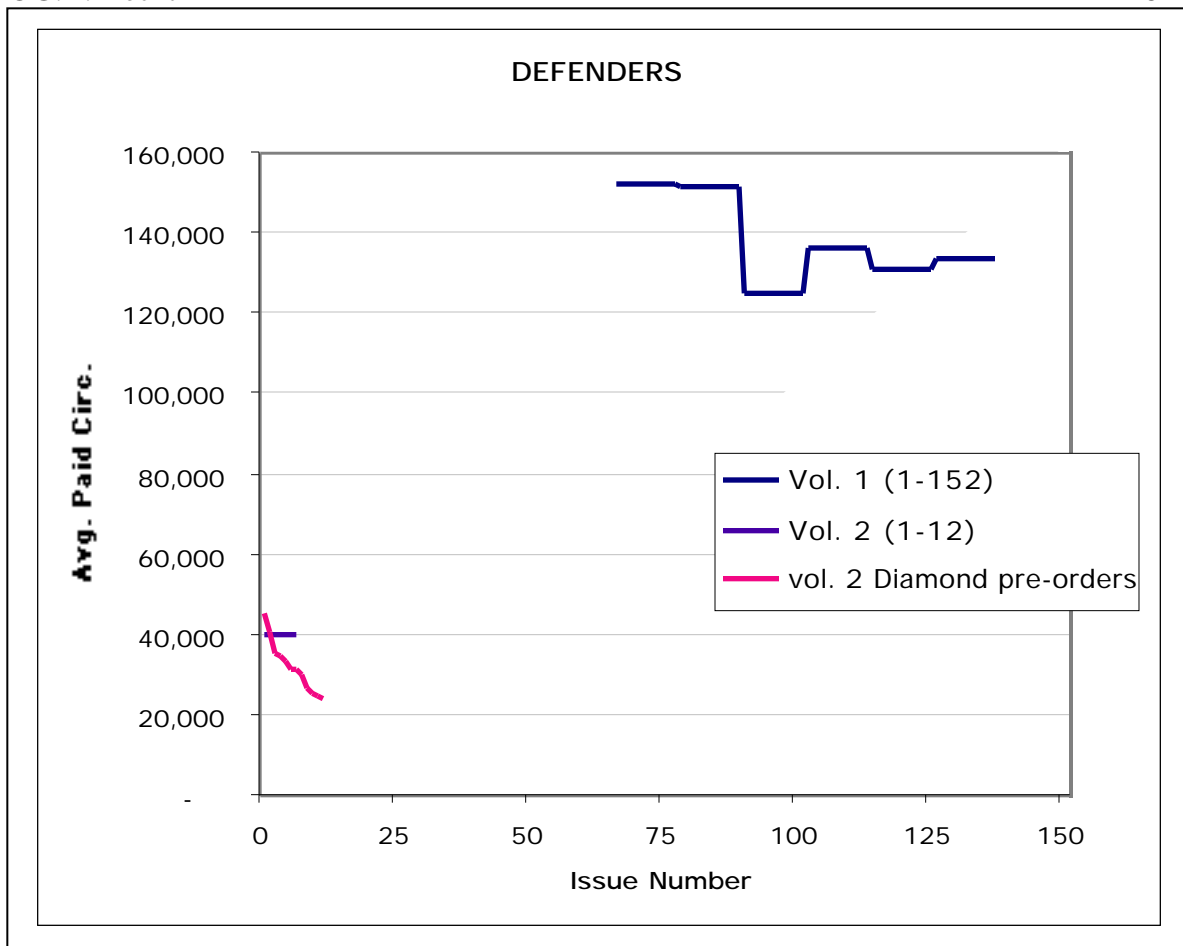
This chart shows volumes 2 and 3. Undoubtedly the average paid circulation for volume 2 was boosted by the high order volume of Rob Liefeld's first issue. In spite of the negative reaction to the "Heroes Reborn" run, every one of those issues was a better seller than the bulk of the volume 3 series.

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The spike between vol. 1 #175 and #200 coincides with Frank Miller's initial run on the series. The comics industry crash is very visible after #325; this title seems to have suffered more than many other Marvel series.

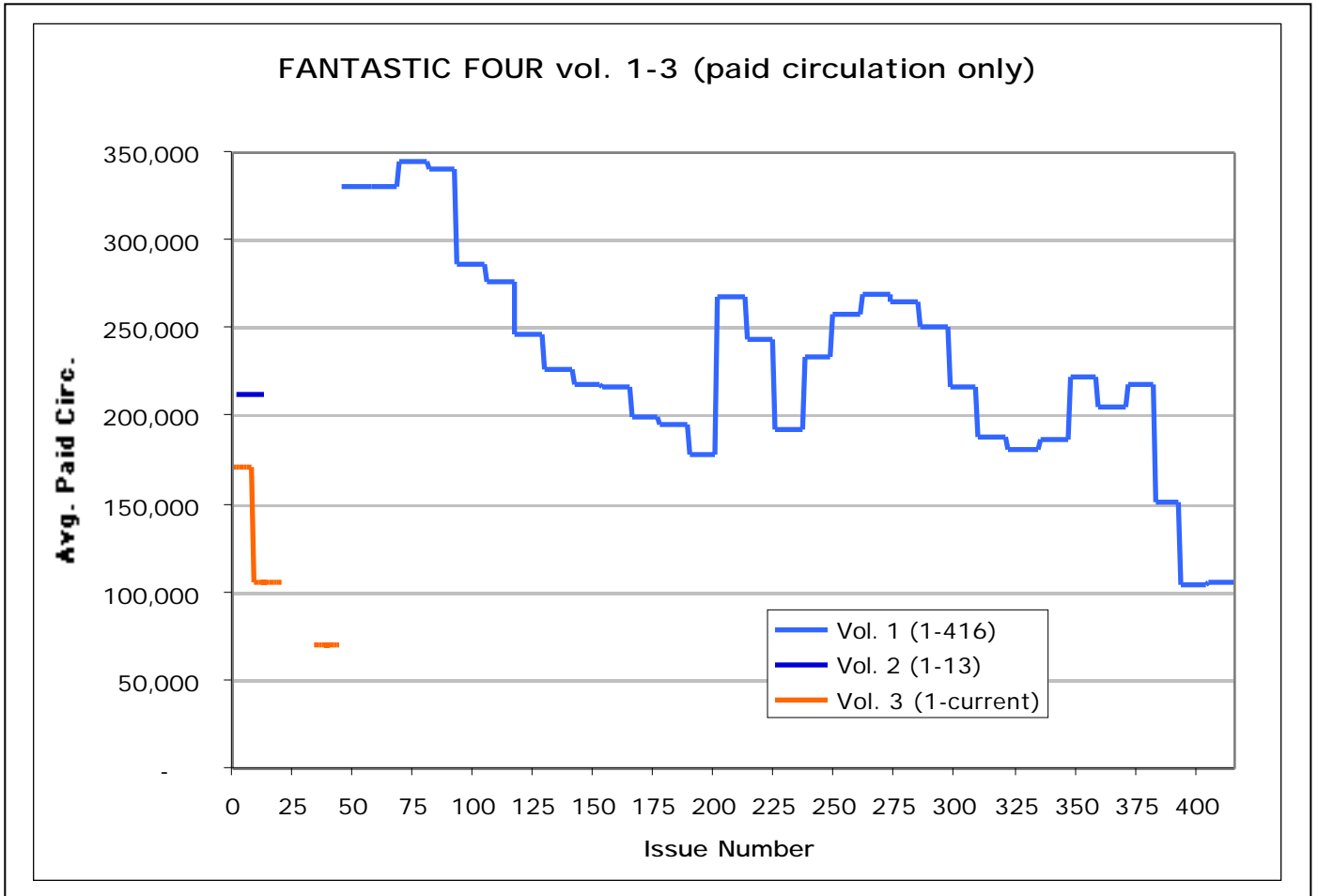
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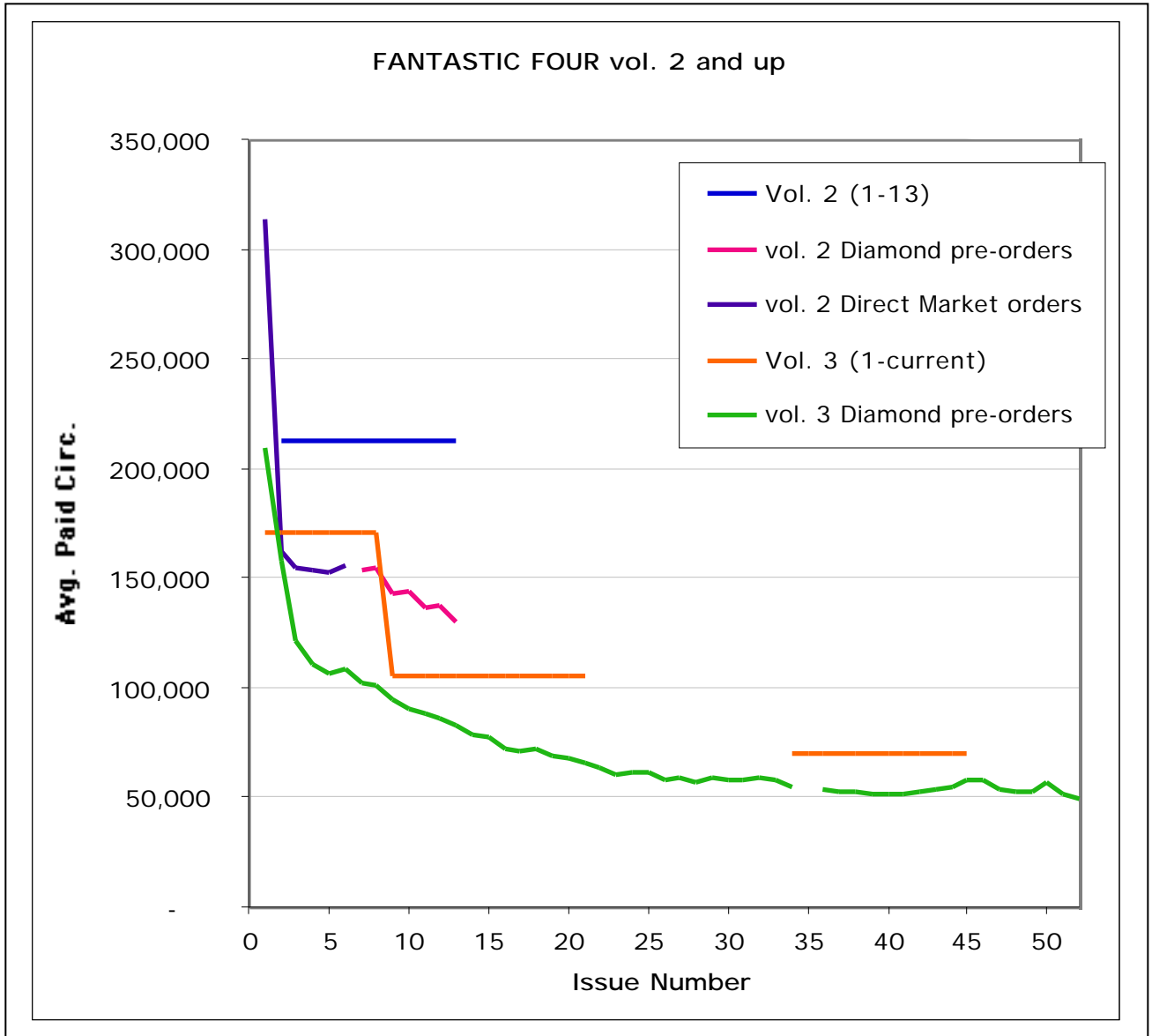
It is interesting to note that even though Defenders vol. 1 was generally considered a "second tier" title at best, its sales numbers eclipse the sales figures of the best-selling titles of 2003 from any comics publisher.

If I find the data, I will include "The Order" mini-series (which was "sub-numbered" as Defenders vol. 2 #13 - #18).

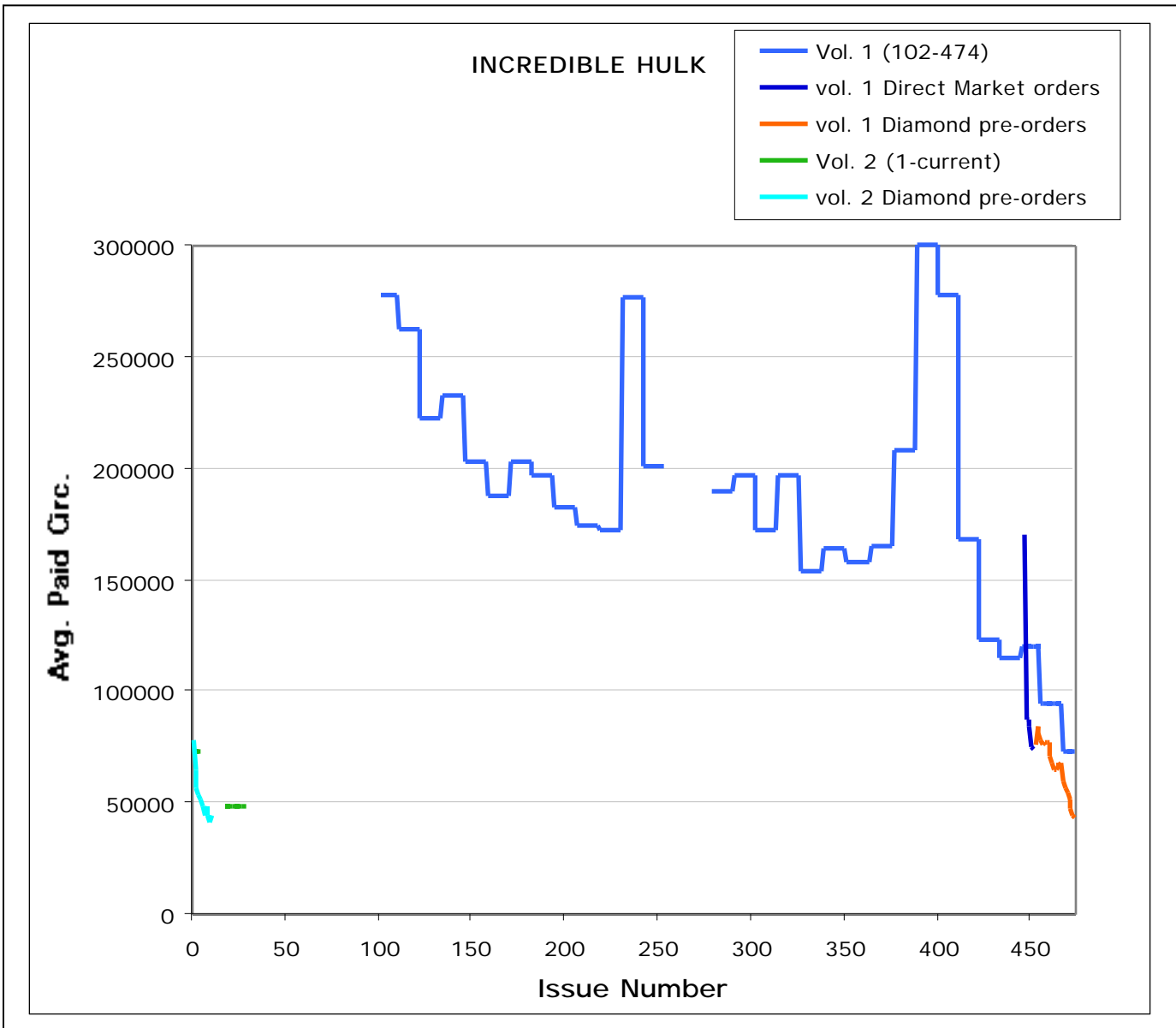
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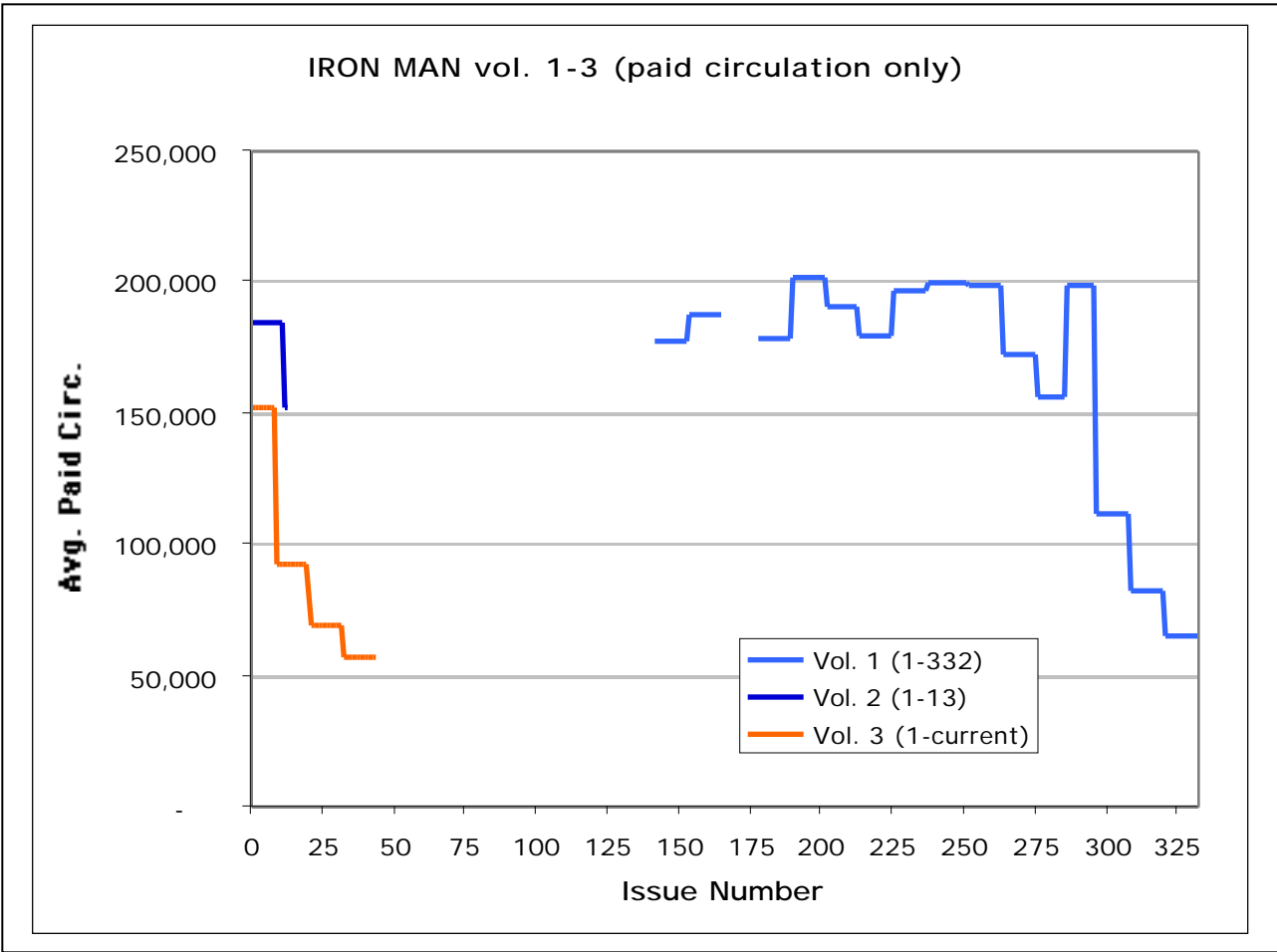


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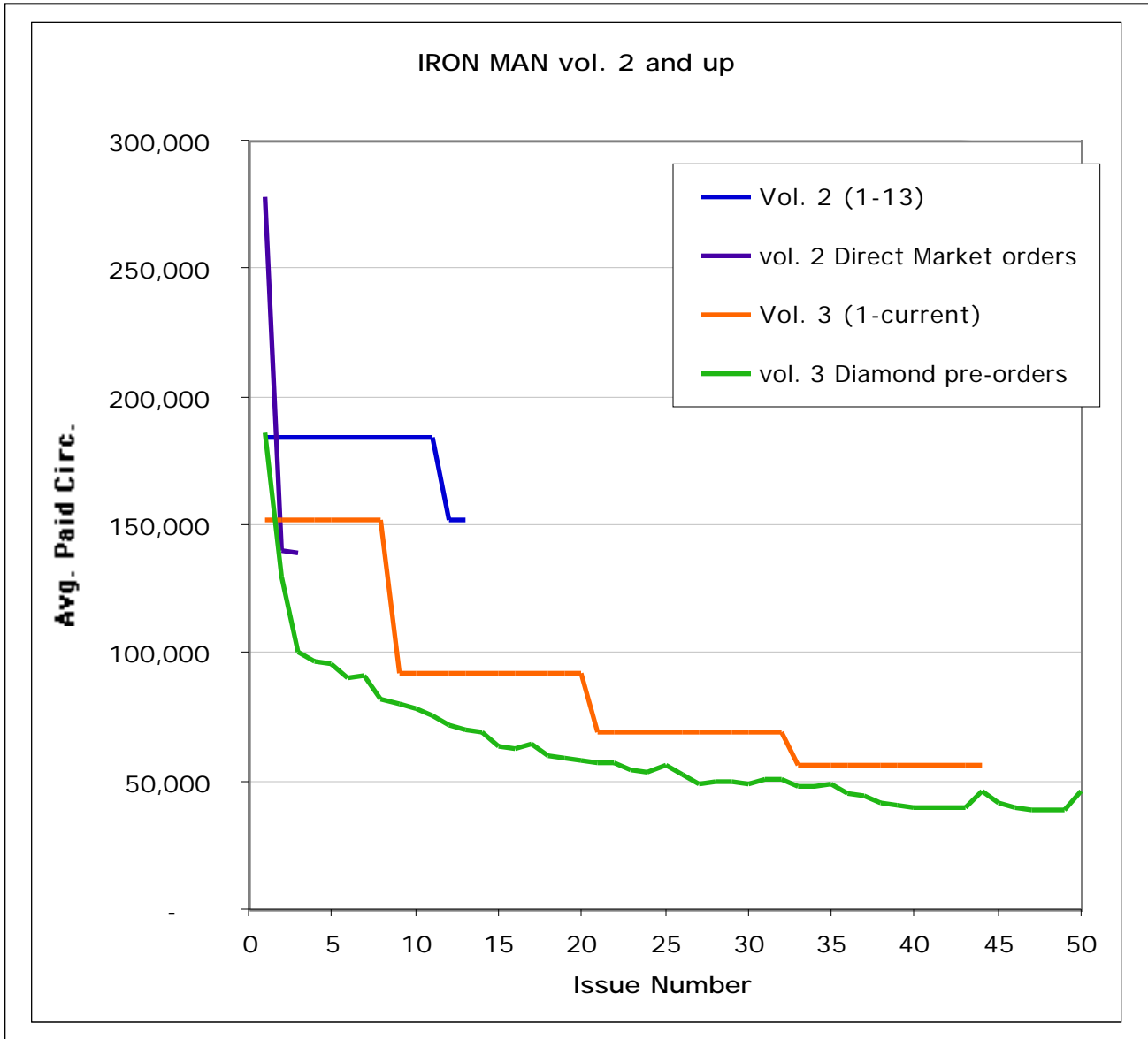


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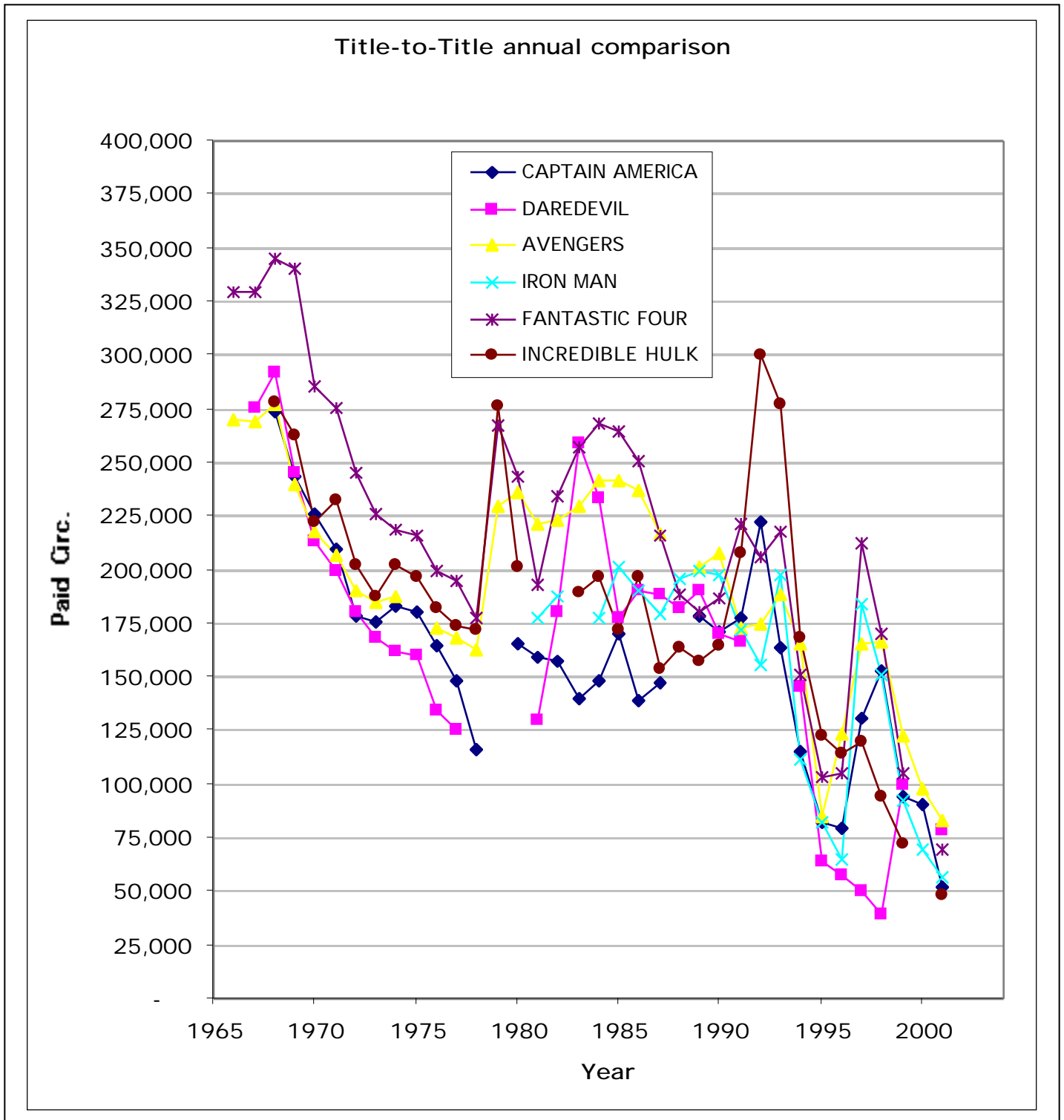
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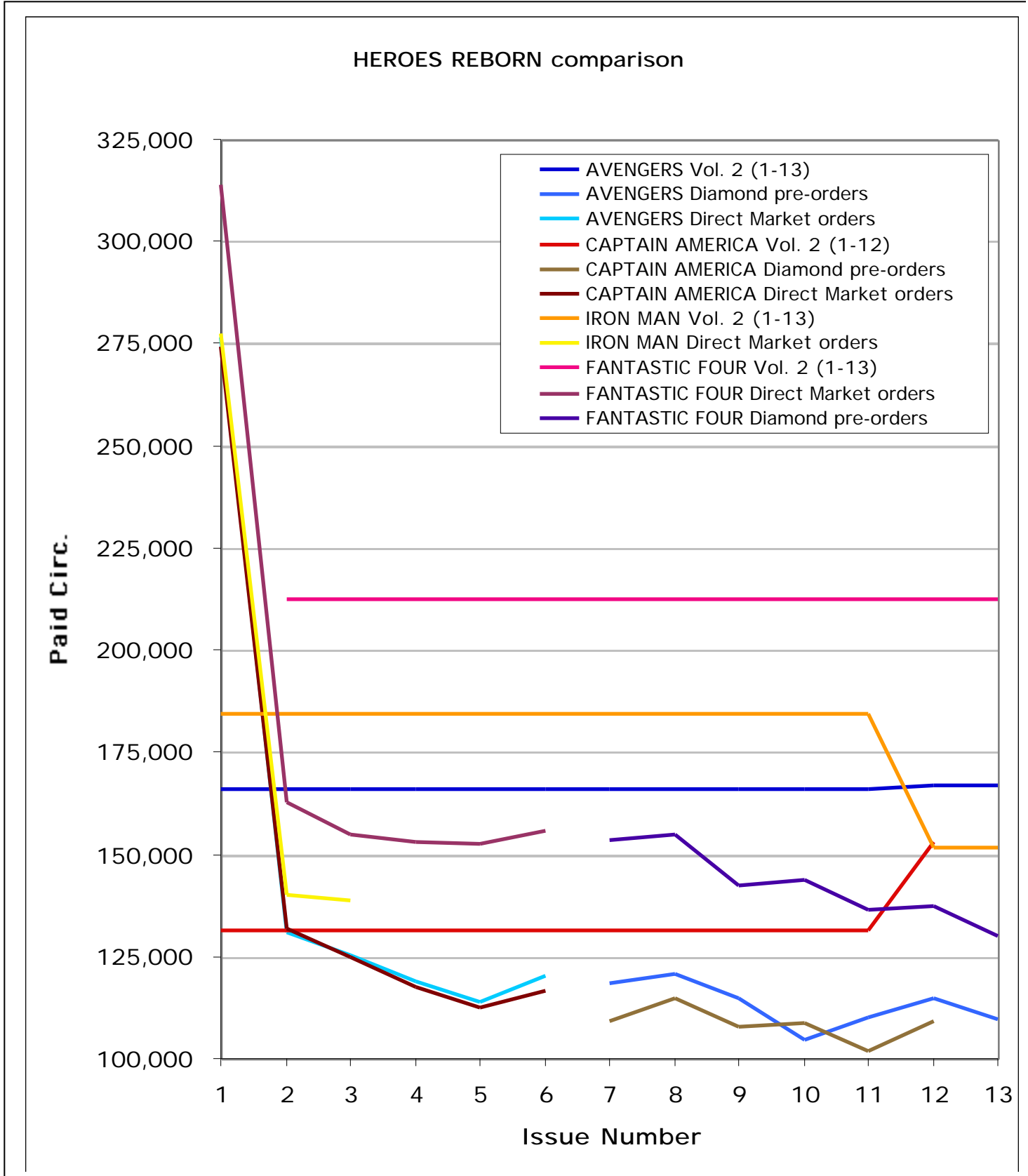


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This graph shows paid circulation on an annual basis. For this chart, horizontal distances are scaled to time, not by issue number. As major series are completed in this project, they will be added to this graph. In addition, an mean paid circulation for all graphed comic book series will be included in the graph (the rationale is that circulation events for a specific title need to be interpreted differently depending upon whether or not they are contrary to the sales trends of the entire publishing line).

Last updated 7/03.



Note that detailed Iron Man circulation numbers are not available.

Last updated 7/03.