

## Courtesy of Jerry Bell, Australian

From experience, the main areas of confusion are the former Communist Eastern European countries, the Far East, the many English written labels with no country on them, and those from Arabic countries. There are, of course, always a few labels that defeat everybody. My observations are based on the 80/20 rule; that is, they will apply to 80% of the labels found. We start with Eastern Europe.

**BULGARIA (a):** Bulgarian labels are written in Cyrillic (Russian) script, and post-WW2 labels always have a string of words and numbers which starts with what looks like bAC (actually BDS) 1103-52, which is probably a match manufacturing standard number, and in the illustrated label, this is followed by the word “KIBRIT”, which means matches in Cyrillic script. English language labels normally say “Made in Bulgaria”.

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA (b,c):** Post-WW2 labels from Czechoslovakia generally show SOLO (the match organisation), followed by the factory name, such as, in the illustration, LIPNIK, SUSICE, SMERCINA and ISKRA BB can also be commonly found. Whilst most English language labels say “Made in Czechoslovakia”, quite a few have a “key” symbol, as in illustration “c”.

**FORMER EAST GERMANY (d,e):** English language export labels usually have a small capital “R” (Riesa factory) in one corner, and no country of origin. Post-WW2 labels for the domestic market usually say “Zundholzfabrik Riesa”, or “DZA Coswig” somewhere in the wording, also DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik).

**HUNGARY (f):** On post-WW2 labels, look for MSZ (Magyar Szabvány) and 30 or 40f (probably filler, their currency). English language labels for export are very difficult, as they often have no distinguishing marks and no country of origin. The commonest, which has many varieties, is “The Spark”.

**POLAND (g):** Post-WW2 labels always have the string of words and numbers, starting with ZPZ plus the factory, in this illustration “Gdansk (Danzig)”, followed by 64 ZAP (Zapalky) 25 GR (groschen). English language labels normally say “Made in Poland” quite clearly.

**RUSSIA (USSR) (h,i):** In post-WW2 labels, there is nearly always a string of words, symbols and numbers. Look for the match manufacturing standard number, in this case what looks like roct (actually gost) 1820-45. There are several different ones, and they all look like dates. In addition, there is usually the factory name (o-ka is short for fabrika (factory)), and in this case it is “GIGANT” (giant). Collectors should bear in mind that there are around 20 Russian factories, and the same label may exist with 10 or so different factory imprints. Of course, Russian labels generally written in the Cyrillic script, except for some souvenir export sets, and in this latter case, the factory is normally on an outside box which contains a dozen smaller boxes.

Quite frequently, pre-WW2 export labels from the USSR did not mention a country of origin, particularly those exported to the USA, but a small “A”, for ARCOS, their overseas trading company, can be seen in one corner, as in illustration (i).

When **Latvia (j)**, **Lithuania** and **Estonia** were part of the USSR, their labels followed the same

# Identification

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pattern, except that the Cyrillic script was only used for exports to other parts of the USSR, as they used Roman script domestically. Therefore, the same string pattern and standard number as for USSR, with the factory name in Roman script, will come from one of these three countries. The major factories in these countries were “Baltija, Kometa and Vesuvz” (Latvia), “Kaunas” (Lithuania) and “Viljandi” (Estonia).

**ROUMANIA:** There is no fixed pattern or string of symbols for post-WW2 Roumanian labels. Look for Chibrituri (matches) or Bucuresti (Bucharest, the capital) in the text as one possible clue, otherwise they are very difficult to identify, except that the lettering is Roman, and the words used have a more Italian flavour, as the Roumanian language is a Latin language, related to Italian, French and Spanish rather than the more usual Slavonic languages of Eastern Europe. Export labels usually say “Made in Rumania”, but some only say “Deanta SA”.

**FORMER YUGOSLAVIA (k,l):** Look for the DRAVA symbol. DRAVA is the name of the factory, and DRAVACA is the word for matches. The DRAVA symbol often appears on many export labels also, It should also be remembered that part of the former Yugoslavia, Serbia, used the Cyrillic script, and labels which do not contain the strings associated with Bulgaria and the USSR often come from Serbia. The Cyrillic rendition of DRAVA, which looks like DPABA, is illustrated in illustration “l”.



*Ed Note: I'm sure you could use much of the same information to identify matchboxes and matchcovers from these countries, as well.*

*Labels are really interesting; they have all attractions of our own matchbooks (except being domestic), go much further back in history, cover a much broader scope of the world, are much cheaper and more available...and yet... there's almost no interest in labels among U.S. collectors... Hasn't been since the early days pre-dating the hobby here. Why is that? Can't read most of them, I suppose. Plus, interest disappeared here in the 1930s and has never been reestablished.*