

How To...Work With Brittle Strikers

Ohhhh, what a frustrating problem! Here's this really old matchbook, perhaps even pristine in all ways except one, that you'd *really* like to add to your collection...but...the striker has turned brittle. If you try and remove that striker, you already know that there's a fairly good chance that the striker is just going to break apart in pieces...and there goes your cover!

Unfortunately, I don't have some secret solution that only us 'veterans' know about...and I've never heard of one, either. Perhaps this discussion will bring one out of the woodwork, but, as far as I know, trying to remove a staple from a brittle striker is just plain Russian Roulette.

You *can*, perhaps, enhance your chances somewhat by running a piece of tape across the back of the striker before you try and open the staple and press it out, but that's ify, as well. You can always hope that the staple is so rusted that it just falls apart without any pushing, etc.. That *does* happen sometimes.

But, just as I raise your spirits with that slim hope, our scenario worsens--This is an old Diamond cover, and the striker material has been applied right *over* the staple! Now, you're *really* in trouble! The only way to get to the staple is dig into the striker (ouch!) You can't just try and pull the staple out from the back because the prongs are on the front side, and, without opening them first, pulling from the back will just break the striker.

If this is a cover you value, unless you're feeling lucky, I'd suggest you just leave it be and keep it as a full-book. I have a number of covers in this category, including some DQs, Licensed Match No.7's, 1939 World's Fairs, Diamond Safety First, etc. I'm just not willing to take the chance.

I'm not being much help, am I? Well, the brighter side of the picture is that the vast majority of brittle strikers you're going to encounter in your collecting career *won't be* full-books. They'll already be stripped covers...*much* easier to deal with, although care is definitely called for.

Here, the breakage can come from 1) handling the cover, 2) trying to fit it into a slotted page (always a hazard), 3) sliding it into a plastic pocket, and 4) even turning the album page once the cover is in it!--anything that applies undue pressure to the striker.

- 1) Avoid handing the cover as much as possible, always staying away from the striker portion.
- 2) *Don't* put this type of cover into a slotted page.
- 3) Slide the cover into the plastic pocket by holding it with a pair of stamp tweesers (the ones that have the wide ends, not the pointed ends)
- 4) Before you do *anything* with such a cover, lay a strip of scotch tape over the back of the brittle, thus holding the whole area in place in case anything *does* happen. (Make certain you cover the entire affected area) (I prefer scotch tape because when it gets too old to do the job, it simply becomes loose and falls off (years later), with no damage to the back of the striker; then you replace it).
- 5) If you're going to have the cover in a plastic pocket, you can give it additional support against any bending by making sure there's another cover at its back, in the same pocket. However, be aware that that 'snugness' is probably going to make it tougher to put the cover in the pocket or take it out.

If anyone has other tips, solutions, ideas, send them in...*please!* I've certainly ruined more than one good cover in my time!