

The Evolution Of The American Girlie

Girlies have certainly become a mainstay of the hobby, and they have been for some 50 years. A 2007 *Insta-Poll* showed Girlies as the third most popular category with collectors.

Well, the darlings have been around a lot longer than 50 years. I don't recall personally seeing any 1920 covers with a Girlie, but, then, how many 1920s covers does one see? The Girlie catalog has one 1920s Girlie single (#2717). By the 1930s and 1940s, though, they're definitely there. I have a dated 1938 singles Girlie (a bathing suited gal at the beach), for example. But, it was the stock Girlies that the '30s brought to the forefront. By the 1950s, certainly, all the major match manufacturers had their own stock Girlie graphics for the customer to choose from.

In 1938, Superior came out with the first Girlie set, at least the first Girlie model set. There may have been some earlier Girlie stock drawing sets. In any event, after that, Girlie stock sets mushroomed over the next 30 years. Superior, Advance, Arrow, Chicago, Diamond, Lion, Maryland, Match Corp., Ohio, and Universal all churned them out. American, Brown & Bigelow, and Republic jumped on the bandwagon in the 1960s.

By the end of the 1950s, the typical stock model Girlie set was beginning to give way to the stock photo Girlie set (goodbye Elvgren, Petty, Thompson, and D'Amario!). Eventually, the latter would be superseded by single photo Girlies, which is basically what we have today. At the same time (1950s), Girlie Single issues began to really flourish from individual businesses, rather than from stock manufacturers' sets.

But, it's also interesting to look at how Girlies have changed over the years with respect to 'social mores.' Any Girlie collector, certainly, can attest that during the 1930s-1950s, 'girlie' humor was rife sexual innuendo, and such covers were widespread throughout many business types, not just bars and so on. That's when the stock Girlie cuts were at their height. Afterwards, that type of stock humor seems to have quickly declined until it reached a point where it's almost non-existent now.

Also, the stock model Girlie sets from 1938 to the end of the 1960s are clothed—skimpily, perhaps...but clothed! The 1970s ushered in the nude! But, even the nude had its evolution. At first, although there was some frontal nudity (topless), most of the models were usually posed in some discreet fashion, but, by the late 1970s, the nudity had become more blatant (no beach balls!) Later, we have full-frontal nudes.

Now, there are some few exceptions to all this. Arrow had come out with a set of photo nudes way back in 1950, for example, but such *are* exceptions.

Getting back to the earlier humorous stock Girlie cuts discussed above, one might argue that such humor began to decline because the late 1950s became more prudish, but certainly, by the 1980s, the Feminine Movement had made such humor politically incorrect.

Paradoxically, looking at a chronological array of Girlie covers over the years, the trend is entirely reversed. The classic pin-up girlie covers of the 1940s-1950s gradually give way to full-nude photos. It should be noted, however, that, even with this reversal, Girlie covers remain much less common since, say, the 1960s to the present as compared to earlier periods. In fact, one might also rightly argue that the biggest single purveyor of Girlie covers over the last 40+ years has been the hobby, itself.