

BACK-STRIKER - FRONT STRIKER - REVERSE STRIKER

Recent reader inquiries have set my mind to wondering once again...this time in the direction of Back-Strikers, Front Strikers, and Reverse Strikers. I suppose it all could be somewhat confusing to newer collectors.

In the some 123 years since the invention of the beloved matchbook, manufacturers, at one time or another, have toyed with the striker in any number of ways—putting it on the inside, putting it on the outside; permanently affixing it to the cover, making it removable; thin strikers, wide strikers; positioning it on the top panel, the back panel, the base, or even customizing the position (as in the case of Odd-Strikers).

Front-strikers were the standard for the American match manufacturing industry up until 1973. These are matchbooks which have the striker on the top flap, so that when the matchbook is folded properly the striker is on the same face as the front panel.

In 1973, government legislation mandated, for safety purposes, that the striker henceforth be moved to the back panel, thus putting in on the reverse side of the matchbook (hence, 'Reverse-striker'). The transition, though, actually took several years, as manufacturers were allowed to use up previous stockpiled supplies. The last U.S Front-strikers were issued in 1978.

But, the industry had already been dabbling in Reverse-strikers for several decades prior to the 1973 law. These 'early' Reverse-strikers are referred to by hobbyists as "Back-strikers". These were first regularly produced in 1938 by Ohio Match Company, I believe. Technically, then, any Reverse-striker prior to 1973 can be referred to as a Back-striker, but I think most veterans think of Back-strikers as the

older Reverse-strikers from the '30s, '40s, and '50s.

Back-strikers, by the way, certainly weren't limited to 20-strikes. If you peruse your Lion 21 Features and Lion 30-STICKs, for example, you'll see lots of 30-strike Back-strikers, mainly from the '40s and '50s.

There are a few collectors who collect Back-Strikers as a separate category in and of themselves, but, for the most part, they usually end up as just covers in other collections. So, if you look for them, that's where they'll be.

