



by
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When we think of “Giant,” we immediately call to mind Diamond, or perhaps even Universal, but, as it turns out, we’re being much too provincial in our thinking. The giant of the match industry is probably not even known to most American collectors, but it has been the largest manufacturer of matches in the world for over 70 years! Who is this giant? The Swedish Match Company!

Amazingly, the the birth of the Swedish Match Co. paralleled the same process that gave birth to the Diamond Match Co. By 1880, the American match industry was being torn apart by fierce competition between companies, and, because of that, 12 companies, including America’s two largest, merged to form Diamond. Across the Atlantic, the Swedish match industry, already dominating the world market, was also suffering from severe infighting between competing companies. By the turn of the century, it was agreed that, for continued success, an amalgamation of Swedish manufacturers into a single entity was the solution. Thus, in 1903, the three Lowenadler factories, the old Jonkoping Factory, the Uddevalla Factory, and subsequently the large **Vulcan** Factory at Tidaholm all joined, and the Swedish Match Company was born [*The Vulcan Factory, by the way, was the largest in the world by 1923*]. Later, the Company acquired the Vanersborg Factory and the Junebro Factory at Jonkoping.

Still, a considerable number of Swedish manufacturers, some very active, were operating outside of the new Swedish Match Company, and this is where Sweden’s wiz kid, Ivar Kreuger, came into the picture. In 1913, he put together a conglomerate of these independent companies, forming the Forenade company. Now, Sweden was divided between the two giant organizations. In 1917 [*on December 7th, ironically*], the two giants merged into The Swedish Match Co., Ltd. of Stockholm. The Company now owned the factories, the necessary forest lands, the paper and lumber mills, the machinery works...everything that was needed to produce matches.

At the same time, Swedish Match, like Diamond, was making huge technical advances in match

production. By 1923, the majority of all mechanical improvements in match production had been introduced by Swedish inventors, not the least of which was Alex Lagerman, the “Thomas Edison” of Sweden. He not only invented the best match-making machinery of his day, but printing machinery and a brand new type-setting machine, as well.

And, by 1923, Swedish Match and its subsidiaries were cranking out 10 million boxes a year, each containing an average of 60 matches. That equaled 30,000 matches a second and corresponded to one match per day for every person in the world. A full one-third of the world’s match production was originating from Swedish Match. Swedish Match factories were producing these matches under 9000+ different labels [*Oh, my aching trademarks list!*].

In 1932, in connection with what was known as the Kreuger crash, STAB suffered a major liquidity crisis, and it was not until the 1940s that the group recovered.

In 1980 – after 63 years – Svenska Tändsticks AB changed its name to Swedish Match AB.

In 1992, Swedish Match introduced a unique, environmentally friendly product; THE SULPHUR-FREE MATCH. Harmful heavy metals has been removed, and the group’s matches consists mostly of renewable raw materials.

Today Swedish Match’s Swedish operations are run in Vetlanda and Tidaholm. The Vetlanda factory manufactures semi-finished products such as printed outerboxes (skillets) and matchsticks without heads (splints). The Tidaholm factory completes production of finished boxes of matches which are exported to around 80 countries all over the world.

Over the ensuing decades, Swedish Match had its ups and downs, which isn’t surprising considering it had to survive the Depression and two world wars...and the grandiose plans of Ivar Kreuger [*but that’s another story*]. Suffice it to say, today, Swedish Match is *still* the world’s largest manufacturer of matches, and, incidentally, the third largest producer in the world of lighters. Currently, it has factories in 26 different countries and a world-wide sales organization. Its main office is in Nyon, just outside of Geneva, Switzerland.

In the late 1990s, Swedish Match was looking to really enter the US market in a major way, but I don’t think anything ever came of it. One certainly doesn’t see much Swedish Match material here. Too bad. With all the Universal fancies a think of the past, Swedish Match products would be very popular with collectors on this side of the ocean, especially their incredible die-cut covers, which are much more customized than the Jewelites ever were.

In 2010, Swedish Match and Scandinavian Tobacco Group (STG) created a global company with leading market positions in cigars, pipe tobacco and fine cut tobacco.

Swedish Match also sponsors the annual Swedish Match Cup [*a sailing competition*] and maintains a web site where events, photos and results are posted. Just do a search for Swedish Match Cup.

Every day, Swedish Match manufactures around 5 million boxes of matches in Sweden alone, which is equivalent to around 250 million matches. 2 % of the production is sold in Sweden, while the rest is exported.

[<https://www.swedishmatch.com/Our-company/Company-history/Swedish-Match-AB/>]