

Strikers

by
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Strikers are essential in collecting. Not only are they required for the matches to actually work, but the condition of the striker is the primary factor in determining whether or not the matchcover is collectible. If the striker has been used, the cover isn't collectible (although many collectors will use such as place holders in their albums until an unused version of the cover can be found.) In fact, some early collectors in the 1930s used to cut the strikers off their covers, ruining them forever (by today's hobby standards, at least).

Strikers can be found in a number of different positions on the matchcover. The very first matchbook (1894) had the striker inside the matchbook. When Diamond bought the rights to the invention, the striker was immediately moved to the outside. Almost all matchbooks thereafter had the striker on the outside front...until 1973. It was then that the government mandated that the striker be moved to the outside back. Manufacturers were allowed to use up their existing stock, though, so that last of the older versions were issued through 1978.

But, the striker has been in other positions, as well. An early Diamond type featured the striker at the bottom of the folded matchbook. This base-friction type didn't last very long.

On the Odd Striker version, the striker is integrated into the advertiser's design on the cover. It can appear anywhere on the front or back panels and in any shape. The most famous issue of this type was the World War II Patriotic cover where the striker made up the seat of Hitler's pants! And in error covers, the striker is frequently to be seen...back on the inside!

The size of the striker has also changed over the years. Early on, the striker material was hand-applied, leading to slanted and uneven strikers. During this period, Diamond also was applying the striker material over the staple, making it very difficult for collectors to remove the staple without digging holes in the striker. Later, machine-applied strikers resulted in even, standardized strikers. Also, in the beginning, compared to today, strikers were noticeably larger ('wide-strikers'; normally 7-9 mm). This was standard until the latter 1930s, when vending machines became common. The then standard matchbook was too large to fit vending machines, so the length of the cover was shortened...and the size of the striker with it. Hence,

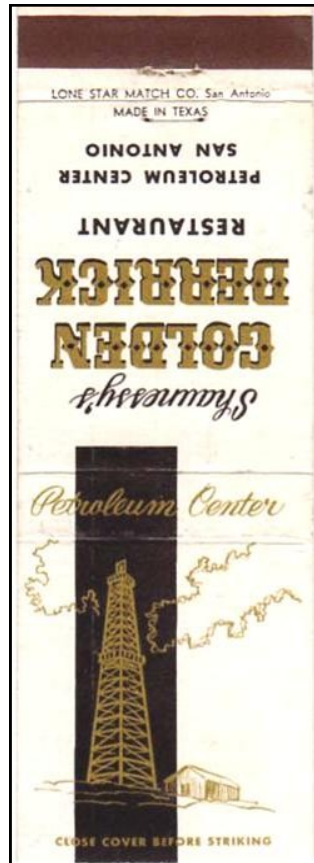
the standard striker today is 4-5mm.

99.999% of matchbooks have always had the striker glued or otherwise chemically 'adhesived' to the cover, but the Owname Renewable Matchbook Co. (1925-1940s) tried holding the striker to the cover with just the staple. Probably a cost-saving measure, but it never caught on.

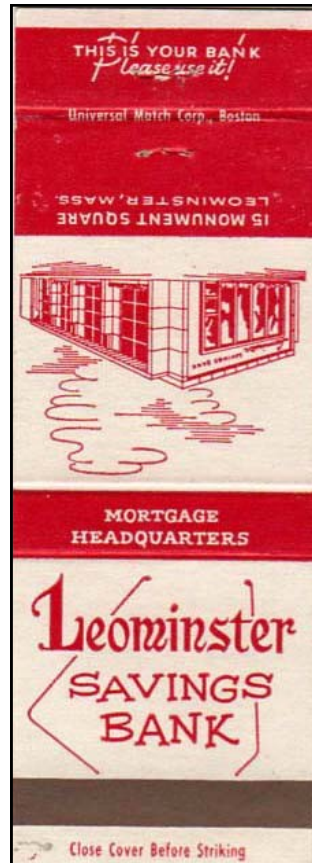
The actual make-up of the striker has always been pretty much the same abrasive material, but foreign issues sometimes use a variety of other materials, some of which look like coarse sandpaper.



Wide Striker



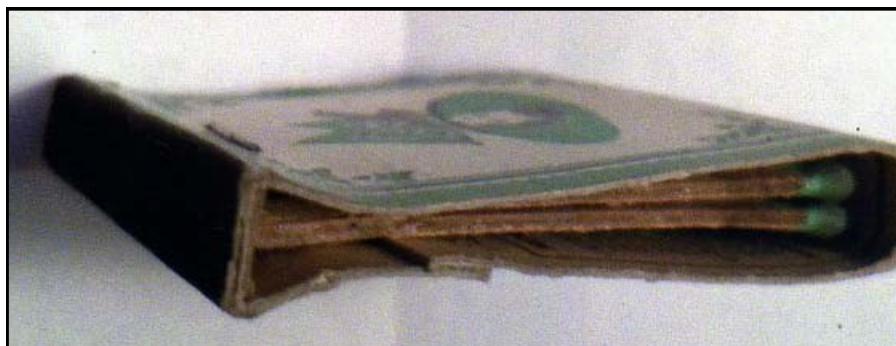
Modern Striker



Bottom Striker



Odd-Striker



Base Friction