

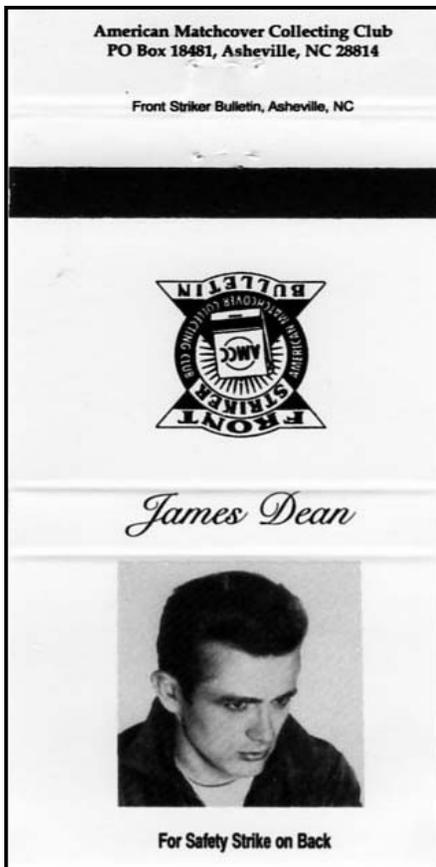
James Dean: The Legend

This year marks the 43rd anniversary of the death of James Dean, and last year the Post Office issued a commemorative stamp in his honor, but who *was* James Dean, anyway? He was only 24 when he died on the highway near Paso Robles, California, on September 30, 1955, and he had only made three movies...and only *one* of those had actually been released before his death. Is this the stuff legends are made of? You bet!

Dean was a promising actor, and his death was front-page news. It was the 1950s, when young people were expected to respect their elders and obey the rules. But even during his short lifetime, Dean was widely known as a nonconformist—a rebel who had taken Hollywood by storm and who did as he pleased. For young people coming of age, Dean was someone with whom they could easily identify with: an outsider, a loner, the antithesis of everything a well-behaved youth was supposed to be.

From the day of his death, it seemed that young people would not let him die. A fan mail agency had to deal with the deluge of mail that poured into the studio. A record, *His Name Was Dean*, put out on a small label, sold 25,000 copies in a single week. Mattson's, a Hollywood clothing shop, received hundreds of orders for red jackets identical to the one worn by Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and Griffith Parth, where scenes from the movie were shot, became an almost overnight tourist attraction. Admirers lined up in the Observatory, hoping to sit in the same seat Dean had used in the film.

Some fans refused to believe Dean was dead. Walter Winchell printed a rumor in his column that Dean was disfigured but still alive. Other stories insisted that it had been a hitchhiker who had been killed and that Dean had been placed in a sanatorium.



Dean's popularity wasn't lost on Hollywood's movie moguls, either. Aided by studio press releases, fan magazines printed stories with titles such as, *You Can Make Jimmy Dean Live Forever* and *The Boy Who Refuses to Die*. Even today, visitors come from all over to visit his grave in Fairmount, Indiana, the small farming community where Dean grew up. A licensing company, run by lawyers, markets James Dean calendars, postcards, and ashtrays around the world...Like Elvis, James Dean will be with us a long time.

His three movies: *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *Giant*.

[Martinetti, Ronald, "The James Dean Story," <http://www.americanlegends.com>

