

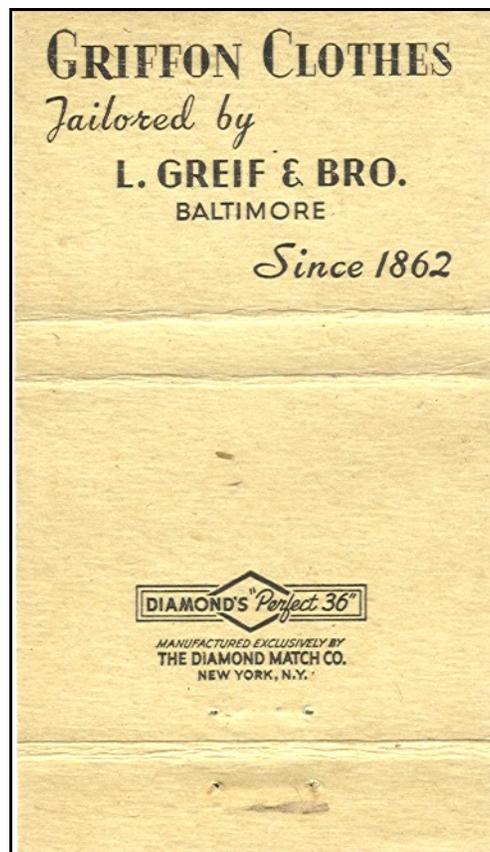
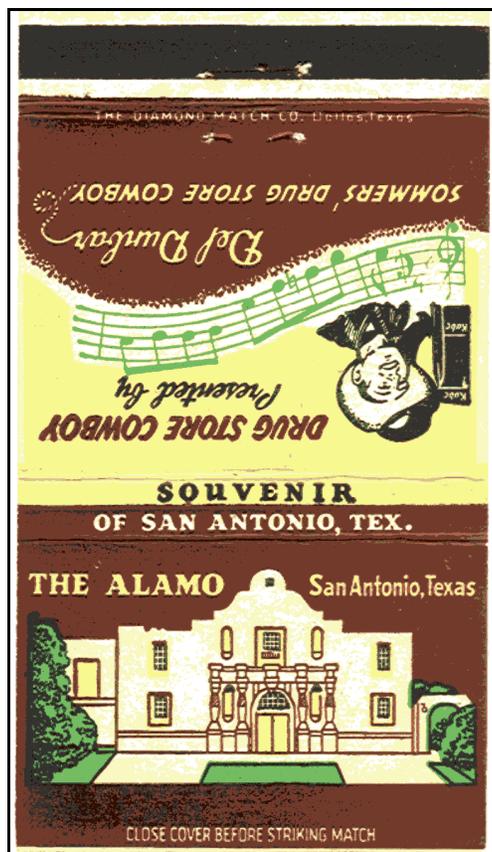
Diamond's "Perfect 36"

by
Mike Prero

What's smaller than a 40-strike, but bigger than a 30-strike? A "Perfect 36!" What's a Perfect 36, you say? No, I'm not talking about your last girlfriend. It's not surprising that you may be a somewhat hazy on the term; it may even be altogether new to you. After all, you could have blinked and missed its entire span

of production. It's one of those deliciously unique classics that people such as myself write about in wonderfully glowing terms to make sure you know what you missed out on!

As can be seen by the manumark to the right, "Perfect 36" was a trademark of the Diamond Match Co. Each cover measured 2 1/2" x 4 6/16" and held 36 matches, hence the name. Most of the covers carry the trademark on the inside, but not all do. For identification purposes, however, the latter fact doesn't matter since no other cover in the hobby is that size. Often, even an experienced collector won't

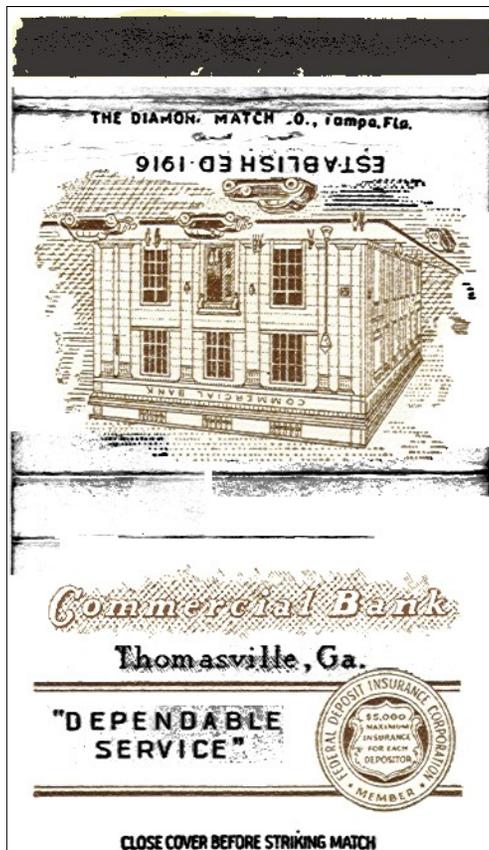


notice what the cover actually is until he or she tries to mount it on a pre-cut 40-strike page and notices that it's too small to fit.

The Perfect 36 may have been Diamond's answer to the 30-strike; Oname had introduced the 30-strike size in 1935, but that size hadn't become common until after World War II. The 20-strike had always been the staple of the matchcover industry, and the 40-strike had been around since 1931, courtesy of the Advance Match Co. Clearly, both Oname and Diamond thought that there was a market to be tapped for an intermediate size. But, History is clear as to which size proved a success and which didn't. By the end of 1951, production of Perfect 36s had halted...forever! It certainly wasn't the first Diamond innovation that had gone bust, but that was one of Diamond's strengths. That aggressiveness kept Diamond in the industry longer than any other match manufacturer in the U.S.

Well, what makes the Perfect 36 so collectible, then? They're not particularly attractive covers. Most are multi-colored, but nothing fancy like a Cameo. The artwork certainly doesn't come close to the heralded art of the Crowns or Lion's 30 STICK or 21 FEATURE. Aside from the odd size of the covers, themselves, there's no 'gimmick'...no pop-up display on the inside, no feature sticks, no odd-striker, no easel-back, no special veneer, etc. So? Have you guessed what their collectibility is based on yet? (I gave you hints in the preceding paragraphs).

That's right!....RARITY! (comparative rarity, anyway) The covers are all at least 54 years old, were distinctly unpopular in their day (much to Diamond's chagrin), and were only produced from 1948-1951. That adds up to exactly what we see today...very few Perfect 36s. No one can say exactly how many were originally produced, but, relatively speaking, it couldn't have been many, and only a fraction of that number still exists today. So, they're seldom seen, and that means that they'll always be in demand by knowledgeable collectors. Of course, many 'ignorant' (sorry) collectors will save them also, simply because they're different.



So, how many such covers comprise a "good" collection? I have no idea! The data base information just isn't available. I have 183 in my collection, but the largest collection that has been reported is that of Al Wolf, NJ—430, as of February, 2005. John Williams maintains the listing on these, and the last time I heard, there were 612 listed. Number-wise, then, this is a fairly small small category, especially considering your chances of obtaining all 612 known issues!

And, understandably, it's a tough category to collect in. You don't normally see them in auctions and almost never in trades. Your best bet is to advertise your interest and hope that contact is made with enough collectors that the covers come trickling in over a period of time; that usually works with most categories, but I must admit that most of mine came as a gift from a veteran collector. Also, keep an eye peeled for estate sales through various clubs, AMCAL, and RMS.

I have a grand total of fifteen available for trade if you happen to have fifteen others. You'll probably find that most traders also wish to trade in kind for these gems. Hang in there, though...you never know what will come your way.