

To Crease, Or Not To Crease....*That Is The Question!*

At its most basic aspect, a matchcover is a piece of rectangular cardboard with a striker and a staple. The cardboard, itself, is divided by collectors into the front and back panels, and the intervening space is called the saddle. We also distinguish between one side and the other with the designations 'inside' and 'outside'. That's certainly not many physical parts, all in all, when you consider how many thousands of hours the average collector devotes to collecting them. And, the position of the striker notwithstanding, as if to add insult to injury, most collectors don't pay much attention to any of the parts of a matchcover, being much more interested in the design printed on the cover....What's the manumark? What's the category? Is there a date? What about a footer?

But I, being the veteran matchcover nerd that I am, am aware of yet another part of the matchcover yet to be mentioned...the crease! Yes, the crease! There it sits on either side of the saddle, unheralded and in almost all cases usually unnoticed. It gets no respect. And yet, the guy who originally came up with the idea probably got a raise and a promotion!

Still, we're not concerned with the inequities of life, here. No, what's of import to us is the answer to yet another of those wonderful little mysteries the hobby has to offer...*When did the matchbook industry start creasing its covers?* Because, although many collectors, especially our newer apprentices, may simply have assumed that covers have always been creased, that isn't the case at all. Indeed, covers weren't machine-creased for the first few decades of their existence. I've checked full-book Diamond Approved Match #7s, Diamond Match's, Diamond Safety Firsts, Diamond Quality's, Crowns, etc. No machine-creases. [Note that one has to distinguish between natural creasing (from use) and machine-creasing] So, when did it start?

I've gone through my Dated collection, which is sizeable enough, I believe, to give reliable results, and the earliest machine-creased cover appears to be a 1936 Universal 20-strike. In 1937, there's a Diamond 20-strike [I'm only looking at domestic covers here; there is a 1937 Bryant & May coronation cover which is machine-creased]. Still, machine-creased covers remain rarities through the ensuing years, all the way up to 1951, when they become exceptions to the rule, but no longer rarities. And, perhaps notably, they're still Universal and Diamond covers.

By 1953-1954, machine-creased covers are common, still mainly Universal and Diamond, but other manufacturers have joined the bandwagon (Ohio, Chicago, Lion, some Match Corp. etc). It's difficult to discern if machine-based covers had become the norm by the mid-1950s, simply because there were so many issues from Monarch, Superior, and Mercury during those years, and those three companies seems to have been the last major hold-outs in the march toward machine-creasing.

Still, by the late 1950s, machine-creasing had become the norm, even appearing on Monarch, Superior, and Mercury covers.

I must admit, though, even after 3½ decades of collecting, I don't really see what the impetus was to machine crease covers—What was the advantage? It can't be keeping the cover from rubbing against the matches because that doesn't happen with non-creased covers either...and neither process keeps the inside back panel from touching the match heads. I'm assuming there was some tangible advantage...enough to warrant the addition of an additional stage in the production process and the resulting additional machinery.

Can anyone enlighten me?