

SMOKING INTERNATIONALE!

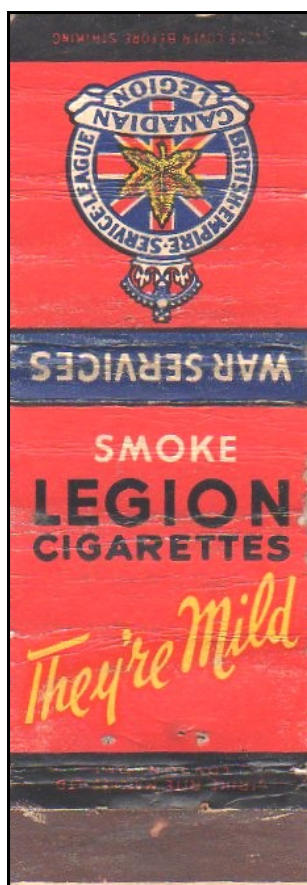
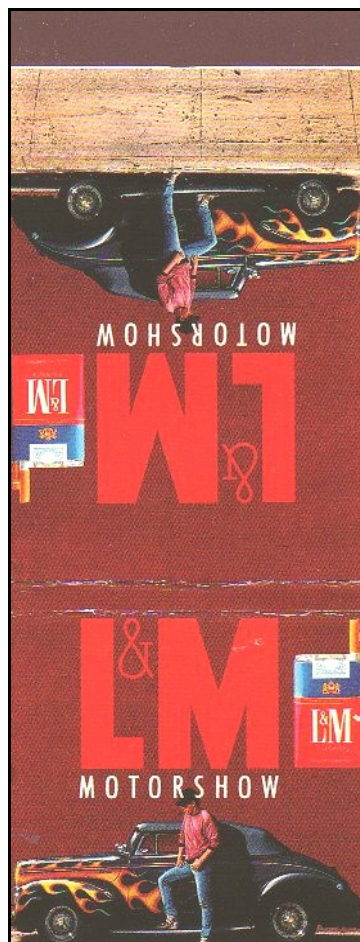
by Mike Prero

Smoking and the tobacco industry have certainly been under fire here at home for the last twenty years, with everything from community bans to national smoke-outs to congressional hearings and class action law suits. There are fewer American smokers, now, and those that continue seem to be smoking less. Consequently, tobacco profits in the U.S. market are declining from their highs of previous years. Actually, the number of smokers in developed Western countries, in general, is falling by more than 3 percent a year.

But business is business, and (not to bite the hand that feeds us....but) unfortunately the global market is growing ("unfortunately" because smoking really is a nasty and unhealthy habit...I can say that because I smoke). Anyway, as we're smoking less, the rest of the world is smoking more. Tobacco firms may be on the defensive in the developed world, but consumption is booming in the Third World, especially Eastern Europe and Asia, where controls over nicotine content, tar, health warnings, and advertising are much less stringent.

The estimated figure for world tobacco consumption several years ago was 5 trillion cigarettes, up 10 percent from the year before and the equivalent of every person on earth smoking about 900 cigarettes!

Of all the market possibilities, Asia, of course, with the most people, offers the tobacco industry the greatest chance for expansion. In pushing their products, advertisers have not always been reticent about s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g the truth, and tobacco advertisers, both domestic and foreign, are right in there with the best of them. Here in America, we all know that if you smoke the right brand you'll have beautiful women coming out of the woodwork...with only one thing on their minds...YOU! In



Asia, the advertising takes a different approach...Smoking is good for your health (ouch!).

In Taiwan, a leading brand of cigarettes is called “Long Life.” In China, billboards tout Marlboros, and makers of a cigarette aimed at women claim it “offers very good treatment for people’s health. Especially...for bronchitis.”

In China over 300 million smokers puff away on about 1.7 trillion cigarettes a year, and some 3 million of them die from smoking-related diseases. “But the statistic [*early 1990s*] that really excites the tobacco giants is that foreign brands have only 2 percent of China’s colossal market. The potential is enormous.”

[Depressing, isn’t it? Now I feel guilty about all the great covers this increased smoking is bringing our way! But, as long as they’re out there...]

The covers coming about as a result of all this smoking are usually quite nice—slick and attractive, and, of course, that’s exactly what the advertisers are aiming for. The European covers, especially, tend to sport high glossy finishes and to be very colorful, many with beautiful color photos. Many of these foreign cigarette covers also tend to be conjunctives. I have a cover from Austria, for example, advertising Brazilian cigarettes and an Austrian hotel; a German box advertising L&M cigarettes and the movie, “Gorki Park”; and so on.

There are also some very nice sets. I have a French Marlboro a 5-cover set, for example, (at least, that’s how many I have), each showing a picturesque spot in Europe. There’s also a similar set in a slightly smaller, front-striker format. “Export A,” from Canada, has an attractive 4-cover set of 20-strikes. Benson and Hedges put out a couple of color-photo box sets from Canada. And boxes! Oh, my! Boxes abound, with some really nice box sets from Europe.

The best way I’ve found of getting these covers is actually to trade with someone overseas. The postage is murder, but the results are good. Europe, especially, abounds in cigarette and airline covers. The only disadvantage to these covers is that almost all are in typically odd sizes...and if you haven’t specified beforehand, you frequently end up with what we would call “flats”, which are acceptable to European collectors.

