

Menko Corner 1958 M581-2 Pack Rip

by Ryan Laughton

In the previous article I talked about prize menko and how they were distributed and given away to kids. In this month's SFM article, I am going to open two packs of menko from the 1958 Dash 7-8 Type 2: Blue Ink on Back set (Catalog Number M581-2) and see if I can find one of the elusive winner menko from the set. The last time the menko in these packs saw the light of day was over 52 years ago when they were being printed and packaged in a box getting ready for shipment to a dagashiya.

Unfortunately, the maker of this set is unknown, but the quality is fairly good, leading me to believe it was probably one of the more popular companies such as Marukami or Marumatsu. As a refresher there are three types of menko in this set: Type 1 - Green Backs, Type 2 - Blue Backs and Type 3 - Gold Front with Blue Backs. The following scans are examples of how the winner menko/stamps and prize sheets worked for the 1958 Dash 7-8 set:

The menko were packed in a box with dimensions of about 10" x 8" x 1". The box was sealed with a piece of twine and very nicely packed. As seen on the front of the box (Picture 3), there are 10 third-place uncut menko sheets with three menko, four second-place uncut menko sheets with four menko, and two first place uncut menko sheets with five menko. These uncut menko sheets are the Type 3 of this set.

Inside there should be 16 menko with a winner stamp on the back.

Picture 1- Fronts



Winner menko



1st level prize (5 menko)



2nd level (4 menko)



3rd level (3 menko)

If we assume that any pack would only possibly have one winner menko, then we have about a 16% chance of pulling a winner menko in one of the packs tonight. (By the way, if anyone can help with the kanji for the last prize, written

Picture 2- Backs



Winner menko with 1st, 2nd and 3rd Level winner stamps



1st level prize



2nd level prize



3rd level prize

just to the right of the 1st place description, it'd be much appreciated). It is also written along the bottom left of the box in much bigger kanji. There seems to be two of this "mystery" prize, but my Japanese abilities fail me on

this translation. For your efforts, I'll send you free of charge the menko that I open up this evening.



Picture 3 - Box of 1958 Dash 7-8 Type 2

Once the box is opened up you can smell the vintage, stale cardboard smell that you get sometimes inside old dagashiya. Inside the box, the gold Type 3 menko sheets are stacked along the top of all the unopened packs (Picture 4). I have only seen these Type 3 menko with Blue Backs and never with Green Backs. If/when they do surface, they will be designated Type 4: Gold Front with Green Backs. It is possible that the Type 1 menko were issued in a different manner or just with the Type 3 menko as prizes.



Picture 4 – Box “freshly” opened after 52 years

Laying the Type 3 prize menko aside you can easily see all the menko packs lined up as they would have been packed from the factory (Picture 5). Each of these packs is wrapped in a very thin paper wrapper much like tissue paper.



Picture 5 – Exposing the unopened packs

If I was a kid back in 1958, it would have cost me approximately 5 yen per pack for these menko. It cost me many times this amount back in 2000, but the expense well worth it. I decided to pull a pack out from each side of the box to try and at least get some variety in the rikishi.

As you can see the tissue is thin enough to almost see which menko lies underneath (Picture 6). Also, the ends of the menko stick out so you can tell almost immediately which menko you will get.

Opening up the first pack I see that I've pulled a Sekiwake Wakahaguro (Picture 7). Not bad, but I soon realize that this set was packaged so you get all the same

menko in each pack.

Unfortunately, there are no winner menko in this Wakahaguro pack, but the colors and crispness of the menko are really amazing. The centering of the menko is somewhat off, but really quite good for 1950s Japanese printing and manufacturing technology.

Opening up the next pack I see that I am going to get 4 menko of Maegashira Kitanonada (Picture 8), but unfortunately no winner menko. From previous experience, I know that there were some quality control issues on this particular menko. The front colors on the dozens I have seen didn't seem to be applied correctly giving it a washed out look with lots of



Picture 6 – Pulling two random packs

small white dots. When I turned them over I immediately realized that these menko were like all the rest I had seen, leading me to believe there might have been some issue with the printing plate the company was using.

Well, unfortunately no luck on finding a winner menko, but I had a great time trying to relive what it

must have been like for a Japanese kid back in the late 1950s. The M-series menko were on its way out in 1958 and so this set was probably not as popular as the new BB and BC-series menko that were coming into the market in force. That could explain why there are so few menko of this set on the open market and why I was fortunate enough to find a box in

an old dagashiya.

As mentioned before, if you can help me translate some of the kanji on the front of the box, I'll ship you these Wakahaguro and Kitanonada free of charge anywhere in the world. Thanks for reading and until next time, cheers!



Picture 7 – Sekiwake Wakahaguro





Picture 8 – Maegashira Kitanonada