

Stirring up the Airlines; SWIZZLE STICKS

By Ed Martin

Google's definition of swizzle stick is:

A small thin rod, often adorned on one or both ends with spokes, spheres, or other ornaments for stirring mixed drinks.

This does not seem adequate for an item that is utilized at 35,000 feet when traveling at more than 500 mph - stirring a mixed liquid while avoiding spillage. If swizzle sticks were used by the U.S. Air Force or NASA in the space program, it would most likely be classified as a "Reciprocating Fluid Propulsion System" (RFPS) or some similar exotic nomenclature.

Why then would something as lowly as the simple swizzle stick be worthy of customization? Why not just give the customer a highly functional flat wooden or plastic stick to stir their drink with? The answer comes from marketing, where the objective of the item being placed in the receiver's drink is to help build brand awareness, launch new products or services and to enhance customer relationships.

Airline swizzle sticks usually provided with drinks served in the premium classes once had identifiable character and were very collectible. Unfortunately, today, they are becoming extinct. Gone are the days when your in-flight drink came with a thought provoking swizzle stick in various colors related to your flight or destination. With the passage of time, many of the airline logos present here have gone the way of the specialized swizzle stick, and some of the airlines themselves have followed as well.

Airlines provided swizzle sticks in many colors and sizes, so as a collector one needed to fly a lot and drink frequently in order to build a complete set. If some observant reader is disappointed that his or her special airline swizzle stick is not



Depending on your route or the time of year, the swizzle stick decoration could be changed to remind the passenger of their destination. Here we see a collection of Continental Airlines stirring apparatuses representing a variety of themes.

displayed, it is due to this author's limited drinking ability and infrequent flights, thus having an incomplete collection.

Back in the days, some airlines went so far as to customize their swizzle sticks to specific routes. For example, flying on American Airlines with Hawaii was your destination your drink came with a substantial decorative "Hawaiian canoe paddle" swizzle stick, allowing as you stirred and sipped for your thoughts to drift toward those balmy breezes and light waves. However, as you stirred your fingers also clasped the "AA" logo or airline name on your swizzle stick, which of course was to remind you who was contributing to your enjoyable moment. But should your flight be to New York on the Douglas DC-7 "Royal Coachman Service," your in-flight drink swizzle stick might come in the shape of a "Top Hat" as a reminder of all the wonderful theater shows you might attend upon arrival, with of course the always attached airline identification.

American Airlines provided most of their swizzle sticks in red, white and blue - their corporate colors, also the colors of the national flag. The "AA" flag swizzle stick may be representative of the flag the American Airlines pilots once flew from their cockpit window on the Douglas DC-3 after landing.



Swizzle sticks from American Airlines. (All images are from the author's collection)



Sample swizzle sticks from United Airlines.



Shapes and colors varied within airlines over time. Here we see a set of Pan American Airlines representing this variation.



Trans World Airlines (TWA)



Many airlines incorporated their logos and/or corporate colors into their swizzle sticks. They were also used to celebrate milestones or significant events for the airline. Here we have a number of variations of Western Airlines. The top commemorates 50 years of service, while the bottom three incorporate Western's logo "W".

Many of these swizzle sticks were part of the memorable American Airlines "Piano Bar" on the Boeing 747. American Airlines was merged with U.S. Airways in 2013, however, the American Airlines name and a similar logo was retained.

If your airline of travel was United Airlines, the decorative drink swizzle sticks were applicable to their destinations, logo or corporate slogan, "The Friendly Skies." The cowboy representing their Mid-West Rockies destinations and the outdoor life it offered.

Los Angeles on "The Friendly Skies" conjured thoughts of Hollywood, movie stars, coupled with the sea, sun, and sand of the Pacific Ocean. Who remembers the "The Mainliner" or the Douglas DC-8 "Red Carpet Service?"

TWA had a large variety of various colored swizzle sticks from around the world, identifying specifics to particular destination cities or countries. The following are a small representation of the TWA specialized swizzle sticks, the "Chinese Junk" from Hong Kong, the "Gendarme" from France, the "Native American" in green and blue from the U.S.A., "Native Dancer" from India, "Swiss Guard" from Rome, Italy, and the "Flamenco Dancer" from Spain. Over many years, TWA also provided swizzle sticks for the various aircraft in use at that time. The propeller representing the early prop-liners, the Lockheed Constellation with four engines, the introduction of the jets with the Boeing 707, and looking to a future that never happened, TWA introduced the SST-Supersonic swizzle stick. American Airlines acquired TWA in 2001.

Not to be out done Continental Airlines was also very lavish in their swizzle stick presentations. On their Hawaiian flights your in-flight drink came with a large pineapple sitting

on top of the swizzle stick and, of course, Continental Airlines was embossed on the stem to remind you who was providing the enjoyable service and creating the destination atmosphere. Destinations played a large part in the Continental in-flight service and that is reflected in their swizzle sticks representing Dallas, Chicago, New Orleans, Kansas City, Denver, Los Angeles, Hawaii, Houston and of course the "Proud Bird" half-globe logo. Swizzle sticks were used in the drinks service on the McDonnell Douglas DC-10 "Proud Bird of the Pacific" to many international destinations: New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Micronesia and domestic cities like San Francisco, Washington D.C, Las Vegas, Florida. Continental Airlines merged in 2010 into United Airlines, the Continental Globe logo was retained as the new United logo.

The iconic globe logo of Pan American Airways was flown around the world for decades but it was only in 1980 that Pan Am was able to fly domestically following the purchase of National Airlines. Unfortunately, Pan Am ceased operations in 1991.



TOP: Pacific Southwest Airlines, PSA, swizzle sticks with and without their catch phrase "Catch Us!." BOTTOM: Southern Airways swizzle stick sporting their logo.

Western Airlines, based at Los Angeles and well known for their slogan, "The Only Way to Fly," had a large "W" on the fuselage of their aircraft that was replicated on their swizzle sticks. Western celebrated 50 years in operation in 1976 and issued a special "Fifty Fair" swizzle stick for the occasion. Western Airlines was merged into Delta Airlines in 1987.

Even regional carriers sought to promote their airline and



Two variations of Air CAL swizzle sticks.



Alaska Airlines swizzles including promotions for their "Gold Coast" service.

services through customized swizzle sticks. The following are a few examples of these.

Pacific Southwest Airlines, PSA, was known for their aircraft with the big smile and flew in the Western states. Southern operated in the southern states. PSA was merged into U.S. Air in 1986. Southern would be merged into North Central in 1979.

Air California, Air CAL, was absorbed into American Airlines in 1987. Alaska Airlines mainly operated on the west coast but have successfully expanded their routes transcontinental, and to Hawaii.



Martinair-Holland, Varig-Brazil, ONA-Overseas National Airlines, British Airways, Air Canada, SAS, and Australian (upper left inset)



Sky Chef and Save a Connie swizzle sticks.



Swizzle sticks from the Seattle-Tacoma Airport and Bartke's Restaurant at Tampa International Airport.

Wien Air Alaska ceased operations in 1984. Eastern Airlines ceased operations in 1991, and their South American routes were purchased by American Airlines.

Specialized swizzle sticks were not just a U.S. marketing ploy. International carriers also provided decorative swizzle sticks and below are some samples.

The theme of a swizzle stick ranged from promoting the airline to destinations. Some international carriers even promoted the native culture of their respective countries. Among examples of these are those of Japan Airlines, Air New Zealand, and Cathay Pacific, which issued decorative swizzle sticks reflective of their native cultures.

The airlines were not unique in employing customized swizzle sticks. Some aviation related companies also issued decorative swizzle sticks, here are some examples: Sky Chef, Save a Connie, Seattle-Tacoma International and Tampa International Airport restaurants.

Coffee/Latté drinkers will be very familiar with the green swizzle sticks provided by Starbuck's, topped with a decorative mermaid. What a wonderful opportunity for the airlines to provide travel to destinations around the world with Starbucks (almost everywhere!), with coffee and of course applicable destination swizzle sticks.

Now that would be a collection.