

A Can of Cigarettes

Japan's tobacco monopoly introduced *Peace* cigarettes on January 13, 1946, just a few months after the victorious American fleet steamed into Tokyo Bay at the end of World War II. I got this date not from research but from a wizened old guy with whom Yoshi and I struck up a conversation at a coffee shop deep in the Hakone mountains. I trust his memory. He came into the empty little shop immediately after we did. We ordered cappuccino, while he ordered an American blend. Yoshi lit up a *Virginia Slim*, I flipped a *Smokin Joe*, and he surprised the hell out of me. He dug into his bag and pulled out a *Peace* can like the one shown below. I was familiar with cans of Japanese cigarettes. As a young man in Tokyo long ago, I bought them myself, to keep on a table in my apartment for guests and for those occasions when I ran out of packaged cigarettes. But I had never before seen anybody pull out a *Peace* can in a public place. When he saw I was interested, he offered me one. It tasted good like a cigarette should. The 74-year-old man said he had been smoking *Peace* since *Showa* 21, which translates to 1946. Okay, lots of people know the year they first started puffing on coffin nails, but this smoker provided the actual date, January 13. He was only 16 years old when he lined up to buy the brand-new *Peace* cigarettes, which sold out quickly. What stuck in his mind for, lo, these many decades was that police officers pulled him out of the long line and lectured him on underage smoking. But policemen cannot always be watching, so he got his *Peace* smokes and has been puffing on them ever since.

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Unfiltered Flavor

I kept my eyes open for cans of *Peace* cigarettes as I moved around Japan, but never found them. Finally, a friend in Karuizawa, Mampei Hotel bartender Takamichi Ozawa, kindly acquired two cans for me, each costing about \$7. I smoked up one can in Japan and carried home the other for this photograph. The lid is equipped with a cutter that opens the can. A handy little paper tab allows you to raise up several cigarettes for easy grasping. The smell reminds a veteran smoker of *Camels*.