Bazooka Joe Encyclopedia Article

Bazooka Joe

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Bazooka Joe

Gum manufacturers commonly used gimmicks, like sports trading cards, to help boost sales. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., which began producing Bazooka bubble gum in 1947, included comics with its small chunk of pink bubble gum. The gum took its name from the unplayable musical instrument, which American comedian Bob Burns made from two gas pipes and a whiskey funnel, called a "bazooka."

The comic, featuring Joe, a blonde kid with an eye patch, and his gang, debuted in 1953. In the crowded chewing gum market of the 1950s, Topps used the comic to distinguish Bazooka from other brands. The jokes produced more groaning than laughter, and included a fortune. Collectors of the comics redeemed them for prizes, such as bracelets, harmonicas, and sunglasses. In the 1990s, Joe's popularity fell, and the strip was modernized in response to market studies in which kids said they wanted characters who were "more hip."

Further Reading:

Wardlaw, Lee. *Bubblemania: A Chewy History of Bubble Gum.* New York, Aladdin, 1997.