In the National Puzzlers' League rebus puzzle, a group of letters or other symbols, called a rubric, clues a word or phrase. For example, the rubric XCY clues chiromancy with the reading 'chi, Roman C, Y'. In a phonetic rebus, the sound of the reading is involved: for example, the rubric P clues rhopalic with the reading 'rho, pal, I see'. In an enigmatic rebus, something beyond what is visible in the rubric must be inferred, like the missing ST in the rubric AIN L, which clues stainless steel with the reading 'STAIN less S, tee; L'. In a reversed rebus, or suber, the reversal of the answer is clued: for example, OP clues dessertspoon with the reversed reading 'no O, P stressed'.

I particularly like rebi in which the rubric itself is a word, instead of a meaningless collection of letters or symbols. The first I remember seeing was the lovely CARTS :: concertinas (C once, RT in PS). I have since made a complete collection of such rebi appearing in the National Puzzlers' League monthly publication, The Enigma, as well as from other sources. The rebi presented below, taken from issues through June 1979, are labeled with their creators' pseudonyms as is done in The Enigma.

All three-letter rubrics appear as independent uncapitalized entries in the 1953 Merriam-Webster New Collegiate Dictionary. All of four or more letters appear in NI2 or NI3. Without these restrictions, this listing would be swelled to about ten times its present size with less interesting examples. Also, the letters must be written in a solid clump, without intrusive punctuation, special placement, or the like. This rules out ALL placed at the far left of the page (the rubric for West Allis), WIN GS (the rubric for wings widespread), or CON (the rubric for condescending).

One may ask: is any word-rubric itself a rebus answer? A rebus could be constructed for many of the rubrics, and nine have actually been done, all inspired by one-letter work. There is Hoodwink's T = format; Dreamer's, Lateo's and Missile C's E = ice; and Orion's L = lie. Treesong's one-letter liporebi (rebi using the alphabet with one letter omitted) give ABCDFGHIL..Z = cute and A...RSUVWXYZ = tout. Nightowl turned to the one-letter suber to provide P = fees, C = sic, P = sip, and U = situ.

The rubrics fall off in number very swiftly as length increases. In the list below, there is only one 12-letter example (RUMMAGE SALES),
one 10-letter one (Volkswagen), one 9-letter one (CART HORSE), and a scattering of 7-letter and 8-letter ones. Rebus with very long word rubrics are usually enigmatic. More precisely, they have one of the following characteristics: (1) the answer describes a single word or phrase (CART HORSE = the cart before the horse), often using a clever definition (Janus = Romanian + 'Roman Ian!'), (2) the answer defines only a part of the rubric (RUMMAGE SALES = in the Middle Ages), or (3) the answer describes a transposition of the rubric (BLOUSED = mixed doubles). In (2), and to some extent (3), the rebus constructor has considerable freedom in selecting a rubric which fits the requirements of the answer; it is not strictly necessary that the entire rubric is a word, but good constructors usually try to do it. In short, the occurrence of a word rubric in certain rebus is not the fortuitous event that it is in others.

In the list below, = separates rubric and answer; =P, =E and =S identify phonetic rebus, enigmatic rebi, and iber, respectively.

AFT =S terefa (Faro); AGA = agenda (B. Natural); AGE = postage (Fiddle); AIM = am I in the middle? (M. U. Later); AMA = anathema (Hoodwink); Amy = bigamy (Ho Ho); army = Little Mary Mixup (Nightowl); ASIA = ashenia (Hoodwink); ASS = abyss (Hallie Looyah, Molemi)

BAR = brain (Percy Verance), BAR = afterbrain (Hap), BAR = midbrain (Hap); BAS = bananas (Baful); BEAU = bandeau (anon.); BED = be bothered (Blackstone); BEER = before and after (B. Natural); BEET = a bite to eat (Hoodwink); bet =E aboriginally (Awl Wrong); BILLS = sends the bill (Susan); BITS = bones about it (Ho Ho); BLOUSED =E mixed doubles (Brym); BOW = boatwright (Graydol, Uncle Rebus); BRA =E Brasenose (Hap); BRAN = raisin bran (Cryptox); BUR = rub the wrong way (Livedevil); BURS = bursitis (Paul & Virginia)

Cadillac =E Great Vehicle (Merlin); CART HORSE = the cart before the horse (Nightowl); CARTS = concertinas (Billy Goat, Merlin); CHINCHIN =E double feature (A. Chern); CHIVES = four inches (Midurndist); cod =E oafish (Comrade); CUTE = persecute (Omar)

dee = dispelled (Rayle Rhoder), DEE =S enamored DEEF = feedback (Brym); DID = one in a thousand (Orion); DION = disputation (Sour Puss); DIRECT =E letters of credit (Stilicho); DOOM =E a change of mood (Midurndist)

EAGLE = lineage (Sas); ECHE =P Chinese (Quefanon); ECOD =P coincided (Arcanus); ECUS = cuisines (Oedipus); ELBA = turnable (Ho Ho); EME = before me, even as behind (Hoodwink); END =P endeavor (Alec Sander); ERE = ether and thee (Captain To); EROS =S senior (Oedipus); ESTE = the esthete (Hoodwink); ETH = the beginning (C. F.)

FAT =P fanatic (Hazy); FEAR = flying by ear (Uncle Rebus); FeES =SE senorita (Merlin); FORM = misinform (anon.); FORMAT = inside information (Stilicho); FRAT = faintheart (Hoodwink)

GAR = gatherer (Hoodwink); GOA = ingathering (Sol); GOD =PE partaken of good (anon.); GRIL = Goneril (Molemi)

HATER =E a change of heart (Midurndist); HEET = letter sheet (Captain Ser hereat/herel glius); HE1 HOARD =E withheld (Te callithump (ICE = el)

ICY = oneiric IDEA = the t INN =P insig Point, K. G. Janus =E

JUST = read LAD =S i (Winkle); LIE =E laniate of Tlos (Pro just a little I MANN = (The Gink); curtailment METE = mat quarter moo MUCE =P yo NANA =I Doc, ARD it togetherness ODDR = (Rhoder); OB Pace =E ptisan (Sagit nom de plum backwards (I) (Faro), PARRY RECAPS Yercas); RE Middle Ages SAC =S c fires (Ho Ho)

Shylock = Jet sthenic (Fun Brutus); SI SMOTE = the =EP parasol! (M. U. Later, SURE = satu TAM =E, esting = in 'Fiddle); TH from Shakes; THE = there (Evergreen)
The rebus LEG = elegy in the above list is an example of a pure phonetic rebus in which the letters of the rubric, spelled out one at a time, gives the answer. Words of this type were christened "Literal Words" by Walter Penney, and examples are given in the May and August 1970 Kickshaws: DFI (deify), XPDNC (expediency), NRG (energy), NME (enemy), etc.

Only eight of the rebus in the above list are iber, a fact explained in part by the recent popularity of the latter. Even more recent than the rebus is the rebade, a combination of rebus and alternade. In an alternade, alternate letters of a word are taken to form two new words, as in TrleNnlaLiY = tiniely / renal. In a rebade this alternation is applied to the reading, as shown by the five word-rubric rebades composed to date:

APT = atrip/feast (after A is PT) (Graydol)
LAD = land/oil (lo, A in LD) (Neophyte)
IGHTO = iota/gong/howl/tut (IGHTO; o, out NW; tag L) (Treesong)
IGHTO = SP loge/eten/why (N, eye GHTOW, el) (Treesong)
SPAM = samara/pester (SPA, ém's at rear) (Graydol)