

THE QUALITY OF STAMPS

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This is a matter which is great importance, perhaps never more important than it is today.

In times past, when the old pre-printed album was the only way of collecting stamps, many a collector cut off the wide margins and corner pieces of a stamp, in order to fit it into the space provided by the album. With the introduction of the loose leaf, however, all this has changed and nowadays the collectors are trying to get anything unusual on the stamps and the larger the margins the better.

Yet, not every stamp CAN have large margins, and what for one stamp type is a second class copy, is, by the issue of another series of a country, a superlative item. The intention of the writer is to make a collection, showing the possible space between stamps, issued by different countries: e.g. Norway No. 1 can have 3 mm margins, while a stamp from Thurn & Taxis or Tuscany can only have half a millimetre margin.

If it is not cut into the frame of the stamp, a stamp of these last mentioned countries can be regarded as a first class copy. In general a stamp having half the space between the stamps on all sides is a first class stamp.

Stamps with more than these margins are "piece-de-luxe" or "superb" and are worth more than catalogue price. Also corner pieces, some with ornamental frames, as the stamps of Hanover or stamps with watermark of the frame of the sheet showing, or numerals of the frame, or so-called "Super-margins" with the neighbouring stamps showing, all these are fetching high prices, many times more than the catalogue price.

But not only are the margins of the stamps indications of the quality. There are other pointers:

- i Original Fresh Colour
- ii Original gum (for mint stamps)

- iii Cancellation
- iv Well Centred (perforated stamps)
- v Perforation (pulled perfs)

The following are factors for reducing value:

- i Thinned or other slight damage
- ii Repaired stamps.

Original Colours

Many stamps of the old issues are damaged through moisture or stains, also through oxydisation, etc., and have lost their original colour. Therefore, ONLY stamps which have their original colour and gum are to be classified as "Superb". Also, a used stamp which has not lost its colour through injudicious treatment by washing, can be classed "Superb" if it has the other characteristics.

Furthermore, for mint stamps, original gum is a MUST if they are to be classed as "Superb". If the stamp has some of the gum missing, or has been hinged a few times and the hinge has been left covering most of the back of the stamp - such a stamp can only be graded as "Unused" or "Without Gum". Only if the stamp is hinged for not more than 1/16th of an inch, is it accepted as "Mint" meaning: as it left the Post Office.

There is also the considered opinions of some, that it is better for the conservation of the stamp to take the gum off the stamp completely, and, it is perhaps advisable to do this in tropical countries. In these hot countries the gum becomes yellowish and gives the stamp an unfresh appearance. Nevertheless, only stamps with full original gum are regarded as "Mint" and are priced accordingly.

Cancellations

These also are important with regard to the quality of the stamps. It is not always that a heavy cancellation will reduce the quality and value of the stamp but only in it is covering the wrong place.

For instance, a heavy and clear cancellation of
/Sicily

Sicily, if applied in the prescribed way, leaving the face of the king clearly visible, this will not reduce the value similarly the first two issues of Belgium- as long as the face of the king is visible in the centre of the stamps.

Some stamps, with a heavy but clear postmark when the latter is a rarity, are even more valuable, as if the stamp was very lightly cancelled. In general, smudgy postmarks are always deteriorating so far as quality is concerned.

Centred Stamps

This applies to perforated stamps and means that the image of the stamp appears exactly in the centre of the paper and showing the same amount of margin on all sides. There are a few countries whose early issues were all "Off-Centre" for instance, Hungary and Sweden, with their first four issues. This was caused by a faulty perforating machine. It is therefore understandable that a well "Centred" stamp from any of these issues is a "Rarity" and will therefore demand a higher price and be much sought after.

Perforation

There are various kinds of perforation. You cannot expect to have all the perforation on the corners if a line, roulette or serpentine perforation has been used. Only a 'Comb Perforation' can give a perfect perforation.

Missing (pulled) teeth always reduce the value of a stamp. Stamps from Wurtenburg are catalogued at a certain price, but if all the perforations are complete, the value will increase by 50 to 100 percent.

Reducing Factors

Thinned or other damage If a stamp is thinned, it reduces its value considerable, but if a rare stamp it is still worth being taken into a collection. Other damage such as tears and pinholes, etc., reduce the value and it all depends on the rarity of the stamp if such a "damaged" copy can still be tolerated in a collection. There are stamps of Hanover which are thinned by the washing off from the cover and because the structure of the used gun (mainly red gun) could not

be easily washed off because the gum was felted with the paper. This gum is called "Hanover Hell" and it seems that even if such a stamp is thinned, these are still regarded as "first quality" that is, if such a condition is not obvious on the front surface.

Repaired Stamps On this question philatelists are at variance in opinion. With all other old objects, such as paintings, furniture, porcelain, etc., repairing is tolerated. Perhaps in time to come - this will be acceptable to the world of philatelists. Nevertheless, where rare stamps are concerned I think that a repaired stamp is worthwhile to keep in your collection, and in all important auctions all over the world, these repaired stamps are auctioned, but an indication is given of the extent of the repair. An estimate of value depreciation due to repair is: four margins added 70% loss smaller repair approx 50% and a very small repair 25 to 30%. However for exhibition purposes - repaired stamps are best left out.

Summary

From the foregoing it will be noticed that a "First Quality" stamp has to comply with a lot of high standards.

Abbreviations

<u>Italy</u>	B	BB	BBB	for nice, very nice extra nice (Bellissimo)
	R	RR	RRR	for not common, rare, and very rare
		CC		Well centred
	F	FF	FFF	Fresh colour, very fresh colour extra fresh
		GM	Great margins	
<u>USA</u>	G			for gum, C for centred, F fresh of colour
	D			damaged or repaired, P for Perforations
	PM			postmark and the degree indicated by small letter i.e. G.o Original gum G.n without gum.
	CC			Exactly centre C.r Centred right etc.

By this system a stamp can be accurately described and valued, perhaps future dealers and auctioneers will have a computer which one can feed in the relevant details and get the exact valuation expressed as a percentage.