

# Unannounced Introduction of Maltapost peelable postage labels for letter packets

By John De Battista

Early in January this year it came to my knowledge that, unannounced by MaltaPost, a new label started to be used on letter packets. The label is very similar to the parcel label which was introduced by Maltapost back on the 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2006 except that it does not contain a barcode. This parcel label has already been recorded in the “Postal Diary” section of Vol. 35/3 of the Malta Philatelic Society Journal published in December 2006 (Pg. 40). Apparently this new “*postage*” label actually started to be used sometime during the first week or possibly on Monday of the second week of December 2009, although this is still to be verified.

Unfortunately at the time I learned of its existence I could not obtain further information. It looked as if the decision to start using the labels was taken very hurriedly just before the busy Christmas period and as a result not all postal counter clerks had received detailed instructions / training on its use.

Further enquiries to various sources over the next couple of months have now revealed the following information.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009 an internal circular in the form of an e-mail was issued to all MaltaPost offices informing them of the new label.

No public announcement regarding the introduction of these postage labels was made and although some post offices eventually occasionally made use of them during December 2009, the philatelic community remained totally unaware of their existence. It is known that quite a number of post offices did not even make use of this label before the first weeks of January and then only on the odd occasion. The main reason for this is that at present it is much more time consuming for a counter clerk to print and process a label than to sell ordinary postage stamps for use on packets; hence it is only natural that this option is utilised only as a last resort. In effect this means that any such postage labels issued during the months of December 2009 and January 2010 are all to be considered as very rare recent postal history items.

Two versions of the label exist, one for Local and the other for Foreign destinations. The difference between them is that on the Foreign version the postal zone and country of destination is included.

The labels can be printed on-line by the postal clerks at the post office counters in all branch post offices in the islands together with the Mobile Unit. This is possible through the use of standard laser printers located next to them on the

counter and which are linked to their workstation. It is to be noted that during the first two months of use, a major printing problem surfaced in that printing of labels could not be aligned properly on most of the printers at the post offices. As such, frankings can be found used spread over two labels, with the MaltaPost Logo and printing date section being printed on the lower side of the top label and detached by the blade line from the rest of the print which continues onto the bottom label. In an effort to overcome this problem, some Post Offices sometimes resorted to using the larger label intended for printing parcel labels and trimming off the excess material, instead of using the proper sized labels!

The procedure presently used for these labels is for the counter clerk to affix the label onto the postal item personally. The franked item is then deposited by the clerk inside the post office bag located at the post office and which is accessible only to the clerks. This bag is then later picked up by other MaltaPost personnel to be processed in the usual manner applicable for such postal bag handling at the sorting centre.

Postal clerks are prohibited from issuing and handing over such postage labels to customers. It is assumed that security investigations will be held in case any postal items franked with such labels are found at the sorting centre in postal bags not originating from post offices, and that disciplinary steps will be taken against the postal clerk not following procedure.

The customer is obviously given the usual electronic receipt for the sale as is obligatory for the sale of all items made from the post office. This in itself acts as an on-line record of the transaction which is used for administrative control purposes by MaltaPost and its number is also recorded on the label in the fourth line in the lower right hand corner block. Also for accountability purposes, the total number and details of such franked items in the bag is recorded by the postal clerks on the usual contents forms which accompany such bags for eventual tallying purposes at the mail sorting centres.

As for the labels themselves, I have prepared the following diagram which gives some technical information.

### **Technical Details:**

Label Sheet Format:	Individual Straight Edged (Non-Sprocketed) Printer Sheet Comprising Two Same Size Labels, Separated By A Straight Horizontal Blade Line Cut Through Paper With “Wax Type” Backing Layer Joining Both Labels.
Overall Sheet Size:	107 Mm X 148 Mm
Label Type:	Self Adhesive Peel Off
Paper Characteristics:	Unwatermarked Ordinary Paper

Paper Id Markings: None  
 Label Orientation: Horizontal  
 Outer Size Of Label: 107 Mm X 74 Mm  
 Size Of Printed Area: 94 Mm X 60.5 Mm (Outer Box)

