

Themed Stamps

For Royal Mail's *Stamps and Collecting* Website

Our annual series covering themes such as animals and transport vary greatly in their creative treatment, being photographic, illustrative, etc. Would you prefer them to have a similar style every year?

Royal Mail has themes that appear as a set of stamps each year, such as the Transport series that has been running since 2001. Every time, a different stamp designer is commissioned which helps bring great variety to the stamp programme. This approach fails to result in continuity of style year-on-year, though, perhaps making it difficult for collectors to realise that they are witnessing an ongoing series in the making. Would you prefer us to make it obvious that each annual set links into the previous one by issuing designers with a standard creative template and brief?

Postal administrations have long wrestled with this dilemma and it is clear that we take different approaches at different times, for there is no right or wrong situation. Sometimes the theme almost dictates similarity, as with Jersey's 12 annual signs of the zodiac miniature sheets, for example. On the other hand, can a diminutive motorcycle and a mighty ocean liner be given the same design approach when reproducing them on a stamp?

No one can be in any doubt that Royal Mail's ground-breaking Millennium series of stamps, which adopted a standard layout and process and used a different artist for every stamp, demonstrated that such an approach is feasible. The risk here from a collector's point of view is that if a standard format is chosen but it is disliked, then they have to endure several more issues that potentially have no personal appeal. Choose a different treatment each year and perhaps we will please more collectors overall. You can see our problem.

Look out for the exciting new annual series of British Army Uniforms which begins this autumn, where the style chosen will be consistent. We know that many of you enjoy this theme and guarantee that you will not be disappointed with what we have planned.

[30 words in teaser and 340 in article] [Compiled by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL, 24 February 2007]