

Review: "Stamp Year Book 2007"

Royal Mail Special Stamps 2007 Year Book was published on 8 November following the release of the second Lest We Forget miniature sheet that day. It continues in the same format that was established back in 1984 when the first edition appeared and has now reached its 24th year of continuous publication.

The innovation started last year whereby all stamp designs were featured in colour below pre-affixed clear Hawid-type mounts continues, so that even when the stamps are not positioned in the book it still looks as if it is complete. This approach also aids the correct insertion of the stamps. The one-piece presentation box also introduced last year is compatible with the first 22 volumes in the series that had utilised a slip-in case and, therefore, maintains continuity of appearance on the bookshelf.

The stamps continue to come supplied on stock-sheets slipped in to the front of the book, and I recommend that they are 'mounted' on the relevant page; the stock-sheets are not intended for long-term storage.

This year the imagery in the book utilises striking black and white photography, with areas of spot colour and background tints. This has the effect of making the colourful stamps stand-out more on the page (except the Diamond Wedding set, of course, where the stamps have also been printed in black).

The text pages offer three main story lines about each issue. Firstly there is the opportunity to get general background information about the subject covered by the set of stamps. We learn, for example, that at any given moment someone, somewhere on the planet is listening to a Beatles record.

Secondly there are the facts about each individual stamp design. Where required, clever use has been made of unique pictograms that clearly indicate what stamp is being described, without the need for lengthy text explanations. One entry explains how the Dartford Warbler bird population had crashed to a few pairs in the 1960s, but are now recovering due to our increasingly mild winters.

The third story line relates to how the designer approached their commission. The Scouts issue was illustrated by English Artist Gez Frey and he chose a manga-style visual approach because it was felt that it would have a strong appeal to youngsters who love the new wave of comic-book art. Clearly my age now explains why this is my least favourite issue of an otherwise highly attractive year of stamp issues!

There are many website addresses shown throughout for the first time enabling further information to be obtained, such as how to learn more about the British Army (www.army.mod.uk). This is a useful innovation short-term, although with the web being so transient it is perhaps not surprising that the website for the Donington Collection of Grand Prix cars already showed up as 'unable to display' over several days of entering its URL into my browser.

The final text page includes technical details for each issue in an 'About the Stamps' section, with most of the information that a collector would hope to find in a stamp catalogue. Phosphor bar types are described 'as appropriate'.

The text has been written by Maev Kennedy with additional contributions from Tim Shackleton, and an interview with Sir Stirling Moss by Richard Rae. The main pictures are by Phil Sayer, with additional pictures researched by Kathy Lockley. The Yearbook was designed by Atelier Works, printed by Fulmar Colour Printing of Croydon, and bound and finished by F F Allsopp of Nottingham. For the first time the book has a printed paper cover, rather than an embossed 'Balachrom' cover. Limited edition of 21,420 numbered copies.

Royal Mail Special Stamps Year Book 2007 continues its reputation for being a high-quality acquisition for collectors of modern British stamps and for those non-collectors who have an interest in the British way of life, its popular culture and its history.

Price £64.95 standard version (order code AY096), £99.99 de luxe version (AY097) from Royal Mail Talents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. Telephone orders on 08457 641 641 (UK) or +44 131 316 7483 (overseas).