

Cash Machine Stamps

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"You can bank by mail, why not mail by bank?" So went a USPS representatives' quote at the launch of a new format of stamp back in 1990. On 18 May that year, Sea First Bank of Seattle became the first of many subsequent United States banks to offer its customers the opportunity of acquiring stamps while making cash withdrawals from an ATM (Automated Teller Machine).

The story really began back in the early 1960s when Walsall Lithographic (now Walsall Security Printers) produced the world's first self-adhesive stamps for Sierra Leone and Tonga. They were of such unusual shapes for a postage stamp (bananas, coins and maps being some subjects), that the fact they were on a self-adhesive substrate was almost missed by collectors.



It was not until 1974 that the USPS became involved in pressure-sensitive stamp production. For their Christmas issue, they produced a pre-cancelled stamp with straight die-cut edges and rounded corners and a '+' shaped die-cut at the centre to prevent re-use. They were not a success and were actually regularly re-used due to the lack of postmark applied. With time, the stamps also self-destructed, becoming seriously damaged by ugly brown stains on the paper surface as the glue slowly perished. In the following years, adhesive quality improved and in 1988 Avery Dennison was awarded a research contract to produce a sheetlet with the same size and characteristics of a dollar bill. The May 1990 ATM stamp sheetlet was the result.



ATM8 First USA self adhesive

Environmentalists complained that the stamp, which was made of plastic, was not bio-degradable and so with the third issue onwards a paper version of the stamp was produced. The format continues to this day. Other countries became interested in the product and Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, France and Canada have each in turn issued ATM stamp sheetlets. However, the love affair with this format did not last long in most countries, where they were fairly quickly removed from service.

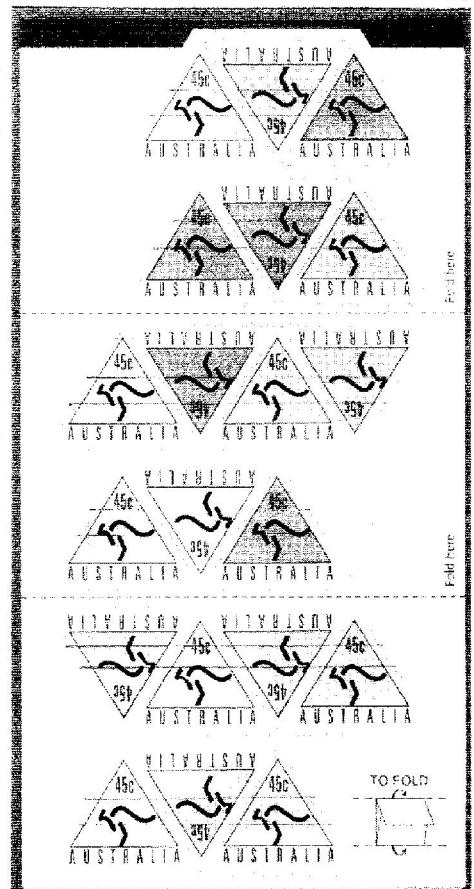
As far back as 1996, rumours abounded that Great Britain was set to issue stamps via cash machines, indeed trial sheets were produced by at least one of Royal Mail's preferred security print suppliers. As readers are probably aware, nothing ever came of this idea and Royal Mail eventually removed the sheet from its stamp issuing programme, due to lack of a suitable sponsor (i.e. a bank willing to allow its cash hoppers to be used for stamps instead of banknotes).

This is an interesting area of collecting with the collector having the opportunity of acquiring supporting items, such as ATM receipts (showing stamp purchases), plastic transactional cards, ephemera (such as promotional advertising materials), etc. Around 100 trial sheets from Australia exist with the kangaroo facing in the wrong direction to the issued sheetlet and various stamp printers have produced their own publicity sheetlets for distribution to potential clients, or for ATM testing reasons.

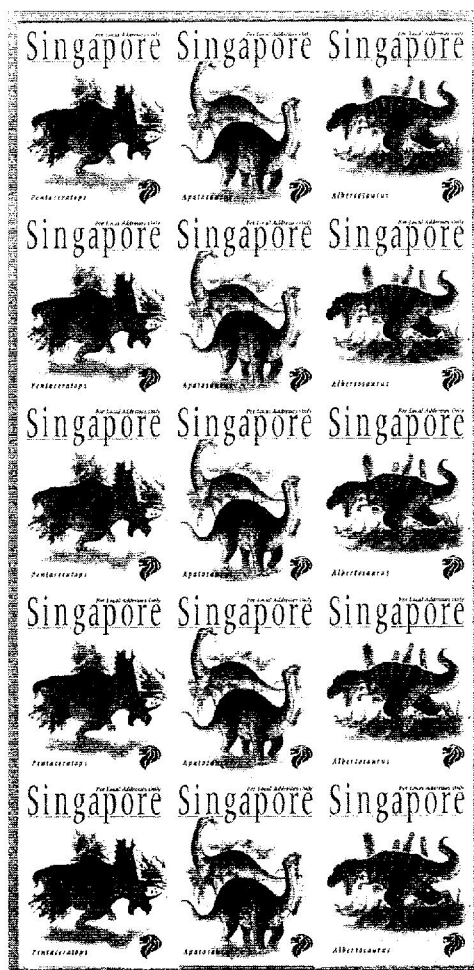
It is a slowly rescinding field with only USA and France definitely still in the market, but with enough new material to maintain interest. There are not that many items to acquire, so you are not made to feel that it is unmanageable or exploitative and there is still the chance to form a complete collection relatively cheaply. The catalogue listing below will assist you in forming such a collection.

USA

18 May 1990	US Flag (25c denomination)
1991	US Flag (F stamp)
June 1991	Liberty Torch type 1 backing sheet
Sometime in 1992	Liberty Torch type 2 backing sheet
28 October 1992	Christmas Train
October 1993	Christmas Snowman
20 October 1994	Christmas Cardinal
January 1995	Old Glory G stamp
17 March 1995	Flag Over Field
19 October 1995	Christmas Sledding
8 October 1996	Christmas Skaters
9 November 1998	Uncle Sam's Hat H stamp
13 March 1999	Classroom Flag
15 December 2000	Farm Flag (non-denominated)
17 December 2001	Farm Flag (34c)
7 June 2002	US Flag (non-denominated)
4 February 2003	US Flag (37c)
16 November 2004	Santa Ornaments
Stamps still in use?	Yes



The Australian Trial Sheet



SINGAPORE

- 24 November 1993 Palm Tree - EMS Speedpost Service backing paper
- 20 January 1995 Palm Tree - Singapore 95 Stamp Show backing paper
- Date unannounced Palm Tree - Postpac Cartons backing paper
- Date unannounced Palm Tree - Philatelic Bureau SODA Account backing paper
- Date unannounced Palm Tree - Local Urgent Mail Service backing paper
- 3 June 1996 Palm Tree - Security Envelopes backing paper
- 22 April 1998 Dinosaurs
- Stamps still in use? Uncertain, as the Post Office does not reply to my requests for information

AUSTRALIA

- November 1994 Triangular Kangaroo - Quickstamp backing paper
- 11 April 1996 Triangular Kangaroo - Postpak backing paper
- Stamps still in use? No, this country no longer uses ATM machines to sell postage

TAIWAN

- 5 May 1995 Peonies
- Stamps still in use? No, this country no longer uses ATM machines to sell postage

FRANCE

- 11 July 1996 Old Marianne design
- 1997 Liberte, egalite, fraternite - simplifiez-vous la vie! Yellow backing paper
- 1997 Liberte, egalite, fraternite - Le Timbre, un plaisir qui se communique. Yellow backing paper
- September 2003 White backing paper to above sheet
- January 2005 New Marianne. La Boutique Web du Timbres. White backing paper
- Stamps still in use? Yes.

CANADA

- 14 April 1998 Canadian Maple leaf - 45 cent version
- 12 December 1998 Canadian Maple leaf - 46 cent version
- Stamps still in use? No, this country no longer uses ATM machines to sell postage