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ARTICLES

| | |
|--|----|
| THE YEAR OF THE HORSE (KENG-WU)..... | 17 |
| THE DEFINITIVE STAMPS OF CANADA, 1977-1989 - John G. Schmidt | 21 |
| BICYCLES ON POSTAGE STAMPS - Carl S. Wiedman | 30 |
| MONACO U.P.U. 1949-1950 II - Jacques Nolet | 43 |
| ISRAEL'S YOUTH EXHIBITION PROMOTES PEACE THROUGH PHILATELY - Michael Madesker | 60 |

REGULAR FEATURES

| | |
|--|----|
| EDITOR'S NOTES - Jim Haskett..... | 4 |
| EXCHANGES WANTED | 8 |
| COMING EVENTS | 9 |
| LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | 12 |
| CANADA POST NEW ISSUES | 14 |
| PRESIDENT'S PAGE - James E. Kraemer | 16 |
| FELLOWS OF THE SOCIETY - G. COLLINS BAUGILD - Beverlie Clark | 19 |
| THE R.P.S.C. JUNIOR STAMP COLLECTOR - Art Holmes | 63 |
| POSTMARKED OTTAWA - Hans Reiche | 67 |
| LITERATURE REVIEWS | 69 |
| SOCIETY REPORTS | 72 |
| CHAPTER MEETINGS | 83 |
| CLASSIFIED | 87 |

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Bicycles On Postage Stamps

by Carl S. Wiedman

For many years, a number of stamp issuing countries have been responsible for large quantities of new issues each year. This profusion of new issues is undoubtedly the result of the desires and purchases by collectors, but by the same token, the large quantities have caused many to lose interest in general collecting. Consequently most collectors now limit their interests to specific topics, such as individual countries or single subjects.

In recent times the topical subject of bicycles on postage stamps has received a great deal of interest. This is partially attributable to a general increase of interest in the bicycle itself, both for sport and pleasure, in the American scene. By contrast, there are countries where cycling is considered the number one sport, and in a number of European nations, bicycle racing champions have attained super-star status. In these countries, track and road racing events are scheduled on a regular basis.

There was considerable interest in American bicycle racing in the 1930s and early '40s during the days of the popular six-day races. In recent times there has been a strong resurgence in the sport of bicycle racing, and results in both the Tour de France and the Olympics have demonstrated that the America's are not without interest and ability in the racing scene.

In many countries around the world there has been a substantial growth in bike ownership and riding, for both pleasure and transportation. Part of this is sparked by the growing recognition of the importance of exercising for health purposes.

With the growing interest in bicycles and cycling, there has been a parallel growth in stamp collector interest in the topical subject of bicycles on postage stamps. Clubs have been organized, and a considerable amount of correspondence and cooperative effort has taken place. The result has been the development of a computerized listing of relevant stamps which is regularly updated. Careful attention is paid to new issues, and input from collectors around

the world has provided a good basis for the subject. In the current master list there are in excess of 1100 different postal issues having a bicycle theme — either a bicycle or part of a bicycle, a tricycle, a bike racer, the word 'bicycle' or 'tricycle', or a velodrome would qualify. In addition, there are about 250 local issues, or non-official printings for postal use in a specific area, and usually having to do with mail delivery by bicycle. In addition, about 200 different bicycle stamps have been printed by the Trucial States, although these have almost no postal validity. The Trucial States comprise the Arab shiekdoms which announced their independence in 1971 and formed the United Arab Emirates.

Collecting interest includes single stamps, blocks, sheets, entire sets with one or more bike items, souvenir sheets, first day covers, and various printed postal items such as envelopes and booklets. Many collectors also search for advertising covers, imperforate varieties and stamp proofs.

While the listing of known examples is nearly complete and comprehensive, a new find is made occasionally amongst older issues, and such a find becomes a newsworthy event for the dedicated collectors. In addition, certain examples sometimes bring about disagreement as to the validity of the subject — whether or not it is truly a bicycle example. It is sometimes difficult to determine if a bike or part of a bike is truly illustrated, and there are also disagreements as to pedal-started motorized vehicles.

At first look, a typical collection will appear to be dominated by sports subjects. In fact, a large majority of all bicycles-on-stamps issues have related to racing events, and in Olympic years, the total of new issues goes up considerably. In both 1980 and 1984, the number of bicycle stamps that were added to the listing exceeded 50 issues, and the 1988 view appears to be equally productive.

On the other hand, a careful look at the

overall use of bicycles in stamp designs over the years shows that sports was not the only related subject, and particularly not the earliest. In the early years, the primary use of bikes in the format was related to the actual delivery of mail, and most frequently to the special delivery of postal items. In the days before motorized vehicles attained sufficient reliability for door-to-door distribution, bicycle use for mail delivery was widespread and convenient. The special delivery stamps of Cuba in 1899, and of America, in 1902 marked the start of regular postal issues featuring bicycles.

However, while these were the first of the regular issues, a number of non-official printed stamps relating to or showing bicycles were used even earlier. In 1887 in Germany, in 1894 in America, and in 1897 in Australia, certain local issues were privately printed and sold for use on mail that was delivered in limited areas. The reason for the bicycle depiction was that such deliveries were made by bike. The 1894 American example was the San Francisco Fresno mail service that was established during a railroad strike, and stamps and envelopes were printed and used for the bicycle delivery

of mail. (see ref.) Other 'local' bicycle stamps are known, dating to fairly recent times, and these have become a collection subject in themselves.

In addition to mail delivery and sports, other postage stamp topics and themes have brought about the incorporation of bicycles in the design. Some of these include subjects such as safety, children, scouting, transportation, military, and cartoons. More recently, the actual history of the bicycle has provided an interesting subject for new issues. Some of these related subjects are described, and the year of issue and Scott catalog numbers shown.

MAIL DELIVERY

The earliest of subjects with bicycles in the design, mail delivery by bicycle, was used in stamp designs in a number of countries. While the earliest deliveries were by foot and horseback, bicycles certainly assisted the postman in his rounds, and this widespread use of the bicycle helped build its popularity for use by the general public. The earliest of mail delivery-related issues are shown, but many more have been forthcoming in the '60s, '70s, and '80s.



- | | | | |
|---------|---------|-------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Cuba | 1899 | E2* | Special Delivery - 'Immediata' |
| 2. Cuba | 1902 | E3 | Special Delivery - 'Immediata' |
| 3. U.S. | 1902 | E6 | Special Delivery |
| U.S. | 1911-16 | E8-11 | Sp. Del., changed perf., wtmks. |

| | | | |
|--------------------|------|----------|---------------------------------|
| 4. Cuba | 1910 | E4 | Special Delivery |
| 5. Panama | 1929 | C3, 4 | Special Delivery |
| Panama | 1929 | C1-4 | Same with airmail overprints |
| 6. Bulgaria | 1939 | E1-5 | Special Delivery |
| 7. Bulgaria | 1946 | 500 | Postman on bike |
| 8. China | 1947 | 764-5 | Post office with small bike |
| 9. E. Germany | 1953 | 178 | Postman with bike |
| 10. Hungary | 1953 | B209, 10 | Postal delivery on bike |
| 11. France | 1958 | B320 | Various modes of mail transport |
| 12. Ivory Coast | 1961 | 191 | Postman and bike (with motor) |
| 13. Congo Republic | 1961 | 537 | Postal delivery by bike |

*Scott catalog nos.

SPORTS

The subject of sports has been the major theme calling for the illustration of bicycles in the design of postage stamps. The first of these was in 1931, with the issuance of a set of seven stamps in a set honoring the First Balkan Games, one of which was for bicycle racing. This and other sports events have taken place on a regular basis, and have received continued interest by stamp-issuing and participating countries. Some of these events are:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Balkan Games | Giro d'Italia Races |
| Spartacist Games | Bolivar Games |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Warsaw-Prague-Berlin Peace Race | Commonwealth Games |
| Tour de France | Pan American Games |
| SEAP Games | Assian Cycling Championships |
| Assian Cycling Championships | Cent. Am. & Caribbean Games |
| Cent. Am. & Caribbean Games | Asian Cycling Championships |
| Asian Cycling Championships | Tour of Bulgaria Cycle Race |

Of these, the Peace Race, the Tour de France, and the Olympics have been predominate in attracting new issues, which have shown racers on bikes as well as individual winners. The first twenty years of sports issues featuring bicycles are shown:



| | | | |
|-------------|------|-----|--------------------------|
| 1. Bulgaria | 1931 | 241 | First Balkan Games |
| 2. Bulgaria | 1933 | 248 | Same set with new colors |
| 3. Russia | 1935 | 564 | Spartacist Games |
| 4. Bulgaria | 1947 | 578 | Balkan Games |
| 5. Poland | 1948 | 419 | Peace Race |

| | | | |
|---------------|------|---------|----------------------------|
| 6. Poland | 1948 | 423-5 | Tour of Poland Bike Race |
| 7. Japan | 1948 | 421 | 3rd National Athletic Meet |
| 8. Germany | 1949 | B304, 5 | Trans-Germany Race |
| 9. Russia | 1949 | 1379 | National Sports |
| 10. Bulgaria | 1950 | 707 | Cyclists in race |
| 11. Bolivia | 1951 | 358 | Racing cyclists |
| 12. Romania | 1951 | 782 | Tour of Romania Cycle Race |
| 13. Italy | 1951 | 584 | World Championship |
| Trieste/Italy | 1951 | 128 | Same issue overprinted |
| 14. Venezuela | 1951 | C334-7 | Velodrome |

SAFETY

A number of countries have issued stamps emphasizing the importance of road safety when riding bicycles. In most countries, bicycles have

the same right of the road as do motor vehicles, but are also subject to the same traffic safety regulations, a point which cyclists sometimes overlook.



| | | | |
|----------------------|------|------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Israel | 1966 | 314 | Cyclist giving hand signal |
| 2. Nigeria | 1972 | 280 | Bike with cars on road |
| 3. Hungary | 1973 | 2249 | Cyclist involved in mishap |
| 4. Australia | 1975 | 608 | Damaged bicycle wheel |
| 5. Denmark | 1977 | 599 | Symbolic accident portrayal |
| 6, 7. Bophuthatswana | 1978 | | Safety scenes |
| 8. New Caledonia | 1980 | 456 | Safety cartoon |
| 9. Netherlands | 1983 | 649 | Symbolic safety portrayal |
| 10. Leichtenstein | 1985 | 813 | View of road accident |

CHILDREN

Stamp's honoring the nation's children have frequently done so with bicycles as part of the design. While the use and enjoyment of bikes

has never been limited by the age of the rider, their importance for young people's enjoyment and development has been shown in many stamp designs. The earlier issues are described.



| | | | |
|--------------------|------|------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Liberia | 1957 | 364 | Playground with bike |
| 2. Netherlands | 1958 | B326 | Children on stilts and tricycle |
| 3. Netherlands | 1962 | B369 | Going to school on bike |
| 4. Cuba | 1970 | | Child in safety depiction |
| 5. Cent. Afr. Rep. | 1969 | C74 | Children's toys |
| 6. Albania | 1971 | 1392 | Painting of girl on bike |
| 7. Albania | 1972 | 1464 | Painting of girl on bike |
| 8. Niue | 1974 | 171 | Christmas issue, child and trike |
| 9. Niue | 1975 | 175 | Christmas issue, cartoon |
| 10. Jordan | 1977 | 1010 | Child and toys |
| 11. Neth. Antilles | 1978 | B159 | Girl riding bike |
| 12. E. Germany | 1979 | 2020 | Group of young bike racers |
| 13. Curiname | 1979 | 539 | Issue honoring Year of the Child |
| 14. Virgin Islands | 1979 | 359 | Year of the Child, with bike |

BICYCLE HISTORY

While bikes have appeared on stamps for many years, it has only been in recent times that the bicycle itself has been honored by stamp issues. The bicycle has been important historically in many countries around the world. It was an early development and invention because of man's need to achieve greater mobility, and there have been constant changes and improvements since the initial 'walking bicycle' or Draisinne of Germany in the early 1800s.

A great step was made when Michaux, of Paris, France, introduced the pedal drive in the 1860s with the early velocipedcor 'boneshaker' as it has become known. It was subsequently

found that increasing the diameter of the front driving wheel enabled the rider to travel farther with each turn of the pedals, and created a much more efficient machine. Thus the high wheel or 'ordinary bicycle' came into being. They were pleasant and easy to pedal, and marked the beginnings of a very great increase in interest in bikes and bicycling. Many of these still exist today, and are used with enjoyment and ease on modern paved roads.

Further developments emphasized the need for greater safety, finally resulting in chain drives to the rear wheel, and greater comfort, with spring suspensions receiving a great deal of interest by inventors and manufacturers. Of course, an underlying concept in all design con-

siderations has been the need for speed and mobility, and modern bikes combine these features in excellent machines.

A number of the stamp honoring cycling's history are shown. These are frequently part of a larger set, and are not shown in chronological order of issue.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---|
| 1. Great Britain | 1973 | 843-6 | A set of four stamps honoring a century of organized cycling in England. |
| 2. Venezuela | 1981 | 1250 | One of a set of four depicting road transportation. |
| 3. France | 1983 | 1902 | A single stamp honoring Pierre and Ernest Michaux, founders of the pedal drive. |
| 4. Togo | 1979 | C386 | An issue honoring Sir Rowland Hill, and illustrating the Center-cycle, an early contrivance used for mail delivery. |
| 5. W. Germany, W. Berlin | 1985 | B630-33 9NB223-6 | Eight stamps showing different examples of bike development. |
| 6. Mongolia | 1982 | 1233-41 | A set of eight, plus a souvenir sheet showing early bikes. |
| 7. Mali | 1968 | 109, 111, C60 | A set of three showing the Draisinne, the Michaux, and a 1988 French bicyclette. |
| 8. Togo | 1978 | 1003-4, C350-353 | Six different pictorial views of different historical bikes. |
| 9. Austria | 1985 | 1328 | A single issue showing the ordinary in a modern art view. |
| 10. United States | 1982 1985 | 1901 2127 | Two issues in the transportation coil set having historical bikes. |

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------|--------|--|
| 11. Poland | 1986 | | A set of six stamps commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Warsaw Cycle Society. |
| 12. Czechoslovakia | 1979 | 2255-9 | A set of five different, showing bikes from 1870-1978. |

RELATED TIMES

Other themes have featured bicycles as part of the design. Some of these include scouting, transportation, manufacturing, animals, and cartoons. Also, a number of stamps have been issued in which a bicycle has been shown as an incidental part of a particular scene or setting.

With interest in the bicycle continuing to grow both for competitive sports and for pleasure riding, it is natural to expect a strong continuation of new bicycle stamp issues. As a topical theme the number of collectors has grown markedly. Clubs have been organized, books have been published, and a great deal of serious study has been devoted to this important subject of philately.

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"Bicycles on Postage Stamps", was written by Carl S. Wiedman of Bloomfield Hills, Mich. Mr. Wiedman is an officer of The Wheelman, an organization of about 750 members devoted to the collecting and restoration of antique bicycles. In addition Mr. Wiedman is also a member of The Bicycle Stamp Club, a specialized organization in the United Kingdom interested in postal stamps having a bicycling subject or reference. Members of the stamp club receive a semi-annual publication, *Bicycle Stamps*. Anyone interested in either of these organizations should write to Mr. Norman Batho, 358 Iverson Place, E. Windsor, N.H., U.S.A. 08520, and ask for information and a membership application. The club also has a computer checklist of bicycle stamps which is available from Mr. Batho at a price of \$6. U.S.

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