



Glen Stephens'

Market Matters:

Pacific Explorer 2005

Will this good ship sink or float?...

It never ceases to amaze me when opening up inward mail how many philatelic senders do not use postage stamps on their mail.

We would NOT have a hobby if everyone in history had thought like that.

PLEASE use stamps!

I can't believe the junk some folks place on their mail. A lady this week mailed me from Cairns a pile of photocopies of her "postmark collection" she rapidly formed after reading my column last month.

Now a postmark collector would engender and encourage postmarking on today's stamps one might think? Nope - she used a \$6.60 Australia Post white "supermarket label". Which I tossed away mumbling angrily about the waste of an opportunity.

Why these folks do not use a block of high value commems or a recent Mini Sheet and have them lightly cancelled is a mystery to me. Where does she imagine the NEXT generation of postmark collectors - indeed collectors of fine used stamps will source their material?

This lady advised me many of her cancels 'might' be valuable - such as Hobart. (Wrong!) I have no idea what she expected me to do with her photocopies - mail them back to her at my expense or what. They never say.

On that point I'd like to re-iterate something Alan Salisbury used to often type in his wonderful *Stamp News* columns for decades, and it bears repeating to this day. Whenever you write to a *Stamp News* columnist seeking free advice, PLEASE observe the common courtesy of enclosing a stamped addressed envelope (SAE) or postage to cover the response.

Stamp writers and dealers are often busy people. We will often take our time at no charge to respond, and try and answer your query, but expecting that to be at our postage expense is a bit much.

And when sending parcels or packets to philatelic recipients please use NICE stamps. I pride myself on doing that - have done for 25 years, and customers appreciate it. It takes so little time, and gives us all something we can use and appreciate at the other end!



Pacific Explorer 2005

You will be reading this magazine in early September. It will then be only about 7½ months to "Pacific Explorer - World Stamp Expo 2005" in Sydney.

Staged under the auspices of the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie, it is being presented over four days from Thursday 21st to Sunday 24th April 2005 at the Sydney Exhibition Centre.

Sadly the general "vibe" for this Exhibition has been very low-key to my ears. So low-key it is almost inaudible. Seven months out from "Australia 99" ("A99") the trumpets were blowing and the buzz was amazing. I bet a lot of readers of this column have no clue "Pacific Explorer 2005" is even occurring in Sydney? Unhelpfully, the most recent APF newsletter announced it was being held in Melbourne.

After the astounding success of "A99", I personally am disappointed to see the direction this international is heading. The jungle drums are not beating loudly at all. However this boat CAN be turned around.

A lot of the success of "A99" can be attributed directly to the drive and enthusiasm of David Maiden who was at the head of the Australia Post philatelic group. After retiring from Australia Post David has been for some time consulting with the Greek Post Office on their Olympic issue, and on Olymphilex 2005.

Sure it cost Australia Post a ton of money to underwrite - but they were repaid on that investment MANY fold, I know that for a fact. I believe David Maiden is the only head of Philatelic for the past 30 years to realise that stamp dealers were an essential part of his division making money.

Maiden worked well with dealers, came up with a number of positive and sensible innovations for them, and was always very approachable and positive. I am certain the division turnover figures under his stewardship speak for themselves.

I was Executive Editor of *Australasian Stamps* magazine during "A99" (and editor and publisher of *Coin and Banknote Magazine*) and Australia Post was bombarding the collector media with ideas and support. And the media in turn all got heavily behind the Exhibition.

In turn I wrote about it often in the large selling overseas magazines I am the South Pacific correspondent for, and did this for many months in advance. By contrast, the silence so far has been almost deafening about "Pacific Explorer" to myself and the Editor of *Stamp News*. These things do NOT cost money - they just take organisation.

Australian dealer interest in taking stands for "Pacific Explorer" presently seems tepid to put it generously. A good deal of it is the old Sydney/Melbourne rivalry thing of course. However, AP long ago decided Sydney would be the venue if they were to fund it, and there will be NO going back on the location. So we all need to get behind this Sydney show - dealers and collectors alike.

A bunch of foreign post offices will of course always turn up to a trade show junket to desirable locales like Sydney on full Government expense. But leading stamp dealers being there is what brings in the crowds in big numbers. Not the stamp bureaus, not coin related stands, not the rows of exhibit frames which a lot of visitors do not bother to go near. Bottom line - they want STAMP DEALERS. Real dealers. The more of them the better.

Add to this reality the brilliant and innovative ideas which also attracted visitors to "A99" in huge numbers. Being able to hand perforate your own imperforate Mini Sheets was a big hit. To this day I still get orders for the "A99" perfins at \$A75 a pair, and they are listed in catalogues worldwide. The "personalised stamps" were another huge drawcard. A sheet of them now sells for near \$100.

"A99" allegedly attracted about 100,000 visitors over 6 days, who spent up big with about 180 trade standholders.

Glen Stephens - Market Matters



"A99" perfins still a \$75 set

I honestly DO hope we see similar massive crowds in Sydney. And 110 filled stands. (Or 120 if you listen to APTA.) With real stamp DEALERS – not mostly postal Administrations and institutions and numismatic related booths.

If that is to happen, or indeed achieve anything remotely like it, a turbo charged promotional campaign within the trade better start VERY soon in my view. To attract BOTH dealers and attendees. Officially the committee is expecting 60,000 visitors in 4 days. In my view that is absurdly naive wishful thinking, knowing what the fairly well promoted ANDA show attracted last weekend.

Many experienced stamp dealers had fantastic results in 1999. Michael Eastick from Melbourne is a stamp show junkie, and has taken booths at big shows all over the world. Eastick KNOWS what figures a good show should bring him. He told me at the time he TRIPLED his most optimistic budget at "A99".

Eastick told me after that show and was quoted in the magazine - *"Australia Post et al did a sensational job on this show, and I really can't think of one tiny thing they could have done to improve the venue, the facilities, the running of the show, or the size of the crowds. Let this show be an object lesson to both Royal Mail in the UK and to the United States Post Office."*

Interestingly, Eastick is not at all certain yet if he will book a stand for "Pacific Explorer". And many other prominent dealers I have spoken to have exactly the same view. Leading Melbourne Auctioneer Gary Watson of Prestige Philately states in his current Auction catalogue that they presently have no intention of booking a booth. Australia's leading retail dealer I understand is also in two minds etc, and many others tell me the same.

Even Sydney based industry icons Seven Seas Stamps stated at the Sydney meeting with Kate Jones (below) they will likely not have a booth. The booth cost is very substantial. About DOUBLE per day "real cost" in dollars to dealers than it was for "A99". Many inducements that I need not go into here in a collector magazine

that were offered to "A99" booth-holders and are not offered in 2005. *"There is no budget"*.

Executive officer of "Pacific Explorer" Kate Jones from Australia Post flew up to Sydney earlier year to address a dinner meeting of local dealers about the show. (Nope - no free junket - we all paid our own way!) Speaking personally I was surprised at what was NOT being done for

the show as there was: *"no budget for it"*. Issue after issue was covered by this same response.

Even blanket public liability insurance was not to be included in the stand costs for this show as: *"there was no budget for it"* this time around. Wow. Allegedly Australia Post is "spending" over \$3 million on this show. I have no idea what they are spending it on, but if there is "no budget" for the essential basics someone needs to review the plan.

Hiring the venue is clearly the major cost. A lot of the "expense" this show is to pay contractors to do what Australia Post themselves did for "A99". Subbing out a lot of the work at high cost to folks that know nothing about the stamp business will see a lot of money chewed up, that I can well imagine, but will it attract 60,000 visitors?

I pointed out that a series of six numbered, Limited Edition miniature sheets, such as a special print of a \$10 stamp being issued via a random ballot one a month for 6 months before the show would do three things: (a) Create collector and dealer excitement (b) Create great demand from collectors who would badger dealers (c) Help directly fund a lot of important things that right now there appears to be "no budget" for.

Only 5000 monthly numbered sets 6 of such \$10 Mini Sheets sold is \$300,000 right there. And would create (a) (b) and (c) rather nicely. And at the small 5000 set level the secondary market value would always be VERY good.

If balloted you'd need to go seeking the ones you missed out on etc., to get a complete set of 6. Many phone calls. Much "buzz". NO special access for stock to dealers. Most would not succeed, so only 1,000 or so full sets 6 would ever exist. And clearly be worth more than \$60. A "Win, Win" for all parties.

The Sydney dealer meeting was assured this kind of thing had been discussed and was not going to occur. Seems a shame to me, but I do not work for Australia Post. I just have a Diploma in Marketing and Advertising. The official Australia Post

website for the show as I typed this piece mid August simply says: *"Products - Australia Post will be releasing new stamp issues and products at Pacific Explorer 2005. Watch this space!"*

Hot Dog. You can feel the excitement. I don't think. Some kind of exciting and pertinent products surely need to be on sale worldwide right NOW!

If only the collectors who opted to ballot for such pre-show items were involved it would not affect the annual spend of the general collector, and thus not generate any negative feedback or complaint.

"Ausipex 84" had a similar preliminary miniature sheet "supporters" issue leading right up to the show, and to this day - 20 years on, that set is expensive and highly sought after. Not all sought them, but those who did are well pleased.

Australia Post should in my opinion be taking page ads in this and the *Coin and Banknote* magazines each month counting down to this major show. And should have been doing this for at least the past 6 months. And covering international dealer publications like the *Philatelic Exporter*.

Many folks will plan a vacation or booth around the show IF given a lot of advance notice. Stamp collectors are NOT impulsive people. This is supposedly a "World Stamp Expo". Does anyone in Europe or the USA know this? How?

Kate Jones told dealers in Sydney the "advertising blitz" was to be focused in the week or two immediately prior to the show and there was little budget for anything else. That may work with motor shows and home shows, but I personally do NOT think it will work for a large stamp show. At all.

The weekend chosen for the show is rather unfortunate, co-inciding with the major Jewish religious observance of Passover which begins on April 24. As a lot of stamp dealers are of the observant Jewish faith, manning a trade booth on any Saturday is not always possible either. Not being free to trade on Saturday or Sunday in a 4 day show may impact on some potential dealers, and even collector visitors.

The weekend chosen is also before the Anzac Day national holiday Monday, which will mean air fares and Sydney hotel accommodations are tight or non-existent, (and VERY expensive) as lots of diggers come into Sydney for the dawn service "One Day Of The Year". I suggested to Kate Jones tying in heavily with the RSL might mean a lot of potential attendees in a perfect demographic, but I was advised this had been discussed and not proceeded with.

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Worse still, NSW school holidays are on whilst this show occurs. Heaps of families are out of Sydney and on vacation. A large slab of the visitors to "A99" were countless 1000s of school children skilfully organised to visit the show via much hard work and careful organisation from Australia Post staff and Education Dept. A lot of new collectors came from that I am sure. Clearly that will not be occurring next April as school is out.

My view is that this ball lies firmly in the lap of Australia Post (AP) – not the hard working committee of dealer and collector members, who are working simply with what they are given. AP will make millions if it works. They need to spend more money NOW to make it work. A LOT more money than they have presently budgeted for. OR far easier redistribute some money ear-marked for expensive "consultants" who know nothing about philately to where real stamp collectors will see it. It seems as simple as that.

Leading well-known Australian dealers must fill that hall for collectors to come, and right now they are NOT booking stands. AP brass surely knows the reason why (if they ever venture out of their top floor offices in Exhibition Street and ask) and it quite simply is COST.

Without going into precise details in a collector magazine, replicating precisely the incentive they offered for "A99" would see stands get booked, and booked fast. I can tell them that for free. Donate my consultancy fee to charity please! Stands allegedly need to be booked by September



Month old Mini Sheet sells for 10 times face.

30, (and credit card will be debited same day) so someone senior in AP better make a decision on this very soon.

Dealer "vibe" about this show right now is really terrible. AP offering an incentive will turn that around. Dealers will in turn decide if they plan to attend, circularise their clients about their attendance in advance, and the grass roots campaign to boost numbers and awareness then gets underway as it did for "A99". At no cost to AP. APTA is talking about what a booth costs in Washington. Local dealers are talking about longingly what a booth cost them at "A99".

There is no real "cost" to AP if they adopt this tried and proven course. Stand revenue gross will in fact be far higher, and collector attendance higher as a direct result. And the show a far larger success. Another "Win, Win" for all concerned it seems to me? Disclaimer – I never attend stamp shows, so have no vested interest whatever in this suggestion.

The clock is ticking. I really hope it is a great show, and I think raising this matter NOW at least allows timely input and comment and evasive action before the date looms too close. I urge collectors, dealers and organisers to forward letters with your thoughts on my comments - **for or against** - to the Editor.

Month old Mini Sheet sells for 10 times face.

I had an email this week from a client confused at why he got such a HIGH price for a recent mini sheet he listed on eBay. The item was a 2004 Tasmania '1804-2004' miniature sheet (issued February 04) *OVER-PRINTED "Paris 26 June-4 July LE SALON DU TIMBRE 2004"* in gold foil. The foil overprint is in lower right, but gold never shows well on scans, sorry.

My client's ebay handle is "redpigeon2000" and this sheet had an opening bid of \$6. It sold August 1 for \$29, with an underbidder at \$28. For a \$3 face value just issued mini sheet! This seller had no idea why the high price, so he asked me.

Asking around the trade it seems this sheet is in short supply. Some dealers are already asking \$40 and \$50 for it. If you need it, secure a copy now. (Disclosure statement - I have never had stock, nor ordered any!)

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