

GETTING COVERS

Everyone's after covers, and there's no denying that they're harder to pick up these days, so I thought it might be helpful to get together and share favorite strategies for success. Aside from the obvious reason why this could be of use, many collectors find that it is the "thrill of the hunt" which is the most enjoyable part of putting together any collection. There are a variety of methods for obtaining covers suggested here. They're all tried and proven. Pick and choose the ones which you feel the most comfortable with. I've outlined the basic methods below, and we'll also take a look in this issue at what a cross-section of collectors do to obtain their covers.

WHERE TO START: If you're just starting out in the hobby, before seriously approaching collecting, you're going to have to deal with the problem of exactly what you want to collect, at least on an initial basis. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of categories in which one can collect, ranging from the gigantic areas, such as "Hotels/Motels" and "Restaurants," to minute areas, such as "Aardvarks," or "Fire Engine Companies." Any collector is always free to collect whatever strikes his or her fancy, and most add and drop categories as their collecting careers progress. A good way to start out is to begin by being a "General" collector, collecting any and all covers. This will give you the opportunity to become acquainted with various categories and types of covers, and which ones are easy to come by and which are more difficult. Eventually, most collectors drop "General" and specialize in just certain categories. Most of us aren't willing or simply not capable of dealing with the tremendous volume of covers or the enormous amount of space required to house a truly good General collection, but in the beginning "General" is good, and, besides you'll need trading stock, anyway.

GETTING COVERS: *Undoubtedly, the fastest method of getting covers is to buy them*, and, judging from the survey forms, almost all collectors do, either regularly or occasionally. Most collectors can't afford to go around buying entire collections, though, so "buying," here, basically refers to participating in auctions from time to time or employing any of the other buying strategies discussed here. Almost all of the regional clubs carry on mail auctions through their bulletins, as does RMS; auctions are also held at the conventions and major swapfests; and there are even some private mail auctions held by individual collectors. This is a major reason, by the way, why a collector would want to belong to clubs out of his local area—for the bulletins and the auctions. Erich Miethner and I used to do that.

If you *would* like to try buying entire collections, you might think about buying with a partner and then splitting the collection. That might bring the cost of such an approach down to a more reasonable level for you.

There is another form of buying that's cheaper and usually quite successful: *run a local ad* offering to buy accumulations. Many people have them sitting around the house, stored in the garage, etc.; they'd really like to get rid of them, but they're souvenirs of past vacations and they don't want to just throw them out. Some will simply give their matches to you; others will be expecting to make a killing; but most will accept .02-.05 cents each for the run-of-the-mill type covers. When I do this, I run my ad for four weeks, let it lapse for 2-3 months (thereby allowing time for new people to move into the area), and then run it again. A fascinating aspect of this method of getting covers is that you never know what you're going to run into.

Unless your last name is Rockefeller or Kennedy, though, buying is probably not going to be your main way of getting covers...so let's get down to the nuts and bolts of building up both your collection

and trading stock. First, ***do it yourself!*** You're constantly going into a variety of businesses, such as: hotels, restaurants, shoe stores, hardware stores, garages, etc. Some are going to have matches available, although they may no longer be so temptingly placed in a basket on the counter. If they are, take some!

Many collectors go a step farther and ask for an entire caddy or more. It doesn't hurt to ask, and who knows what you're going to end up with. Each such collector has developed his own technique for doing so, but it's always a good idea to carry one or more of your club membership cards to show that you're serious. Bill Thomas's article in the Nov/Dec issue went into detail on acquiring caddies.

Second, ***club meetings, conventions, and the major swapfests offer freebie tables*** where you can simply help yourself (within reason, of course). Also, the AMCAL and RMS conventions offer room-hopping, where you can help yourself to one of each type of cover the room has to offer. It's not unusual for a novice convention-goer to come home with several *thousand* new covers, just from the freebie tables, room-hopping, and registration bags.

Third, no matter how good you turn out at getting covers yourself, there's only one of you. What you need is an army! Your first recruits—***friends and relatives***. Uncle Harry is always out galavanting all over the country, and your sister is taking that vacation to Hawaii next month. Spread the word that you would appreciate their picking up matches for you whenever they get the chance, and then watch them roll in (of course, it helps if you're very social and come from a large family!).

Fourth, ***by far, the best way is to trade***. There are covers all over the world, and new ones being issued every day. Alone, it would be a hopeless task to try and build up a collection. By trading, you can literally have that army, widely dispersed, keeping an eye out for the covers you want. Almost all collectors trade with at least a few others on a regular basis; some trade with over a hundred. It all depends on how much correspondence you can handle and how big your trading stock is.

Traders may be found by: 1) writing to collectors listed as willing to trade (in *The Traders Index* or a club membership list) [This is the best way]; 2) running an ad in any of the club bulletins; 3) making contacts at club meetings, conventions, etc.; and 4) random mail requests to other collectors [This is the worst way].

A corollary of this would also be to look for collectors of other items who would trade their matchcovers for the items they want from you. A fairly common example of this involves matchcover collectors trading business cards for covers.