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# Dealing Overseas

by  
Mike Prero

Collectors, as a class, have probably always traded with collectors overseas, almost from the inception of the hobby back in the 1930s. Foreign covers have also always had a certain allure, at least for some collectors. They may be from exotic locations; they may represent a different 'level' or 'branch' of covers; they may even offer categories that are basically absent from our domestic sources, especially today, with all the smoking bans in effect across the country.

Historically, such trading with collectors overseas has had its ups and downs. In the early years of the hobby here, it's wasn't practical to trade overseas unless boxes or labels were acceptable in return, simply because matchbooks didn't become commonly used, much less collected, in foreign areas until much later...and, in fact, in most parts of the Old World (Europe, Asia, and Africa), the matchbox still reigns supreme. But, in Europe, for example, matchbooks were still something of an odd novelty even going into World War II. An interesting example of this is to be found in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. This classic mystery was first copyrighted in 1933 and in it a match from a matchbook is one of the clues at the scene of the crime...but the famed authoress has to explain what it is to her readers...a 'paper match'...as opposed to the standard wooden box matches.

And, there were other initial problems back in those early days. One would have simply been contacts. Unless the collector had relatives or friends already overseas, who could he trade with? He wouldn't know who was a collector or who to contact. Mail in those days was less swift, as well.

By the time I came into the hobby, though, in the early 1980s, trading overseas had become quite common. Indeed, one of the first people I traded with on a regular basis was a gentleman in the Dominican Republic. I sent a trade to him; he sent a trade to me. Everything then looked quite rosy. Then came the present!

Technology has cleared up the contacts and communications problems. With the internet, a collector can find contacts literally all over the world. With e-mail, communication is almost instantaneous. So before, whereas mere questions between two traders could take months to resolve, today the same can be settled in minutes. Moreover, the traders can even swap scans so that trades can be even more precise. And, language doesn't seem to be the barrier that it once was...not because *we're* any better at languages,

certainly, but rather because so many more people around the world are more familiar with English.

Unfortunately, currently balancing out these positives has been the more than daunting increase in overseas postage. For me, that has been more than enough to cancel out the advantages of trading overseas. Thus, I haven't had a regular trader on another continent for over several years now. Still, I occasionally make one time foreign trades, basically for material that I simply would not be likely to get from my regular trading partners. Foreign Girlie and Tobacco sets, for example.

What *is* out there, anyway? Why would you want to trade overseas in the first place, and in spite of the postage costs? Well, first, if you're only after covers, then you're probably not going to be trading with anyone in Asia or Africa. Those areas are almost exclusively into boxes and labels. For the most part, what covers *are* available from these areas come from the westernized hotel chains...Intercontinentals, Sheratons, etc., and those specific covers are normally available right here from domestic collectors.

That leaves you with South America, Australia, and Europe. There's practically no one to trade with in S. America, and there are no clubs there, either. So, now you're down to Australia and Europe, both of which have active clubs and friendly and willing traders, and both certainly have covers, although not in the quantities that we're used to.

The vast majority of collectors here aren't interested in labels, but if you're willing to take boxes in your categories, and most collectors certainly are, then Asia, Australia, and Europe are open to you as very fertile hunting grounds, with Europe normally being your best bet.

What are these foreign markets especially good for? - Sets, Tobacco, Girlies, and Die-Cuts! Sets abound, especially in Europe and Asia, and have for quite awhile...and *these* sets are almost always bigger, often *much* bigger—40, 60, 80 issues! Portugal, for example, is famous for such, and India has also been a major producer of sets for at least the last decade or so.

Foreign Girlies! Europe is your best bet. Just look at the sets that have been added to the Girlie Catalog over the last several years! The issues from Eastern Europe, almost all sets, often tend to be significantly less slick than their Western European counterparts, but hey! Girlies are Girlies!

Foreign Tobacco - huge potential! As the domestic smoking market has dwindled, you bet the tobacco companies have redoubled their efforts overseas where people smoke with a vengeance! As a case in point, Marlboro, of the brands that we're more familiar with, has been very big in Europe for many years.

Foreign Die-Cuts! The variety and creativity are absolutely amazing! One has to smile as we look back and remember how impressed we once were with Jewelites and Contours. What's available now boggles the mind! Biggest producer---undoubtedly, Swedish Match. I've recently begun to assemble a collection of such...They're just so wonderfully bizarre, you can't help grinning in unbridled glee as you page through example after example.

Of course, all of this depends on finding reliable traders overseas. And, don't forget, you have to have available what *they*'re looking for. And that's often a key stumbling point. But, nothing ventured, nothing gained! To help you out, I'll see if I can put together some sort of list of collectors you might contact. Stay tuned...