

The Pros and Cons of Nationals

Unaffectionately known as the “garbage cover” of the hobby, a “National” is a stock cover that is designed to be used as blanket advertising over a wide geographic area. It has no specific address, just the general advertisement....Take a Holiday Inn cover, for example, which has the logo and a 1-800 number, but no single location given from which it came. It could have come from a San Francisco Holiday Inn, a New York Holiday Inn, or somewhere in between; you’ll never know. And, even if you did know, because you’re the person who picked it up in the first place, or some well-intentioned collector has actually written the original location on the inside of the cover, it doesn’t matter. A National is a National is a National!

There are a number of categories, however, in which Nationals are not only accepted, but, in fact, wherein they are the norm. These are categories in which you would not expect to see a lot of specific locations: Ship Lines, Airlines, Cigarettes, etc., and Nationals in these categories are well-made, sought-after covers. But, such covers don’t comprise the vast majority of Nationals, and, all-in-all, Nationals are not well-received by collectors. Most flat out just don’t like them; they don’t want them; and they don’t trade them. Traditionally, most Nationals have been *really* mass-produced, cheap “quickie” covers of very poor quality, and, with no given location, many collectors just don’t want to waste their time (and their covers) on them.

Well, do *I* keep Nationals? Yes, I do...and for the best reason any collector can possibly give: “I need them for my collection!” If I’m collecting Holiday Inns, for example, I want one each of ALL the Holiday Inn covers ever produced in order for my collection to be complete, including one of each distinctively different National that Holiday Inn has produced over the years.



Do I tell that to my traders? ***Absolutely not!*** I’d be inundated with them...Not that other collectors are out to “cheat” me in any way, but human nature is human nature, and many would see this as their golden opportunity to “dump” their unwanted Nationals on *me*. Also, even given that I might be able to use those Nationals I receive, I certainly don’t want to send out “good” covers only to receive Nationals back for them. There is an unacceptable balance there. So, I trade good covers for good covers, and the Nationals find their way to me from freebie tables, relatives, etc. By their very definition, they’re much more common and readily available than other covers, so there’s usually no problem in my finding the Nationals that I can actually use.

How *you* make use of Nationals is up to you, but you should be aware, on the one hand, that most collectors don’t see them as collectibles *just because* they’re matchcovers, and that, on the other hand, perhaps they shouldn’t all just be summarily tossed out just because they *are* Nationals.

