

Hobby Abandoning Slotted Pages?

The last ten years have been full of technical innovations for the hobby—first the computer and the ensuing revolution in desktop publishing; then faxes; then scanners; and finally E-mail, the internet, and web sites. But, while these technological primadonnas have been getting all the publicity, a quieter revolution has also been in progress—the hobby is rapidly switching to plastic pages for housing its treasures rather than the once standard slotted, or ‘slit,’ pages.

The pioneers of the hobby didn’t have access to either type of album page, of course, so they had to improvise. Many seem to have made their own by taking needle and thread and simply sewing linear guides on heavy construction-type paper. I have a number of wonderful examples of such albums and use them, myself. And, the last time I heard, there were still at least a few collectors left who still continue this craft today.

By the time the 1950s arrived, or thereabouts, there were at least a couple of companies that were producing slotted pages especially designed for matchcovers, such as Beachcraft. Here, the collector merely fitted each cover into the pre-cut slots on the pages—no more sewing. Although there were always complaints about the slotted pages (i.e., the corners of covers often were damaged, and any collector knows it’s murder trying to get a cover with a brittle striker into those slots), these slotted pages soon became the hobby standard.

With the close of the 1980s came the appearance of the early plastic pages—especially tailored for matchcovers. These early pages weighed a ton and had a definite tendency to become very stiff in cool temperatures—so that they ‘crackled’ when handled, but they offered a number of obvious advantages over the slotted pages: the covers were now protected, you could see the inside of the cover just by turning the page, and—no more slots! There was also an initial scare when coin and card collectors, already familiar with working with plastic pages, warned of the possible PVC danger to covers. Today’s plastic pages, however, are lighter in weight, much more flexible, and free of PVC. They’re also much more readily available than they once were.

So, when did the switch-over take place? It was gradual (and it’s still going on), but it was steady and significant. At the height of the slotted page era, there were a number of sources—individual collectors, album manufacturers such as Hobbymaster, etc. Even some of the clubs offered them. Long Beach was one, and Sierra-Diablo, thanks to hand-made dies by master craftsman Warren Marshall, manufactured their own and was doing a fairly brisk business in the pages at one time. With the advent of the plastic pages, though, demand gradually eroded away. Today, none of the clubs have them available anymore (except occasional used ones), and Hobbymaster has switched over completely to plastic pages. In fact, there is only one source left that I know of for slotted pages: Larry Zeigler in Canada. Meanwhile, the corresponding demand for plastic pages within the hobby is booming by comparison.

Slotted pages will certainly continue to be used by hobbyists for decades to come, just as many of us are still hanging on to our sewn pages, but the shift, both in preference and production, has already been made. It’s just as well that there *is* this overlapping in page types, though. Those of us with larger collections (in the hundreds of thousands—and a few have over a million) may never be able to afford to put every cover in plastic. For the present, at least for myself, I’ve had to compromise and only use plastic for my older, more cherished covers....but as soon as that rich uncle dies...