

Making Displays

[This is a reprisal of a March, 1986 Sierra-Diablo Bulletin article by the late Bill Thomas; the information here is perfectly apropos after 15 years]

I can't assure you of a win, but as in any competitive thing, you have a better chance if you know how the game is played, so here are some helpful hints which might help you capture a trophy or award.

Every club has its own rules for display competition, and they aren't all the same. RMS publishes their rules before each convention; most local clubs have rules somewhere, but nobody can find 'em. RMS has experienced judges to make awards; most local clubs have a popular vote in which everyone votes.

Whether it's judges or members in general voting, they should be voting on the covers and not your artistic talent. Oh sure, neatness counts where there are two identical displays and one is sloppy, but, theoretically, an advertising layout artist is not supposed to have an edge over ordinary Joe Collector. So, what you display is important. A set of covers, no matter how beautiful, is not likely to be a winner if it has been around for some years and most everyone has the set. People are looking for rarity as well as quality. Quality doesn't mean much—a set having many blah covers is not as winningful as a small set of dandy covers.

Check the rules carefully to see if your intended display will fit the criteria. Some clubs' rules are vague, like "small set." If you ask how many makes a small set, you'll likely get different answers. Pick your mounting board color with care, considering the dominant color of your covers. Size can be a factor, too. Some clubs allow extraneous matter; some don't care. Some limit the size of the descriptive label to some percentage of the display's total area. This, too, can affect the size of your display.

Mount your covers in some logical or sequential order. Lay them out first before fastening them down. Some covers might need to be in "upside down" if the primary area to be viewed and admired is the back, but that's OK. Displays need not be framed under glass, but most clubs' rules do not prohibit such mounting. It is best, though, to cover your display with sheet plastic; it keeps the covers from being soiled, disturbed or STOLEN. Yes, there are light-fingered people who will steal a cover. Remember, most display competitions are open to viewing by the general public. I would recommend mounting your covers (or boxes) on your display with transparent photo corners, or with stamp hinges. Glued down covers look nice, but they are ruined for any future trading. But, if you have spares, and don't care, there's no rule that says you can't glue 'em down.

Most all displays are entered in some category, so you should know before you begin your display what category you intend to enter it in. It might be suitable for one category at RMS and for another category at a local club's display. But you will need to tell the display folks what category you want your display entered in, and you'll have to have your name on the back, covered so it can't be accidentally seen.

Most displays are covers or boxes mounted on a board, but they don't have to be. You could have a cover or box in a glass box or an a pedestal. I have displayed a wooden-box lady's purse covered with matchbooks. The club's display committee will guard the display to the extent that it can, but they can't assume legal responsibility. Viewers are asked and expected not to handle displays, even their own. Once the competition is over, be sure and pick up your displays when asked, as some nice displays have been known to disappear if not retrieved promptly.