

Is it a Set?

That is the question! Whether 'tis nobler...Well, never mind...Is it a set? Or, is it a series? Are they the same? Are the two mutually exclusive? Do they ever overlap?

Well, let's start with definitions. A set is a group of covers, sharing a common design or theme, issued at the same time. We've all seen Christmas sets, Bank sets, Cigarette sets. They could be store sets, with no advertiser, but if there is an advertiser then all the covers in a set would have the same advertiser. While some collectors see sets as running three or more in number, others (myself included) say two is enough. The most common numbers seen in sets are probably 3 and 5, but they can certainly run to any number (almost always an even number, though, when over 5 covers). Some of the Group One sets, for example, run 24, 96, 200. Some of the Portuguese box sets run even bigger. *[Here are 4 covers from an Eddy set, below]*

Series, on the other hand, are groups of covers, sharing a common design or theme, *not* issued at the same time. And, I've never seen a 'store series'; they all have advertisers, but, normally, *different* advertisers...or, at least, different *secondary* advertisers. So, for example, take one of the Champion Spark Plugs series. Each cover bears the name or logo of the main advertiser (Champion Spark Plugs, in this case) (usually on the back panel), while the front panel bears the name of the individual agent or outlet. Thus, each cover may have the same back panel design, while each front panel shows a different outlet. Plus, they're issued at different times, as new outlets are added *[although, in some cases, I'm sure, the whole run may have been made at once, based on who the outlets were at the time]*. In other cases, such as some of the more notable Radio Station series, the entire outside of each cover may be



Or, Is It a Series?

identical, but they're different on the inside (each bearing a different contest number, for example). Or, I can think of at least one series where the *insides* are identical, but the *outsides* are different (with the exception of the ID number)...the CLIX series. [Below are 4 covers from a Chevron series]

Series tend to run much larger than sets, simply because of the nature of the beast...all those different agents, or outlets, or contest numbers. Probably the most recent well-known series is the Camel 30 Singles, almost all of which have the Camel name or logo on the back panel and the name of the night club/bar/etc. on the front panel. They're not *all* the same design, though, which brings us back to our initial definition. They don't all *have to* have the same design, but they all do have the same theme. The Camel 30 Singles run some 4,400, last time I checked. That's quite a series!

Which brings us to our next point. In a set, the number of issued covers or boxes is finite and known. "This is a set of five First Federal Savings & Loans covers"; "This is a three-cover contact set issued for the 2001 RMS Convention"; "This is a 12-cover Signs of the Zodiac set". With a series, however, we (the collectors) usually don't know how many were issued, simply because we're not privy to what is basically in-house manufacturer-advertiser records. Some time ago, for example, I ran an initial article on the KFOX radio station series, I believe, in the Jul/Aug 1999 issue. That article listed 91 covers in the series. In the Sep/Oct 2002 issue, that number was revised up to 154, as more collectors reported having additional covers. With most series, though, we'll never have a definitive number, because we can never be sure that 'all' are known, or that 'all' even still exist. The best we can reasonably hope for is to put together lists of known covers by comparing collections.

