

Hobby Abandoning Slotted Pages?

By Mike Prero

[That's the question I asked in July, 1999. Here's the article...]

“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..."

Well, it's 13 years later now [*Oh, my God!*]; let's see whether my predictions have come to fruition or not.....and....[*the envelope, please*]...Aha! Yes, they have!

1. There definitively *has been* a continuing move towards plastic pages and away from paper pages.
2. Paper pages *have* continued to be used for 'decades to come', simply because they're the cheaper alternative. But, as far as I know, no one makes them anymore. Larry Ziegler, CAN, used to be a source; Sierra-Diablo used to be a source, as well...no more. That means that, as the years go by, there will be fewer and fewer paper pages available to collectors, especially newer collectors. Attrition will slowly whittle their numbers down, and, the most of the collectors that are using them will continue to sit on theirs. That may force other collectors to plastic, or other means of storing covers, such as cardboard trays.

Collectors who *do* use plastic pages continue to be widely split as to which brands are the best and which features are the most desirable. For example, I started off with *Matchcaddy* pages, which, I believe, was the first brand to become widely used in the hobby. But, I found those pages to be too thick, leading them to become something akin to brick sheets in the winter time when the temperatures were cooler. Eventually, I switch to *Bettervue*, finding them much more flexible because they're lighter, and I've used them ever since. The only thing I don't like about the *Bettervue* pages is that the pockets on the 40-strike pages are much too large, letting the 40-strike covers move around.

Some collectors seek out the 10-pocket 20-strike pages because they can get 20 covers to a page (using both sides), but the vast majority of collectors use the standard 8-pocket pages of whatever brand for their 20-strike covers.