

# The State of the Hobby: 2014

by  
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## A quick look back:

In 1990, the hobby was at its height. There were a little over 4,000 collectors actually *in* the hobby; RMS had 1,530 members; and there were 39 clubs, both regional and specialty.

But the domestic match industry had imploded in the 1980s, and most of the industry's major manufacturers disappeared in quick succession: Maryland (1984), Ohio (1985), Universal (1988), Superior (1990), Lion (1993). Atlas, D.D. Bean and Diamond carved up what was left of the domestic market, foreign incursions notwithstanding. Across the border, Eddy folded in 1991, and Canada lost its last manufacturer in 2001.

By 1990, the shock wave reached the hobby, and numbers across the board began to steadily decline. In the ensuing years, the hobby has lost 75% of its collectors, and the Badger State, Golden Orange, Mid-South, Southeastern, IMC, Phillu-Quebec, and Berks County clubs all failed.

At the same time, other factors were acting to inhibit traditional hobby activities. In 1990, for example, a first class postage stamp was 25¢. Today, it's 49¢. This rise in postage hurt the hobby on several fronts, but especially with respect to its club bulletins and mail trading, both of which I'll cover later. Likewise, in 1990 a gallon of gas averaged \$1.16; today, as of this writing, it's \$3.46.

And then, of course, in the same time frame, we've had a couple of stock market crashes, a recession, increased inflation, and, for at least the last several years, a generally poor economy.

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## Where we stand today:

Today, the hobby, although still going strong, continues to decline in numbers. As of this writing, there are 909 collectors actually *in* the hobby; RMS has 521 members; and there are 33 clubs, both regional and specialty.

### **Demographics**

Geographically, those 909 collectors are spread out in the following regions:

Midwest	232
Northeast	200
West	163
Southeast	149
Canada	68
Southwest	42
Rocky	38
Foreign	17

State wise, with other countries included, the breakdown is:

California	139	Oregon	8
Ohio	92	New Hampshire	7
Pennsylvania	72	Tennessee	7
Canada	68	Wyoming	7
Florida	44	Alabama	5
New York	39	Australia	4
New Jersey	34	Kansas	4
Illinois	28	Louisiana	4
Massachusetts	27	Nebraska	4
Maryland	25	South Carolina	4
Texas	23	Hawaii	3
Virginia	23	Idaho	3
Missouri	21	Montana	3
Michigan	20	Delaware	2
Wisconsin	20	Georgia	2
Connecticut	19	Rhode Island	2
Kentucky	19	Arkansas	1
Colorado	16	DC	1
Minnesota	15	Germany	1
Indiana	14	India	1
Washington	13	Maine	1
North Carolina	12	New Mexico	1
Iowa	11	South Dakota	1
England	10	Thailand	1
Oklahoma	10	Utah	1
Arizona	8	Vermont	1
Nevada	8		

The hobby continues, as it always has, to be numerically male. Currently, it's a 3:1 ratio: 673 male 236 female.

As to just why that is, we've explored the possibilities in previous issues.

Unfortunately, I can't be as specific when it comes to collector age...*since I could hardly poll the ladies on how old they were!*...but anyone who's ever attended any hobby gatherings already knows that ours is a hobby predominantly overseen by seniors (a group which I now officially belong to, myself). I'd guess the average age is in the 60's. It's also a hobby basically devoid of children, another reason why the average collector age is so high.

Interestingly enough, and just as an aside, I might point out that ours is also a hobby that is almost exclusively white. I won't speculate here just why that is, but it's certainly not by intent. Is it culture? Economics? Something else? Anyone have any ideas? In any event, that might be a

good topic to explore at some late date

## The hobby's clubs:

Although we've lost a number of clubs in the last 24 years, we have made some gains in that area to at least lessen the impact of such. Three new regional clubs started during this time period (Great Lakes, PNMCC, and a new Southeastern), as well as four new specialty clubs (Hallmark Collectors Group, Tobacco Club, Casino Club, and Huggable Bears). Three other clubs started, but failed (Military, Wolverine, and Mid-Hudson). As noted above, then, our current club count, not including RMS, stands at 22 regional clubs and 11 specialty clubs:

Club	Members	Dues (Reg/E)	Annual Bulletins	E-Bulletin Offered	Bulletin Auctions	On Facebook/ Twitter
Long Beach MC	232	\$5	10	No	Yes	No/No
Angelus MC	126	\$8	4	No	Yes	Yes/No
Sierra-Diablo MC	119	\$10/\$5	10/12	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
Keystone-Lehigh MC	108	\$3	2	Yes	No	No/No
Southeastern MC	100	\$5	5	Yes	No	No/No
Denver Strikers MC	96	\$6	6	No	No	No/No
San Diego MC	90	\$5	4	No	No	No/No
Tri-State Cardinal MC	78	\$7	6	No	Yes	Yes/No
Liberty Bell MC	75	\$20/\$10	5	Yes	Yes	No/No
Empire MC	63	\$5	5	Impending	No	No/No
Garden City MC	60	\$5	4-6	No	No	No/No
Trans Canada MC	59	\$22/\$5	4	Yes	Yes	No/No
MARVA MC	58	\$5	4	Yes	No	No/No
Connecticut MC	42	\$5	4	Yes	No	Yes/No
Forest City MC	38	\$6	4	No	No	No/No
PNMCC	35	\$7	6	No	Yes	No/No
Lone Star MC	34	\$7.50	6	Yes	No	No/No
Windy City MC	31	\$5	6	No	No	Yes/No
Rocky Mountain MC	31	\$7	6	No	No	No/No
New England MC	16	\$5	0	No	No	Yes/No
Penn-Ohio MC	16	\$6	0	No	No	No/No
Great Lakes MC	15	\$0	0	No	No	No/No
Casino Club	93	<p>Club dues have generally risen in an effort to keep pace with the ever-increasing postage rates. At the same time, almost all clubs have either cut back on their annual issues and/or the pages per bulletin, but that's a losing proposition in the long run because who's getting shortchanged?...The club members.</p> <p>Several clubs are offering e-bulletins to their members, thereby circumventing the postage problem altogether, but club members, for the most part, are still clinging to their hard copy bulletins..while complaining about rising dues. As far as I know, Sierra Diablo MC is the only club that has succeeded in getting most of its members to switch to E-bulletins. A few clubs have implemented a tiered dues structure, giving E-bulletin recipients a 50%-75% discount on dues, and RMS is set to discuss this possibility at the upcoming business meeting in August.</p>				
Girlie Club	85					
Tobacco Club	64					
New Moon MLC	60					
Huggable Bears Club	40					
Big Boy Rest. Club	20					
Hallmark Col. Group:	18					
Jewelite Club	18					
Mermaid Club						
Foillite Club						
Jewel Club						

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It's surprising that in today's world only six of the 22 regional clubs have web sites, especially considering that a web site is the biggest, most efficient, and cheapest way to advertise.

The clubs have taken a beating from declining membership and poor attendance at local meetings. On the one hand, there are few members to attend meetings, and, on the other, it's become more expensive to get there because of gasoline prices. Some clubs have tried to adjust by simply having fewer meetings, but it's always been hard to get people to interrupt their schedules to attend such meetings in the first place.

**Web Site**  
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It should be noted, though, that it's not necessarily true that a club *has* to have regular meetings in order to survive. Denver Strikers, for example, only meets once at year, at the RMS Convention, and Sierra-Diablo doesn't meet at all.

It should also be noted that, of the 22 current regional clubs, a few are only hanging on by a thread, and it wouldn't be surprising to see anywhere from one to three more clubs failing in the next couple of years.

All of this is a result of the hobby adjusting to the tremendous changes that have taken place in the match manufacturing industry..and society at large. With the disappearance of most domestic match companies and the accompanying anti-smoking campaigns, most collectors simply gave up and left the hobby, now that covers were no longer so readily available.

The hobby, today, is basically made up of a core of die-hards, the *real* collectors...those that are willing to put forth the extra time and effort to make their hobby work for them. To them, after all, it's all a labor of love anyway. The looky-loos, the dabblers, are gone. The hobby has been 'distilled', as it were... and *we're* what's left!

And the process continues. We probably won't bottom out for another few years, but eventually we'll reach a point where new collectors coming in will balance the collectors we lose.

**The hobby's events:**

Despite all this, the hobby's still going strong, and it's certainly not going to disappear. Nowhere is that strength more obvious than in the hobby's annual activities. Each year, we can count on, at the very least, having two conventions (RMS, usually in the East; and AMCAL, always in the West) and five swapfests (Keystone-Lehigh, Long Beach, Southern, UES, and Trans-Canada).

**The hobby's auctions:**

An important part of those conventions and swapfests is the auctions, and auctions, in fact, continue to play an ever-increasingly important part throughout the entire hobby. Not only do auction funds subsidize club dues and help pay the bills, but auctions serve to continually circulate covers from collector to collector, while aiding the individual seller to regain some of the costs involved in the course of collecting.

The biggest auctions are traditionally those associated with the two conventions, but I believe the UES auctions are now on a par with those of AMCAL. The conventions and swapfests normally feature multiple auctions, but they're annual events. Several regional clubs provide mail auctions with their bulletins, and, thus, those auctions are much more numerous and frequent. Sierra-Diablo, for example, has at least ten such auctions annually.

As far as I know, there is only one individual on-line auction in the hobby, my own.

Several clubs have established a presence on Facebook, although I don't know of any instances of such having resulted in new members for the club. It *does* promote more contact between collectors, though.