

**What
are
your
perfins
worth?**

What's it worth? That's probably the most frequently asked question by perfins collectors and non-collectors alike. It's also one of the toughest questions to answer.

Most of us are attracted to perfins collecting, at least in part, because it is a branch of philately that hasn't been reduced to terms of catalog values and pre-printed albums that must be filled with mint-never-hinged bits that often have been issued for commercial rather than postal purposes. To most collectors, the stamps we most treasure are junk.

We do try, however, to place some value on our perfins. In answer to a demand for a means of telling whether a perfin is very scarce or very common, Claude W. Cain developed a system of "relative ratings" for U. S. perfins. Cain assigned an alphabetical code to each perfin. The codes were based on a survey of the major collections of the early 60s and have proven remarkably accurate over the years. Ley and Balough have updated the ratings for perfins added since then and the individual ratings are included in the new U. S. Perfins Catalog.

The ratings go like this:

- A -- Rare--only about 5 known copies
- B -- Scarce--only about 50 known in existence
- C -- Difficult--found in the 2400 to 3600 variety collections
- D -- Common--found in collections up to 2400 types
- E -- Very Common--make up the bulk of the under 1200 collections

Two things must be kept in mind. The ratings apply to the perfins, not to the stamps. A particular pattern on a very common stamp is rated the same as the same pattern on a very scarce stamp. And, the ratings are intended only to convey the relative scarcity of the perfins, not to be a substitute for prices.

Putting dollar values to these letters is tough. Auction prices tend to be higher than prices in the sales books, probably because collectors tend to get a bit carried away with the idea of buying something they need "at any price" in an auction while they are a bit more careful when they have time to ponder over a sales book.

A-rated perfins obviously are worth more than B rated items (at least in most cases) and so on down the line. E-rated perfins can be elusive, but most are disgustingly common. You'll have to study auction results, sales books, and consult your own pocketbook to find out how much you can or should pay for a perfin you need.

The important thing is to be aware of the relative scarcity of perfins. That's what the A, B, C, D, and E rating system is all about.