

From Ugly to Desirable: Poorly Centered or Perforation Error?

By John R. Sabin

Many collectors, looking for something more to focus on, or specialize in, as their collection becomes more complete, turn to the collection of errors. Some errors are well-known and eminently collectable and thus are listed in the *AFA*, *AFA* specialized,¹ *Facit*,² and other catalogs. Among the best-known errors for Danish stamps, the subject of this article, are the well-known pearl error, inverted frame, and Carøe's cut errors of the bicolored issues of 1870–1905; the stone under the plough and break in the left wing of the old airmail issue (*AFA* 144x and 144y); and the bomb and the Round Tower issue (*AFA* 273x). All of these errors (and many others) are plentiful, standardized, and documented.

A somewhat less standardized error is the partly-without-hearts error on the 1905, 2-øre red, wavy line issue (*AFA* 43y), where there are several levels at which the hearts are left out.

In all of the cases mentioned above, the error commands a premium price over the normal issue. For example, the *AFA* 2006 catalog³ lists the 2-øre red where the hearts are missing completely (*AFA* 43x) at 500 DKr, the error with partially missing hearts (*AFA* 43y) at 180 DKr, and the normal issue at 100 DKr.

Things become a little murkier when one deals with perforation errors. Apart from the obvious errors where perforations run diagonally through the design, one must first consider centering, which is intimately tied to perforation errors. Clearly, the gold standard is the perfectly centered design with “Four visually equal margins and outstanding eye appeal: a ‘boxed’ stamp.”⁴ The firm Professional Stamp Experts (PSE) has developed a numerical grading scale for stamps that includes centering, among other qualities. Their rating scale for centering runs from 100 points for the “gem” centering described above, to 30 points for a “good” specimen in which, “The perforations cut into the design on one or two sides. Also referred to as ‘average’.”⁴ The scale has 10 adjectival descriptions describing centering, as well as the numerical grades.

A similar grading scheme is given in the *Facit* catalog,⁵ and rates centering according to six categories, which run from perfect at x5x, to x1x, where the perforations invade the design. In addition, *Facit* adds a category x0x for perforation errors. Recently, *Scott* issued the seventh edition of its *U.S. Valuing Supplement*,⁶ with seven grades of centering, running from Superb (98) down to Very Good (50), where the perforations can begin to invade the design. (One might wonder why, on a scale of 0–100, a pretty badly centered stamp is given a grade of 50/100, and described as Very Good.)

For the most part, there is no question of grading at the extreme ends of the scale. For example, Figure 1 shows two examples from the 1918 Chr. X series that are perfectly centered and would bring a premium at auction. Similarly, Figure 2 shows two examples where collectors would also agree that there has been a perforation error, for which some collectors would also pay a premium.

Things get more complicated as the perforations get close to the design edge and begin to invade it. At what point is the stamp simply poorly centered and only average, or x1x,

according to the *Facit* grading scheme, and thus brings a poor price at auction, and at what point is it a perforation error that may bring a premium? As the



Figure 1. Perfectly centered examples of stamps from the 1918 Chr. X series (*AFA* 105a, and *AFA* 106)⁷



Figure 2. Perforation errors on *AFA* 223 and *AFA* 745.⁸



PSE points out:⁴ “Stamps with exceptionally poor centering, where a significant portion of the design is lost and the perforations cut deeply into the stamp cross into the ‘freaks and oddities’ area, and may actually begin to enjoy increased demand and value from collectors who value such anomalies.”

Consider Figure 3. Of these stamps, the 1919 King Christian X 25-øre (AFA 101) is described as being “almost” a perforation error, the 1905 Christian IX 100-øre (AFA 51) has no comment concerning its centering, and the 1919 Christian X 1-kr. postal ferry overprint (AFA Postfærgemærke 4) are all classified as poorly centered. One would presume that they have a value much less than well-centered copies, because of the poor centering. Note that, in all of these cases, although the perforations cut into the printed design, at least *some*, but not much, of the unprinted white space is visible on the ends of the perforations.

The illustrations in Figure 4 show four-blocks of the 1992 and 1997 Queen Margrethe 3.75-kr. issues (AFA 1017 and AFA 1033). Although the perforations cut into the design, there are traces of white at the tips of the perforations, and the stamps are in ostensibly the same condition as those in Figure 3. However, both of the Figure 4 blocks are described as having a perforation error and would be expected to bring a premium. For example, AFA 1133 has a catalog price of 8 kr. in unused condition, while the minimum price at auction for this block is 400 kr.

Finally, Figure 5 shows two stamps. One is an example of the 1864, 3-sk.



Figure 3. Poorly centered examples of AFA 101, AFA 51, and AFA Postfærgemærke 4.⁹



Figure 4. Four-blocks of AFA 1017 and AFA 1133.¹⁰



Figure 5. AFA 12¹¹ and AFA 1374¹²

crown-scepter-sword issue (AFA 12). Is it badly centered, or a perforation error? The auction catalog describes it as a strong perforation error with a certificate from Nielson. But its starting price at auction is only about one-half of the catalog price for an unused example. On the other hand, the 2004 Queen issue (AFA 1374) just a bit more off centered, is also described as a perforation error, and the auction starting price is 25 times the catalog value. Consistency seems to be lacking.



It appears that stamp values decrease as centering departs more and more from the perfectly centered, gem example. At some point, however, after the perforations have begun to invade the stamp design, the stamp becomes a perforation error and then begins to gain in value. There is no standard in place for determining the borderline between “poorly centered” and “perforation error.” I would like to propose one:

A stamp is poorly centered if there is trace of the unprinted area of the stamp on the ends of the perforations, and a perforation error if not.

This criterion seems to work well for the earlier issues, but it becomes more problematical for modern issues where the design borders are less well defined, e.g., the 1998 fossils issue (AFA 1191-1194), or the issue honoring Queen Margrethe’s 60th birthday in 2000 (AFA 1239-1240). ■

(Acknowledgments: Thanks to Thomas Høiland Auktions, Copenhagen, for permission to use the illustrations from their auction catalogs in this article.)

Endnotes

¹ *AFA Specialkatalog*, AFA-Forlaget, 5450 Otterup, Denmark.

² Facit Förlags AB, Box 321, 721 07, Västerås, Sweden.

³ *AFA Danmark Frimærkekatalog*, AFA-Forlaget, Otterup, Denmark, 2006.

⁴ *A Guide to the Grading of United States Postage Stamps*, Professional Stamp Experts (PSE), Newport Beach, CA, 2002.

⁵ *Facit 2000 Special*, Facit Förlags AB, Västerås, Sweden, 2000.

⁶ “2007 United States Specialized Valuing Supplement,” Scott Publishing Co., Sidney, Ohio, 2006. The new classification scheme is described in the June, 2006 issue of the *Scott Stamp Monthly*, p.10.

⁷ These illustrations are taken from recent online auctions from Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lots 320177, 320182, and 320184, respectively.

⁸ These illustrations are taken from the 90th auction (November 24-26, 2005) by Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lots 561 and 571, respectively.

⁹ These illustrations are taken from recent online auctions from Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lots 315450, 319935, and 320519, respectively.

¹⁰ These illustrations are taken from recent online auctions from Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lots 308002, and 232252, respectively.

¹¹ This illustration is taken from a recent online auction from Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lot 264850.

¹² This illustration is taken from a recent online auction from Thomas Høiland Auktions A/S, lot 323399.