

## This Day in History... May 22, 1997

# Looney Tunes Series and the Rare Bugs Bunny Imperforate Sheet

On May 22, 1997, the USPS issued the first stamp in the Looney Tunes Series, honoring Bugs Bunny.

The Bugs Bunny stamp was issued in conjunction with a campaign to launch the USPS's "Stampers" program. As the official mascot of Stampers, it was hoped the animated character would help revive youth interest in the hobby of stamp collecting. A full-color, 12-page magazine was made available through the USPS Philatelic Fulfillment Service Center for a limited time, as part of the Stampers program.

When the Bugs Bunny stamp was announced, many people were unhappy about picturing an animated character on a stamp. They felt Bugs was too commercial and honoring him would cheapen America's stamp program. One newspaper editor wrote the stamp was "a new low in commercializing and trivializing [the Postal Service's] once high-minded stamp program." But a US Postal Service official replied that Bugs was a "unique part of American history."

Despite the controversy behind the stamp, the USPS issued it on May 22, 1997. Bugs Bunny received a lot of attention for being the first cartoon character on a US stamp. The stamps proved to be so popular that a series of four other Looney Tunes characters in the same format followed.

Another interesting part of the Bugs Bunny stamp story is the specially die-cut imperforate pane, which was one of the rarest US stamps issued in 70 years. The pane was created to fill orders for the Stampers program. It differs from the standard version in two ways. First, the die-cuts on the nine stamps located on the left side of the pane penetrate the backing paper. This allows individual stamps to be removed from the pane with their liner intact. Secondly, the 10th stamp was not die-cut. This was done because the 10th stamp wasn't "burstable" – meaning it wasn't easily removed to fill orders.

In fact, panels containing the unused 10th stamp were shredded! That's why there are only 118,000 specially die-cut Bugs Bunny panes with the 10th stamp imperforate. By comparison, 150,000 Legends of the West error sheets were issued!

The Bugs Bunny sheet proved to be wildly popular, so the USPS continued to produce Looney Tunes stamps for the next four years. The remaining sheets in the series were also produced in both the fully perforated format and with the 10th stamp imperforate. However, the production quantity for these later imperforate sheets was much higher than with the Bugs Bunny sheet.

Even still, when the USPS issued 500,000 Sylvester and Tweety imperforate sheets in 1998, they sold out in three and a half-weeks, leading them to produce another 150,000 panes to meet the high demand.

As with previous Looney Tunes stamps, the USPS issued a number of special die-cut Coyote and Road Runner panes. The amount issued, 236,000, was down from the 500,000 special panes in 1998 and 1999. For the Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner stamps, the USPS changed the printing process and the contractor, causing it to differ somewhat from previous stamps in the series. For example, it has microprinting and more uniform die cuts.

On the fifth and final Looney Tunes stamp, Porky Pig, as a mail carrier, delivers a letter bearing another stamp from the series, Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner. There were 236,000 of these special panes produced in 2001. The selvage image is composed of all the characters who appeared on the previous four Looney Tunes stamps. When the self-adhesive stamps are peeled off, the words, "That's all Folks!" are visible on the liner paper.



1997 Bugs Bunny



1998 Sylvester and Tweety



1999 Daffy Duck



2000 Wile E. Coyote and Roadrunner



2001 Porky Pig

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