

A Few Holes, More or Less

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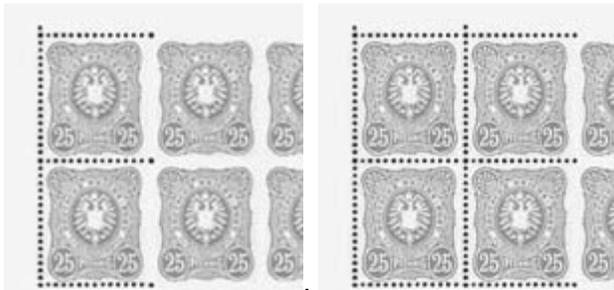
The Michel Specialized catalog was the first postwar catalog to list German stamps having three sides with normal perforations and the bottom side imperforate. Since then, there have been a number of new listings. Today, some of these have impressive catalog prices.

A brief review of perforation methods in use will help us understand the nature of these imperforate at the bottom varieties.

There are two perforation methods that have been used to separate German stamps throughout its history. A line perforation and a comb perforation. Within many of the issues, the difference between a line and comb perforation not only produces additional collectable varieties but rarities of great value.

A line perforation is done by simply punching perforation holes across or down the sheet between two rows of stamps. The punch or sheet is then rotated 90 degrees and the process repeated until each stamp in the sheet has fully perforated margins.

A comb perforation uses a punch that not only forms perforation holes across the sheet but additional perforations down each side of one row of stamps. The punch is then indexed down one row and the process repeated until the entire sheet has been perforated.



In some issues, identical stamps were perforated by both methods. These can be easily sorted by looking at the four corners of the stamp where the horizontal and vertical perforation holes cross. The perforation holes will be perfect and in line with both the vertical and horizontal row on a stamp that has been separated by a comb perforation. The corner perforation holes on a stamp that has been line perforated will be misaligned or even missing in some cases. This Bavarian example is one of the earliest examples of a stamp issued with both perforation methods.



The stamps listed as existing imperforate at the bottom all share one attribute, they were perforated with a comb perforation. The examples of this variety also share one other important feature. They all come from the bottom row of the sheet. If they did not, there would be a corresponding top margin imperforate twin. The variety was created when the perforation machine was not indexed properly to the bottom of the last row of stamps.



Although stamps with truly imperforate bottom margins exist ¹⁾, most stamps offered collectors are not truly "imperforate". Two illustrations are shown here. As you can see, the actual length of the imperforate bottom can vary. These varieties were known and listed in the early catalogs and literature ²⁾. In some cases they were further broken down by the number of perforation holes missing between the bottom of the comb and the improperly indexed next row of perforations in the sheet margin ³⁾.

It is really incorrect to call these stamps totally imperforate at the bottom margin. The portion of the bottom margin that shows the misplaced perforation can be removed at a point just above the perforation line. Since most issues have variable top and bottom margin heights, the missing, perforated margin could be attributed to an improperly cut margin. All is relative, if the stamp is not perforated within a reasonable distance from the bottom of the design, it may well be called "imperf at the bottom". As long as the buyer is aware of the true nature of the variety, it is a reasonable acquisition.

References:

- 1) Dr. W. Kiefner, Deutsches Reich Handbuch der Rosettenausgabe 1923. Infla Bücherei Nr. 17 Abb. 19a/b p.43.
- 2) Georg Moser, Handbuch Katalog der Deutschen Inflation-Marken. 1933. Ziffer 93- 103 pp. 217-18.
- 3) Otto Grossjohann, Inflation Handbuch der Deutschen Postwertzeichen 1919-1923. 1947 pp 37-38.

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