

# SUPERMAN: CELEBRATING 80 YEARS OF AN AMERICAN ICON

## Type, Purpose, and Scope

This single-frame 16-page thematic exhibit focuses on the comic book superhero Superman, the first and greatest superhero character, who first appeared in *Action Comics* #1 issued in April 1938 and 80 years later in *Action Comics* #1000 in April 2018. There have been relatively few stamps and postal cards, so collecting them is not expensive or difficult, but they are colorful and rich in meaning and the topic is fascinating (at least to this exhibitor).

## Plan / Outline

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The most recognized  
Superman shield –  
from a t-shirt label.

## Highlights

There are two items that are special in this exhibit. The first is the USPS Commemorative *Action Comics* #1 with Scott 3185f cancelled first day of issue (showing Superman Arrives 1938 from the 1930s Celebrate the Century pane) still in its original sealed condition. The second is the Celebrate the Century 1930s *Super Heroes Stamp Album*. While not unique or rare, they are hard to find, especially a complete set of all 10 stamp albums, one for each decade and pane. They both appear on separate pages outlined in red.

## Background Information

This exhibit is based on an article by the exhibitor titled “Superheroes on Stamps: Collecting World’s Collide with Stamps and Comics” that was published in the January 2017 issue of *The American Philatelist*, pages 54 to 60.

## Superman Arrives: USA

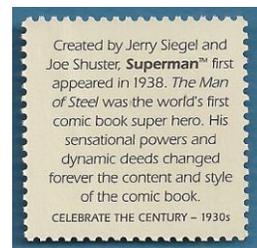
Superman is considered the true characterization of a superhero. He first appeared in *Action Comics #1* published by DC Comics and issued in April 1938 (dated June). DC started in 1934 and is now part of Time Warner. He was created by two men from Cincinnati, Ohio – Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. He was born on the planet Krypton as Kal-El and sent to earth as a baby just before the planet exploded by his parents Jor-El and Lara. He was raised by Jonathan and Martha Kent in Smallville, Kansas (in the USA) and later became a reporter for the *Daily Planet* newspaper in Metropolis in his secret identity guise as mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent. Some of his fellow reporters were Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen, each of whom had their own comic book series at one time. The “S” emblem is actually the symbol for the House of El, and does not mean Superman as commonly thought. The longest comic book series, *Action Comics*, published issue #1000 in April 2018, celebrating 80 years of Superman.

The Superman Homepage (<http://www.supermanhomepage.com/>) is the place to learn about Superman. In addition check out *Superman: The Essential Guide to the Man of Steel* by Daniel Wallace and *The Essential Superman Encyclopedia* by Robert Greenberger and Martin Pasko.

There have been only three stamps issued by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to show Superman. The first stamp was on the Celebrate the Century 1930s pane of 15 stamps issued on September 10, 1998 (Scott US #3185f) at 32 cents. This shows him in his first costume with the wording “Superman Arrives 1938.” On the back is a short description about Superman.



Scott US #3185f  
– front – showing  
Superman in his  
first costume



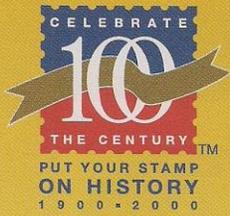
Scott US #3185f  
– back – brief  
description about  
Superman

At the same time, the USPS issued a Commemorative *Action Comics #1* with a first day cancel of this stamp in Cleveland, OH on September 10, 1998 (see next page). This comic was actually an anthology of seven different stories. Only the Superman character continued.

Also, in conjunction with this series, the USPS collaborated with DC Comics to publish a series of 10 comic books highlighting the 10 panes (one for each decade) titled *Super Heroes Stamp Album* (shown is the 1930s comic book/stamp album).

The 1930s  
First Day Issuance  
SEPTEMBER 10, 1998  
CLEVELAND

\$7.95



JUNE, 1938

# ACTION COMICS



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE  
1930s

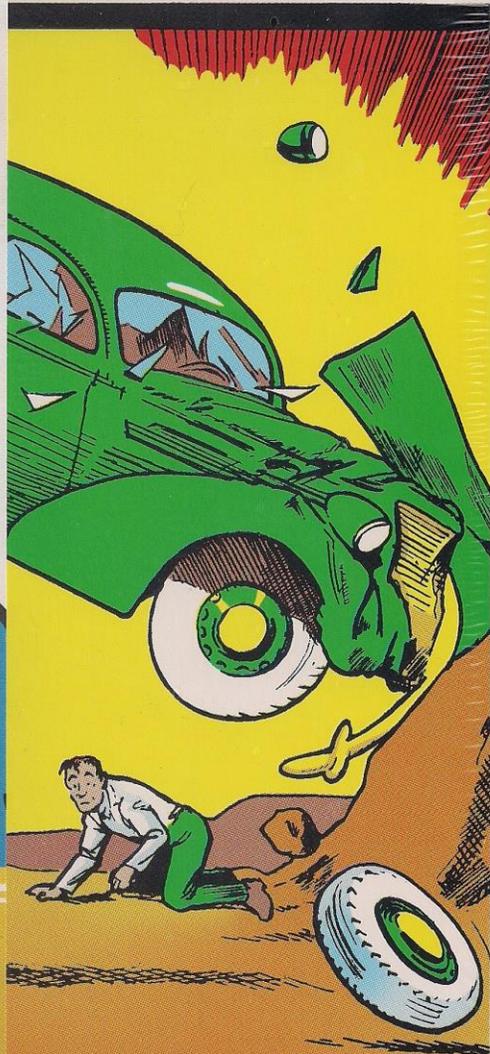


*Special Limited Edition*

United States Postal Service Commemorative

**Action Comics #1**

*The first appearance of Superman, June 1938!*

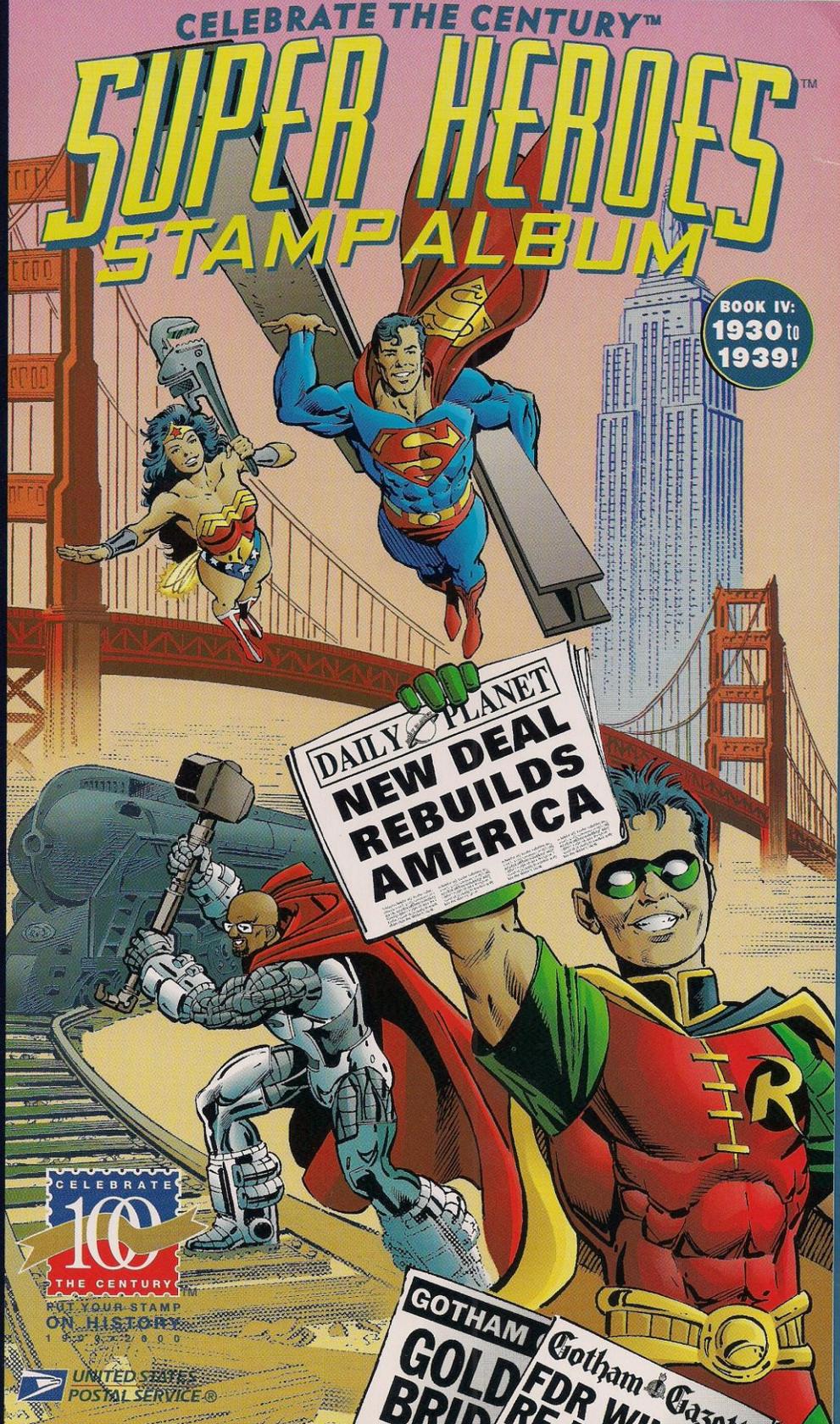


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CELEBRATE THE CENTURY™

# SUPER HEROES™ STAMP ALBUM

BOOK IV:  
1930 TO  
1939!



CELEBRATE  
**100**  
THE CENTURY™

PUT YOUR STAMP  
ON HISTORY  
1 8 0 0 8 2 0 0 0

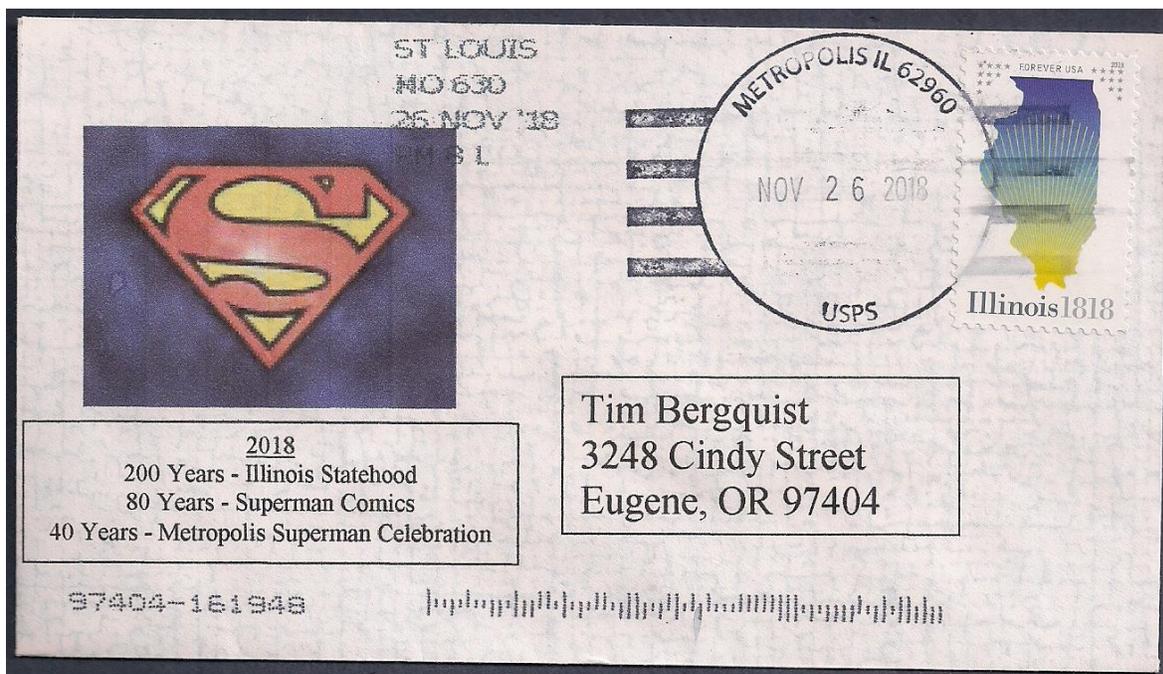
UNITED STATES  
POSTAL SERVICE®

## Home of Superman: Metropolis, IL

In 2018 there were three celebrations related to Superman. First, in June, the city of Metropolis, Illinois, the “Home of Superman,” held its 40<sup>th</sup> annual four-day Superman Celebration. Second, Action Comics celebrated 80 years since Superman’s appearance in 1938. Third, Illinois celebrated 200 years as a state – Metropolis is in Illinois. The Superman Museum (shown below) in town holds all kinds of memorabilia about him (<http://www.supermuseum.com/>).



This cover, with cachet prepared by exhibitor, highlights the three celebrations related to Superman in 2018. It was postmarked in Metropolis, IL on November 26, 2018 with Scott US # 5274 commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Illinois as a state.



## With Other Heroes: Canada & USA

Superman has appeared in two sets with other superheroes. He first appeared on October 2, 1995 in a set of five 45-cent stamps in a 10-stamp booklet format that pictured five Canadian-related superheroes, including Superman, Johnny Canuck, Nirvana (of the Northern Lights), Captain Canuck, and Fleur de Lys (Scott Canada #1579-1583). Joe Shuster, who created Superman along with Jerry Siegel, was born in Toronto, Canada, so there is the Canadian connection. The booklet was printed in English and French and included a description of each superhero. The front cover of the booklet showed the image of Superman from the stamp.

Here is some background about each of the other four characters on the stamps:

- Johnny Canuck was originally a political character created in 1869 to represent Canada (like Uncle Sam) and reemerged as a comic book hero in *Dime Comics #1* issued in February 1942; here he is as shown in the comic books.
- Nelvana (of the Northern Lights) is based on an Inuit mythological character; she first appeared in August 1941 in *Triumph-Adventure Comics #1*.
- Captain Canuck debuted in July 1975 in *Captain Canuck #1*; he wears a red maple leaf on his helmet.
- Fleur de Lys was created in 1985 and first appeared in *New Triumph #3*; the symbol on her uniform appears on the flag of Quebec.



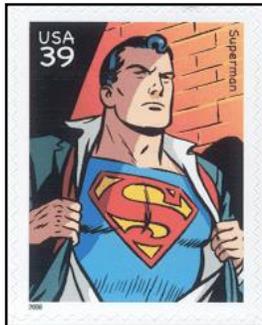
Scott Canada #1579-1583 Booklet of 10

## With Other Heroes: Canada & USA (Continued)

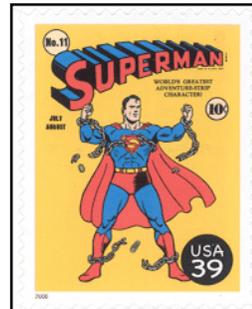
His next appearance with other superheroes was the next two US Superman stamps. These were part of a pane of 20 stamps, with 10 superheroes shown along with an image from their comic book cover. This showed superheroes from DC Comics (Scott US #4084) and was issued on July 20, 2006 at the San Diego Comic-Con with a denomination of 39 cents. The 10 superheroes were, in order: Superman, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow, Batman, The Flash, Plastic Man, Aquaman, Supergirl, and Hawkman (shown on next page). Many of these heroes are also a part of the Justice League, a group of superheroes who work together to fight injustice and supervillains.

The back of the pane has brief descriptions of each character. The one for 4084a reads: “Art by Curt Swan & Sheldon Moldoff. Ever since his debut in the pages of *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938), the *Superman* character created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster has been an icon. The big red “S” on his shirt is among the most recognized symbols of American pop culture.”

The one for 4084k reads “Destiny brought the infant *Kal-El* from *Planet Krypton* to *Smallville, USA*, where he was raised by kindly farmers. Though gifted with extraordinary powers, Kal-El – now *Clark Kent* – expresses true strength in the compassion and moral responsibility he displays in the guise of Superman.”



Scott US #4084a  
– Clark Kent  
changing into  
Superman



Scott US #4084k  
– cover of  
*Superman* #11  
issued in  
July/August 1941

Supergirl is Superman’s cousin (their fathers were brothers) and first appeared in *Action Comics* #252 issued in May 1959. Her Kryptonian name is Kara Zor-El and she is from Argo City. She is on two stamps from this pane (Scott US #4084i and 4084s).

A set of 20 postal cards (Scott US #UX458 to UX477) was issued with the pane and have the same images as on the stamps. Two of the postal cards (Scott US #UX458 and #UX459) depict Superman. In addition, the USPS issued a 22-page spiral-bound folio titled *Comic Book Icons on Stamps* that provided information on each stamp and included a full pane of the stamps.

**With Other Heroes: Canada & USA (Continued)**

Scott US #4084 shows 10 DC Comics superheroes and a selected comic book cover, in order:

Superman, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow, Batman,  
The Flash, Plastic Man, Aquaman, Supergirl, Hawkman.



## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Canada

While the USPS snubbed Superman for his 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Canada did not. In fact, they issued several stamps on September 10, 2013 all at a nondenominated (63 cent) rate: five in booklet format, one coil, and one souvenir sheet.

The booklet in panes of 10 shows five different images of Superman (Scott Canada #2679-2683) while the same images are on a souvenir sheet (Scott Canada #2677). The booklet was issued with five different covers. The images on the stamps come from the covers of five comics.

Ten postal cards were also issued at the same time, five with the stamp images (Scott Canada #UX355 to 359) and five with the booklet cover images (Scott Canada #UX360 to 364). See the article by Jay Bigalke titled "It's Superman! Six new Canadian stamps: sales restricted to Canada addresses only" in the *Linn's Stamp News* issue of September 8, 2013.



Scott Canada #2679 –  
cover of *Superman* #1  
from 1939



Scott Canada #2680 –  
cover of *Superman* #32  
from 1945



Scott Canada #2681 –  
cover of *Superman* #233  
from 1971



Scott Canada #2682 –  
cover of *Superman* #204  
(series renumbered)  
from 2004



Scott Canada #2683 –  
cover of *Superman*  
*Annual* #1 from 2012

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Canada (Continued)

The souvenir sheet shows the same five images as on the individual stamps from the booklet and it has a unique jagged edge to it.



Scott Canada #2677 Souvenir Sheet

The coil stamp (Scott Canada #2678) shows the “S” symbol in a vertical format from *Man of Steel #1* in 1986.

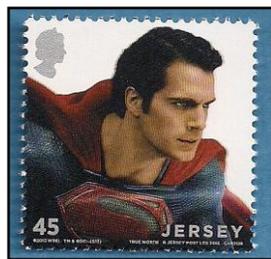


Scott Canada #2678  
– the “S” symbol

## Man of Steel: Jersey

The Island of Jersey issued several stamps on June 7, 2013 showing Henry Cavill (a native of Jersey) as Superman from the movie *Man of Steel*, which came out in 2013 (the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Superman). Six single stamps and a souvenir sheet show Cavill in various poses wearing the costume. See the article titled “Jersey Post honors ‘Man of Steel’ star, native son Henry Cavill” in the *Linn’s Stamp News* issue of June 24, 2013, page 15.

The single stamps were printed in denominations of 45, 60, 68, 80, and 88 penny (Scott Jersey #1682 to 1686) along with a 55 penny (Scott Jersey #1688). Each stamp has a special finish that relates to Superman’s power.



Scott Jersey #1682 -  
the 45p, when  
scanned, triggered  
an app that had an  
interview with  
Cavill



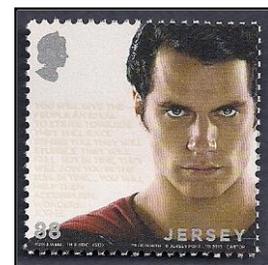
Scott Jersey #1683 -  
the 60p is printed on  
silver foil to  
represent his  
strength



Scott Jersey #1684 -  
the 68p is printed  
with temperature-  
sensitive ink which  
shows the earth  
below him when  
touched



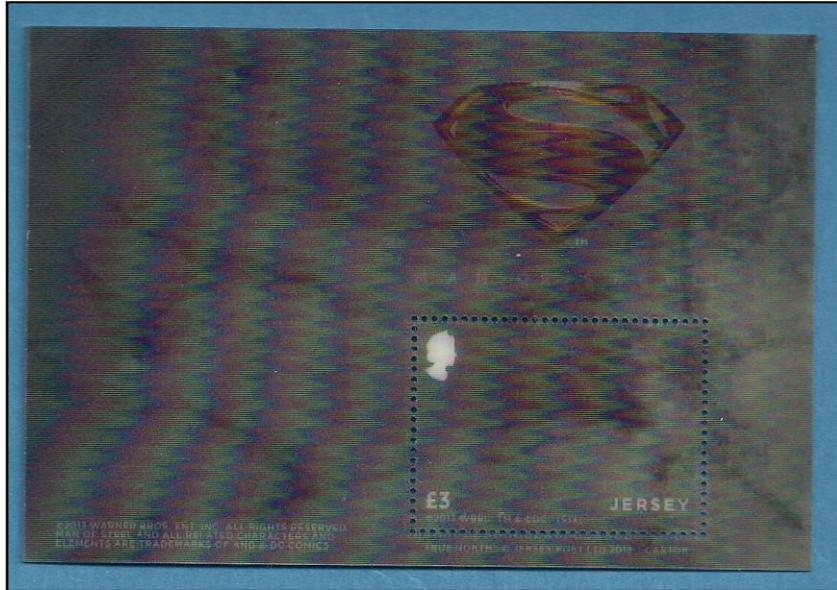
Scott Jersey #1685 -  
the 80p has crushed  
granite applied



Scott Jersey #1686 -  
the 88p includes  
glow-in-the-dark ink  
with a message from  
Superman’s father

## Man of Steel: Jersey (Continued)

The souvenir sheet is rated at £3 pounds (Scott Jersey #1687). It is lenticular and shows Superman in flight when tilted. Lenticular simply means that when the item is tilted at different angles it show different images.



Scott Jersey #1687 Souvenir Sheet



Scott Jersey #1688 -  
the 55p is printed on  
transparent material  
symbolizing x-ray  
vision

## 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Australia

Australia honored Superman in 2018 on his 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. But two years before that in April 2016, it issued a two pane DC Comics stamp pack showcasing Superman. The cover of the pack has the cover from *Action Comics* #419 on it. Both panes have 12 labels showing Superman along with eight of the Australia map stamp (Scott Australia #4522) issued on January 25, 2016 as part of the Love to Celebrate sheetlet of 10 stamps. The first pane (shown below) shows 12 different covers: five from *Action Comics* and seven from the *Superman* comic.



## 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Australia (Continued)

The second pane (shown below) from the 2016 stamp pack shows five poses of Superman on 10 labels (rows 1 and 2 repeated in row 4) plus two additional poses on two labels (row 3).

Also on October 17, 2017, Australia issued a two pane stamp pack to honor the Justice League. Each pane contained 10 of the same map stamp plus 10 labels with images of the Justice League characters, including three with Superman.





## **Bogus Superman Stamps**

Of course, with the popularity of Superman, greed would make someone try to make a buck off of it illegally with stamps. *An image of one example is shown below.*

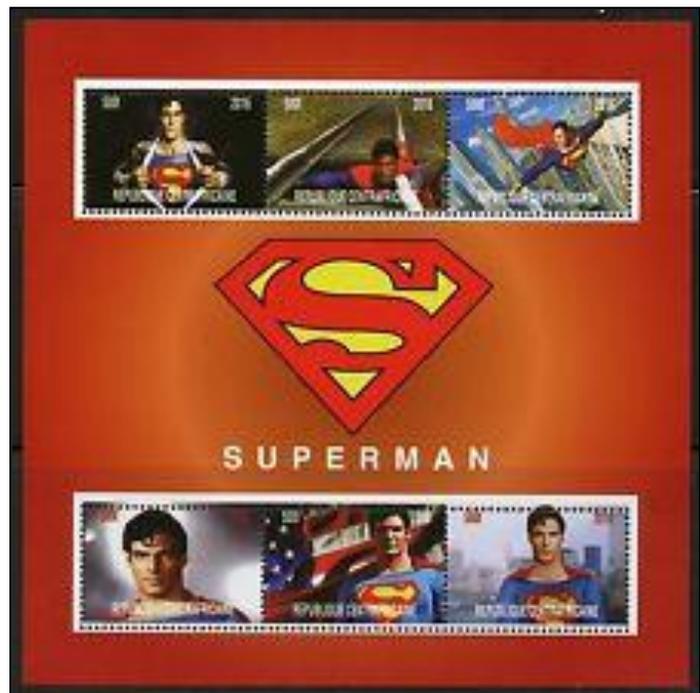
Two bogus panes of 9 stamps each were issued in 2001 depicting Superman, supposedly by Kyrgyzstan and Takjikistan. Much of the art work was pirated without permission by whoever fabricated these stamps. While they are pretty and easy to acquire on eBay, they are not worth the money. See the website [Bogus Superman Stamps at http://theages.superman.nu/TrophyRoom/stamps/herrick.php](http://theages.superman.nu/TrophyRoom/stamps/herrick.php).

Benin issued two souvenir sheets with four stamps each in 2014, one of which showed Christopher Reeve who played Superman in four movies and is considered by many to be the best representation of him and Clark Kent.

The Central African Republic has issued several souvenir sheets of 6 stamps each, many in 2016, depicting Christopher Reeve as Superman.

Supposedly Tongo has issued multiple sheets showing Superman in 2016 from the four movies with Christopher Reeve, the two movies with Brandon Routh, and three from cartoons.

All of these bogus stamps are easy to find on the Internet and very popular on eBay, but are not listed in any catalog. Even the names of the issuing countries are bogus.



## **Epilogue**

From 1938 to 2018, Superman has captivated the American public. Over that 80 year span he has undergone many changes, but still remains his true self – a tireless champion for “Truth, Justice, and the American Way.” This is explored in the special hardcover book *Action Comics 80 Years of Superman: The Deluxe Edition*, edited by Paul Levitz and published by DC Comics in April 2018. In addition, the stamps shown in this exhibit highlight his many costumes and mighty deeds.