

U617 VARIETIES by Steve Levine

Scott #U617 - the 25c Space Station Hologram Envelope issued in 1989 - is one of the more complex modern envelope issues. There are varieties in TYPE STYLE, TAGGING and PAPER...and you need an ultraviolet light to correctly identify the last two.

The scan at the right is the CUT SQUARE area of a "Type A" U617 envelope, shown at more or less double size; the green upside-down L-shaped area is the tagging. The entire envelope is a UPSS Size #21.



The "tagged" area is drawn in from a tracing; my scanner doesn't come equipped with an ultraviolet light.



The scan at the left shows the TWO types of lettering used on the back. I call these "Narrow 1989" and "Wide 1989". These copyright notices appear on the back side of the envelopes, under the flap. The WIDE 1989 is always lighter and the NARROW 1989 is always darker.

Actually, the ink color isn't all that different; it's just that there are more dots in the top (narrow) scan, making it appear darker. The fronts of the two types of envelopes are (more or less) the same shade.

TYPE A - THE FIRST PRINTING

The first printing has the WIDE 1989 on the back. Also, the top of the "L" is very close to 13 mm across. The paper is fluorescent.

I know this is the first printing by examining FIRST DAY COVERS. They only exist with the WIDE 1989 and the 13mm Tag.

This is the most common type. When new issues are announced, we dealers usually put into inventory whatever quantity we favor...be it 10 or 100. This is not always the case with later printings, which are often unannounced!

TYPE B - THE SECOND PRINTING

The second type also has the WIDE 1989 on the back. However, the tagging is radically different; the top of the "L" is roughly 20 mm across. You don't need to measure it; the difference will jump out at you. It looks like the scan the right. The paper is also fluorescent.

This is a moderately scarce variety. Dealers never inventoried large quantities of this type, but collectors and dealers have known about the "wide tag" variety for years and have been searching for it. Enough have been discovered to keep the price reasonable.



TYPE C - THE THIRD VARIETY

The third variety has the NARROW 1989 on the back. The tagging is narrow like the first type, though slightly smaller, at roughly 11 mm. The paper is also fluorescent.

This unannounced variety, though not as common as the first, is readily available.

TYPE D - THE FOURTH VARIETY

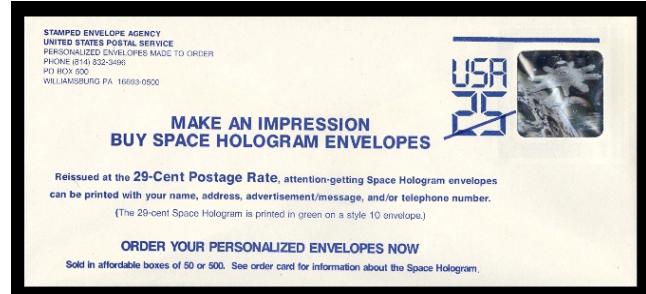
The fourth variety has the NARROW 1989 on the back. The tagging is very similar to the first and third types...but the measurement is in between those two at around 12 mm. The difference here is the paper. It's DEAD STOCK.

Also an unannounced variety, it was never accumulated by dealers; unknown to most collectors AND dealers, it was never searched for by either. It's scarce.

TYPE E - THE FIFTH VARIETY

The fifth variety is the special PROMO issued by the USPS. Printed towards the end of the 25c rate, it promoted the new, 29c Space Station Hologram Envelope which would replace this one.

As you'd expect, it has the NARROW 1989 on the back. The tagging is like the FIRST variety, roughly 14 mm wide...AND the paper, though fluorescent, is NOT as bright as any of the first three varieties.



Although Scott makes no mention of this item, it's listed in the 2004 UPSS 20th Century Envelope Catalog as #3736.

The UPSS Catalog, however, may have the information slightly wrong. I don't believe these were overprints of existing envelopes. All the NARROW tagged envelopes (Types C and D) I've ever seen have shorter (11 mm and 12 mm) tag bars; these have longer bars (14mm, slightly longer than the first printing). AND the paper seems to be slightly less fluorescent than other varieties. I believe these were specially made for the promo.