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Stamps That Move

by Denise McCarty



New Zealand, 2 August 2004 [Sc 1968-1971]. Set of four stamps commemorating the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. The stamps were produced by the lenticular process which combines multiple digital images viewed with a special lens material to create an animated effect.

New Zealand added a new twist to its stamps commemorating the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. The athletes on the stamps appear to move when the stamps are flipped back and forth.

New Zealand Post claims that these are the world's first action-replay stamps, as it calls them. The new-issue announcement says, "When we remember our Olympic champions, we often recall the moments, or the split seconds, when they gritted their teeth and rose to the superhuman tasks of becoming Olympic champions....With the twist of a wrist these split seconds of extraordinary human endeavor can be replayed."

The oldest scene shown on the stamps is Yvette Williams winning the gold medal in long jump at the 1952 Helsinki Games. Williams, the first New Zealand woman to win a gold, is commemorated on the 90¢ denomination.

Two other stamps in the set also capture track and field athletes in action. The \$2 high value of the set

depicts Peter Snell running for the gold and a world record in the 800 meters at the 1960 Rome Olympics, while the 45¢ low value pictures John Walker taking the lead to win the gold in 1,500 meters at the 1976 Montreal Games. The \$1.50 stamp shows Ian Ferguson and Paul MacDonald paddling for the gold in the 500 meters pairs kayaking at the 1988 Seoul Games.

The firm of Saatchi and Saatchi designed the stamps, using photographs from the Olympic competitions. The stamps are self-adhesive. Xtreme Graphics of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota USA, printed them in panes of 16.

New Zealand Post reports that the stamps were produced by the lenticular process. Xtreme Graphics, which specializes in this printing process, provides the following explanation: "Lenticular is the combination of two or more digital images viewed with a special lens material to create a desired animated effect. The images are interlaced, or combined, and

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then printed wrong-reading directly to the back of the lens. Due to the optics designed into the lens, your eye is forced to see only a very small area of the lens at a certain viewing angle.” The process dates to the 1930s, and one popular application was on prizes in boxes of Cracker Jack.

The athletes honored on the stamps helped to unveil them August 2 at a ceremony in Wellington. Williams said that New Zealand Post had considered placing her on a stamp even before she won the gold medal. “It was first proposed back in 1950 that

I be on a stamp, but the New Zealand Amateur Athletics Association said ‘no,’ that it would impinge on my status as an amateur athlete.” Walker said of his appearance on the stamp, “This is just a big-time wow. It’s absolutely awesome, the ultimate recognition.”

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