

The Race to the Moon Chronicled in Stamps, Postmarks, and Postcards

Reviewed by: Jim Reichman

This new book release is an updated version of Umberto Cavallaro's previous edition of the same title published back in 2011. Luckily for those of us collectors that do not read Italian, this version is in English. It is also a beautiful, softbound edition with almost all of its illustrations in full colour and will make a valuable addition to any collector's library. For those few spaceflight philatelists who may not be aware, a good deal of the information related to the early, pre-Moon landing space events and flights was shrouded in secrecy. This was mainly true on the Soviet Union side of the space race but was also true for certain aspects of the US side of that race as well. Even beyond the purely spacecraft specific facts like launch date, launch site, spacecraft configuration, on-orbit activities, and these spacecrafts' real missions and goals that were considered secret by the two governments, there was also all the backroom wheeling and dealing intrigue that was going on relating to these flights to which the public was not privy. Luckily, in the intervening 60 years since those events happened, a lot of that type spaceflight background information has been declassified. In addition, many biographies have been written to provide insights into the personal lives of the people involved in these spaceflights and the inter-workings of the governmental, political, and industrial organizations as they interacted with each other to make these spaceflight achievements happen. This book has captured much of this background information and provided a story that helps untangle many of the webs of secrecy and intrigue surrounding the early spaceflight history. I learned a number of new and interesting spaceflight factoids while reading Umberto's new book. This is quite an amazing feat given how old I am, how many years I have been reading and writing about spaceflight, and how many years I spent working in the space career field with the US Air Force.

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Readers will be happy to know that Umberto's book also includes background and descriptions on a number of the faked space covers from this Moon-race era. These are the unfortunate result of both the Soviet secrecy and the high interest and value of real space covers relating to both the US and Soviet spaceflights. Perhaps the most infamous of these faked space covers occurred on the Soviet side. (...) Who created this forged Baikonur postmark and used it to create artistic, commemorative space covers is a matter of contention. Whoever it was used it to create over 300 back-dated space covers commemorating Soviet space launches and other spaceflight-related events all the way back to Sputnik-1's launch. These covers were marketed to collectors through a French dealer which is why Umberto occasionally calls them "French fakes". Readers will appreciate the fact that Umberto's book goes on to show full colour examples of these fraudulent Soviet space covers as he identifies the salient markings that collectors will find on them so that they can be easily identified.

(...) As Umberto shows in this book, space covers commemorating the American manned spaceflights were not without their own set of problems. This includes forgeries and back dated covers as well as the special Appendix A story about the "great postal caper". This was when the Apollo-15 crew secretly carried almost 400 unauthorized space covers to the Moon and back causing a controversy that lead to a NASA investigation and infuriated the US Congress. Fortunately, these incidents are but minor points to all of the legitimate space covers that Umberto highlights and illustrates for all who read his book. Like the Moon landings themselves and all the spaceflights that lead up to them, these space covers and the stories they illustrate are truly compelling evidence to what was achieved by these two great space faring countries during their magnificent and challenging "Race to the Moon".

