

The Centenary of the Austrian Railways Set of 1937



This set of stamps, issued on 22nd November 1937, would be more correctly described as commemorating a century of steam traction since only one Austrian mile of track, from Florisdorf to Deutsch-Wagram, was actually opened on 23rd November 1837. Nevertheless, on 23rd November 1937, a memorial was unveiled at Florisdorf, and wreaths were laid on the grave of Franz Xavier Riepl, the engineer who built the line. He was born 29.11.1790 in Graz, and died 25.4.1857 in Vienna. He was Professor of Commerce and National History at the Vienna Polytechnic Institute, later Director of the Kaiser Ferdinand Northern Railway. This set was valid for postage until 31st October 1938. Three special stamps, line perf 12½, were issued as follows:

- 12g sepia "Austria" Steam Locomotive (6,000,000)
- 25g deep violet 2-8-4 class of 1936. Steam (1,500,000)
- 35g brown lake Class 1170-200 Bo-Bo Electric (1,000,000)

The stamps were designed by Alexander Exax who was born in 1896 in Styria. He had studied at the Vienna Academy of Graphic Art and his first postage stamp designs were commissioned by the Greek Government. This was the only set of stamps that he designed for the First Republic.

The 12g stamp depicts the first locomotive "Austria" which was built in the British workshops of Robert Stephenson & Co. It was a sandwich frame locomotive with 5 feet diameter driving wheels and cylinders of 10 inches diameter with a 14 inch stroke. It weighed 14 tons and hauled the 38 tonnes train at 20 mph. The driver was British, and only British drivers were employed until 1849.

The 25g stamp depicts a steam locomotive, of the class then used for drawing the heavy express trains on the Vienna-Salzburg line. It has a 2-8-4 wheel arrangement, smoke-deflector plates almost concealing the chimney and electric headlamps and is capable of nearly 100mph even with extremely heavy loads.

The 35g value shows a class 1170-200 Bo-Bo electric engine of the type then recently introduced for passenger and goods working on the Tauern section of the Federal Railways, the electrification of which was completed in 1935. The axle load of these locomotives was 20 tonnes; 33 of these engines were built in order to replace the previous steam motive power.