

Understated:  
this year's  
Royal Mail  
Christmas  
stamps  
come in  
a more  
traditional  
style



# Christmas gaudiness is stamped out

By Colin Freeman

WITH Slade blasting out of the jukebox, and excesses of food and drink, the modern Yuletide experience is not known for self-restraint.

This year, however, one festive ritual will be somewhat toned down — sending your greetings cards.

After years favouring rather garish designs, the Royal Mail has revealed a set of Christmas stamps that are distinctly on the understated side.

The themes are traditional enough: holly with its bright red berries, a few leaves of ivy, a pinecone and some mistletoe. But the pictures, taken by flower photographer Carol Sharp, would be as much at home in an art gallery as on an envelope.

Ms Sharp said: "They are rather more restrained designs than a lot of Christmas stamps in the past. The festive season is generally considered as a time for being a bit over the top, so we thought we'd be a bit more refined and understated — it's a bit more of a modern approach."

This year's five stamps will be on sale at 17,500 Post Office branches from tomorrow. Traditionally, Christmas stamps outsell other Royal Mail issues.

Each purchase of a set of first-class Christmas stamps comes with the chance to become a millionaire, through an instant-win game card.

The new designs are in marked contrast to many efforts from previous years, which often featured either brightly-coloured designs drawn by schoolchildren, or cartoon-style figgy



Garish: previous offerings have featured brightly-coloured children's drawings

puddings, robins and snowmen. The plants were arranged by florist Paula Pryke, whose work regularly adorns the National Theatre and Conran restaurants. She also counts Cate Blanchett, Giorgio Armani and Kate Winslet among her customers.

After initial experiments putting the plants in more traditional settings, such as on front doors and adorning puddings, Ms Sharp and Ms Pryke opted for more modern close-up shots.

"We thought we would focus on the foliage rather than their normal settings, as they are all very beautiful plants in their own right," said Ms Sharp. "The designs have to be quite conservative anyway, as they have to be approved by the Queen."

The Royal Mail points out that, despite their old-fashioned image, the myths surrounding such festive plants still have relevance for today's Christmas celebrations. Holly was traditionally said to be an aid to fertility, mistletoe was considered the Viagra of its time — and ivy was reckoned to be an effective hangover cure.