

**Note: The contents of this section are meant to be but a brief overview of developments that took place over the next forty years. For a more detailed analysis of what occurred during the lifetime of each plate series please refer separately, on the introductory menu page, to each of the sixteen annual issues between 1925/26 to 1940/41 and the five multi-year issues of 1941-46 to 1961-65.**

### *1924-25*

The requisition for the registrations to be phased in as of 1 January 1925 had been sent months prior to a Californian firm by the name of Kittle Manufacturing Company. Any sentiment to having them cultivated in New Zealand was negligently ignored seeing it was thought more circumspect to elicit the expertise of a prominent overseas manufacturer. But the relationship between that preferred corporation and their faraway customer was not to be a cordial one, this inevitably giving rise to authoritative bosses in Wellington experiencing substantial discomforts and frustrations.

The initial surprise not to exhilarate them terribly was when they were alerted a compromise had to be reached regarding the base colour intended to enhance the finished products. Although their original order had unequivocally communicated this should be black (and the serials in white), a dissenting Kittle relayed word back to announce the background needed to be green if there was to be any expectation of staying within imposed budget constraints. Verily snookered, the taciturn client reluctantly conceded to the switch but he definitely was even more unprepared, and impotent, when a subsequent piece of news caught him on the hop. And that was, with production already in full swing, he got wind a hulking NZ identifier was being applied to every plate pressed, a not so trifling detail he had never solicited at any stage in past dealings with the supplier.

But these vexations would pale into insignificance in comparison to the bombshell yet to come. For, shortly after broadcasting publicly their timetable for the launch of the novel system with its complementary registrations, administrators discovered Kittle was running considerably behind schedule. This of course promised there would be nothing on tap as anticipated to apportion to motorists as of the new year, and then some.

Realistically the delay was not predicted to cause major heartache in the case of current owners for they could always be manipulated to keep on exhibiting their council prefixed plates until the arrival of the U.S. consignment. But what to do post 1 January with those wanting to register a vehicle for the first time? What were they to be given in the interim? Obviously stand-ins of some sort had to be urgently invoked to intercede on behalf of the sluggish American articles.

Luckily a saviour was tracked down in the guise of a nearby workshop which managed to come up with a pile of makeshift registrations able to be dealt out while the correct ones persisted on lurking in the shadows. Reportedly what was delivered - on the dot it must be admitted - were somewhere in the realm of 2,000 pairs of extremely crude and not beauteous black plates bolstered by white numerals where all had been prefaced, most curiously, by an NZ.

Why, it must be conjectured, was it felt indispensable to incorporate those letters when not long ago the revelation Kittle was doing likewise had been hailed with total lack of enthusiasm? Regrettably, with the jury still out, we can but surmise what inspired this proclivity. Could it be, now armed with the knowledge the country would soon be inundated with similarly adorned registrations, savvy functionaries reasoned this might be an opportune way to accustom, and hence hopefully warm, the masses to the presence of the abbreviation? Or did they, for untold motives, merely wish to differentiate between the ephemeral plates and the legions of locally coded registrations destined to go on being espied for several more weeks?

So it happened that, with the onset of 1925 (when 92,000 contrivances were on the road and about 2,500 others surfacing every month), present-day drivers, upon re-registering, were advised to hang on to their plates until the embossed imports were ready for pick up and payment. Conversely new owners had to fork out two shillings on the spot whereupon they were bestowed with a set of the temporary registrations (or 'slabs' as the Wanganui Chronicle endearingly dubbed them) and instructed to attach them to their mobile appliances to the day they could be traded in for the Kittle versions. Moreover they also received a verbal assurance serials **NZ 51 to NZ 2,000** from the overdue series would be held back for them, but (and this statement must have been stringently emphasised) under no circumstances could an exchange be entertained or effected unless both transitional issues had been surrendered first.

Can one fathom from this uncompromising ultimatum there was perhaps an air of embarrassment pervading those rated blameworthy for the dissemination of those unsightly plates, sufficient to galvanise them into ensuring all were recovered and any whiff of their existence obliterated as quickly as possible? Indeed that not a solitary one be given assent to resist capture which, had it done so, might later return to haunt them as they optimistically explored their career prospects? Well, whatever the reason, plainly the dictate to hand back the 'slabs' was amazingly successful for it appears all were retrieved and eagerly destroyed. The upshot is, sadly, not a lone surviving specimen has been unearthed to date.

In the same fledgling weeks of January some of the (what had been) dominant providers of cast metal plates, whose trade in this area by now had completely fizzled out, questioned the Registrar of Motor Vehicles whether they could go on dispensing them until Kittle's wares deigned to materialise. No, came the curt retort, since it was his ironclad resolve everyone be obliged to secure only the U.S.-made registrations whose advent, he deceitfully claimed, was almost nigh. Actually, unbeknown to them and the public in general, the Registrar was at that very moment ruminating about cabling another request to Kittle for extra plate quantities seeing he had recently come to the slow realisation the volumes asked for the preceding year were going to be inadequate to appease demand over the next 14 months or so.

At last, on 21 February, the much-awaited vessel "Maunganui", containing the precious cargo it had uplifted in San Francisco, steamed into port. Without wasting a minute the crates making up this advance shipment were hurriedly disgorged, broken open and the smaller boxes inside immediately dispatched to post offices in all four corners of the nation. Not astonishingly, in the rush, there had not even been a chance to inspect the contents.

A huge collective sigh of relief now seemed proper from all involved in this tortuous undertaking. But if there was one it was to be exceptionally short-lived and muted. For the instant the registrations hit the streets a vehement roar of indignation erupted from vast sections of the community who thoroughly disliked them. Newspapers too volunteered a wealth of opinions and through their columns published a scathing tirade of condemnation trained at the incompetents responsible for the entire project, all heartily endorsed by a flood of mail to editors from disgruntled citizens. What, some protested, had been wrong with the former practice that had afforded steadfast recognition from where a conveyance emanated? Worse, what colour-blind nincompoop had condoned the awful green hue on the hideous modern plates? And, outrageously, if a substitute registration scheme had been necessary at all, why was it not modelled on the one 'back home' in Britain?

While stoic Parliamentary chieftains had no trouble shrugging off this, in their eyes, trivial and fleeting civic discontent, they did however find themselves having to retreat into serious defence mode to fend off one specific contentious allegation. For, when it was brought to light by the press the bottom line confronting tax payers for the new plates frivolity, plus freight, would be a princely £10,000, that was the last straw. With hackles raised practically every burgher in the land now threw off his gloves and laid into the reigning junta in Parliament, joined also by many illustrious identities who had generously contributed to Party funds during the erstwhile election campaign. In unison they insisted on an answer to why such a massive sum of money had been squandered, offshore no less, and how come cheaper homegrown options had not been investigated from the start.

In rebuttal Richard Bollard, the then Minister of Internal Affairs, was goaded into convening a conference in Auckland on 29 April 1925 with the objective of instigating dialogue among interested participants on the viability of having future registrations fashioned in the dominion. In his opening address the Minister explained he too would be partial to seeing them crafted internally from hereon in but only if there was to be an economic advantage in doing so. He further placated his audience by voicing regret this had not been achievable the foregoing year but, compatible with the information at his disposal, no domestic syndicate had ever expressed any undue willingness to tackle the task.

It looks as if some kind of consensus must have been attained at the meeting, enough to sway Mr. Bollard into welcoming tenders that ensuing July from any organisation believing itself competent to purvey plates for the length and breadth of New Zealand at a credible cost. Perceptibly, this only occurred three months after that Auckland jamboree so nobody can accuse the Minister of having been stung into prompt action.

Whereas concrete corroboration remains illusive, it must nevertheless be fairly safe to presume there would not have been a wild stampede of applicants all madly passionate about replying to the Minister's invitation. Yet one young man who patently did mull matters over at the time was a certain Robert Burn who headed a tiny metal tooling business called Precision Engineering Coy. Ltd. (which he and his family had established in Petone in 1921 but thence relocated it to 76 Kent Terrace in

the proximity of downtown Wellington). As it turned out, while visiting the capital's Winter Show on 17 August, Robert fortuitously bumped into Mr. Markman, the presiding Registrar of Motor Vehicles, and took the opportunity to declare there and then his humble company proposed to bid for the registration contract on offer. Nothing has been confided about what else transpired at this and suspected successive get-togethers between the two but, once the dust had settled by the next November, Mr. Burn could be noticed tucking into his pocket the appropriately signed papers giving him leave to furnish, on a trial basis, the plate series due to be fully operational on 1 April 1926. Ominously though that was but a tad over four months away...

Meantime, back at governmental headquarters, legislators had been busy earlier in the year injecting sparkle into a small monster they would label "Regulations as to the Use of Motor-lorries pursuant to the Motor-vehicles Act, 1924", which gasped its first breath on 24 March 1925. This brought to life a range of annual levies germane to all heavier carriers plus a list of conditions under which they would hereafter be permitted to function. While the statutes gave vent to such topics as mandatory tyre compressions, their minimum acceptable dimensions and velocity restraints contingent on load capabilities, it was the submitted data concerning into which class a truck would fall that attracted the most attention for on it would hinge the amount of the pertinent tax. It is important therefore at this point for the contemporary observer to be clued in that the antiquated idiom 'motor-lorry' really enveloped three distinct vehicle types, defined by their principal spheres of activity, each of which was to be treated differently when being assessed for the new fees. One such group embraced those contrived solely to move merchandise (i.e. trucks and vans). The second covered the ones built purely for passenger travel (buses) whereas the third attended to the smattering with the panache to transfer both people and goods (service cars).

Truckers were to face a scale of yearly charges dependent on an equation examining the weight of their transport as well as the most profuse loading it was eligible to bear. The lowest began at £6 for a Class A unit with an utmost tolerable capacity of 2½ tons. These then graduated up the alphabet in half ton increments (as did the hike in corresponding tariff) until one stumbled onto a behemoth in Class P sanctioned to haul ten tons but made to sacrifice an exorbitant £75 for the prerogative.

Appositely, as an aside, a remark can be made here about the top speed limits thrust on the assorted classes by this latest ordinance which, by today's ideals, give the acute impression of being excruciatingly inhibiting:

Class A	-	20 m.p.h.
Classes B & C	-	18 m.p.h.
Classes D to F	-	16 m.p.h.
Classes G to J	-	14 m.p.h.
Classes K to P	-	12 m.p.h.

Remittances for buses on the other hand were calculated in harmony with the number of individuals they were licensed to accommodate (which, strangely, always included the driver). Those qualified to shuttle 20 or fewer commuters sustained an annual expenditure of £1-10s for each being. For others practised at holding between

21 and 30, this rose to £2 a head. And for anything planning to cram in a rabble of 31 or more, the price tag went up to £2-10s per person up to a maximum of £75. As for dual-purpose service cars, these could be adjudged to be either in the tonnage or passenger camp. Once both quotients had been tallied the higher of the two prevailed.

There is merit here in evaluating some kindred findings from the first national census conducted in June 1925 from which it was gleaned there were 106,000 registered motorised entities throughout the country as at the middle of that month. Of these 71,000 were described as private or company cars, 22,000 characterised as motorcycles, 1,030 as buses and the residual 11,970 embodied a mosaic of variously sized trucks. At the same phase the Main Highways Board disclosed New Zealand was then being served by 64,500 miles of thoroughfares of which some 9,000 were designated as highways, slightly under half of them paved.

### *1926-27*

As 1926 fluttered in poor Robert Burn and his crew must have been frantic as they surveyed the uncharted, ulcer inducing, territory they had breezed into. So much had yet to be done and time was of the essence. Not only did the instrumentation and components for devising and enamelling plates have to be constructed from the ground up and then interconnected, but negotiations for the procurement of the raw materials intrinsic to the registrations themselves (steel from England, paints and pigments out of the United States) required finalising and thence arrangements made to have them forwarded by sea.

In retrospect it takes little effort to grasp that, as a direct consequence of the inordinate apathy shown before being nominated to fulfil its part of the pledge, Precision would forever wrestle with meeting the inconceivably tight deadline exacted on it. Thus by February, as cardinal indicators were inalienably turning more and more sombre, it became painfully evident the 1 April issue was going to be late.

This on its own should not have provoked too many sleepless nights for the bureaucratic laggards culpable for the maker's plight had it not been for an added gaffe. For, while engrossed in pussyfooting around ahead of appointing Precision, they had failed to detect a shortfall was imminent in their stocks of 1925/26 plates. Yes, somehow they had drastically miscalculated the foreshadowed growth of New Zealand's vehicular market versus the helpings of registrations vital to satisfy its rapacious appetite. So, with an undoubted sense of *dejà vu*, and to the ostensible cries of "oh no, not again!" echoing through hallowed halls, it now dawned on them that at the current pace of plate dissipation post offices would run out well in advance of the end of March. And with the April replacement series nowhere in sight the severity of the calamity could only be magnified.

Clearly yet another stopgap measure had to be sought. Off they all trotted therefore, back to the trusty atelier whose endeavours had so graciously extricated them from a not dissimilar quandary just over a year ago (except this one was incontestably their own fault). Remarkably, and on cue besides, again they were not let down, this resulting in them gratefully laying their hands on several thousand pairs of passenger and motorcycle registrations capable of tiding them over until Precision had achieved its preparatory run. What is more, while it must be confessed these

transitory examples were of comparatively lacklustre craftsmanship when equated to their American counterparts, a degree of praise can be aimed at their creator who did his level best to uphold a flicker of homogeneity by emulating the colours glimpsed on the Kittle variants (and so too the NZ initials despite these being ultra pint-sized on the bigger plates).

With the postponement brought about by the held-up 1926/27 issue, the registration term had to be revised so as to take effect from 1 June to 31 May. Moans were heard from the Department of Land & Income Tax (re-titled Inland Revenue Department in 1974), which had continually pushed for a 1 April to 31 March time frame in unity with its tax year, but there was no adverse reaction from private guilds.

When the Precision items were finally premiered in late April 1926 (with all of May allocated for their transition) the brigade of dark-suited potentates in Wellington would probably have been in mental agony as they braced themselves for a second fusillade of vitriolic abuse from fickle motorists. To their amazement what they encountered instead was an overall response bordering on utter silence since seemingly no one had anything negative to say. On the contrary, the majority were delighted to hear the cost of their plates had been halved to only one shilling a set. Aha, a multitude of them might have sarcastically mused, there very assuredly had been justification in raising a stink about giving a local lad occasion to prove himself as that action was already paying demonstrable dividends.

With the expiration of the Kittle registrations so too did the overpowering NZ codicil, this deemed an incongruous device on soil with no international cross-border motor traffic. Other resolutions forthcoming during 1926/27 relevant to prospective issues were:

- To alter the constitution of the colours from one series to the next.
- To let Precision (whose written agreement with the Government was to be extended for an additional four years) assimilate its moniker on all plates.
- To go on excluding a year of issue, this at variance with the rite famous in countless worldwide jurisdictions barring many in Europe and those in their orbit of influence. This would avoid complications with having to highlight two validity dates seeing it had never been envisaged to confine the home registration cycle within the tidy bounds of a calendar year.
- To integrate in lieu a contrasting emblem every twelve months to act as a separator in like manner to the prevailing hyphen, a feature that was to become matchless and never copied anywhere else. **Appendix 2** catalogues all the symbols and colour combinations utilised from 1925 to when the system came to a halt in 1965.

Yet bizarrely, having gone to prodigious pains to promote the concept of diverse annual insignia, it must be queried why to 1932/33 they were rejected on passenger-sized plates with three or less digits. More so if it is taken into consideration in two instances the colourations chosen were exact duplicates of those

witnessed four years previously. At odds was the motorcycle scene throughout this era where an arresting absence of consistency manifested itself. Haphazardly, and oblivious to numeric content, an emblem loomed on about 85% of registrations but decided to play truant on the remainder.

### *1927-32*

Heralded in with the 1927/28 series was a new plate category for conveyances whose owners were held to be emancipated from the liability to proffer a registration fee. Striding onto centre stage therefore (experimentally, it was asserted afterwards) came four more prefixes - **A**, **B**, **C** and **E** (remembering dealers had staked claim to **D**) - to be devoted to a selection of institutions felt to possess exempt status. At the termination of the twelve months' test the first three letters were dropped in favour of retaining only the **E**.

Somewhat contradictorily the squadrons of cars and trucks in the care of state agencies and departments had bluntly refused to implement the registration scheme, and with it the accompanying plates, wreaked on the rest of the philistine population in 1925. As such they had stubbornly kept on availing themselves of the unmodified initialled registrations they had become besotted with in the embryonic 1920's. This was supposed to have been rectified in 1927/28 when it was orchestrated they be assigned a portion of the exempt release but inexplicably this never came about. But all this forestalling did bring with it its own recompense when in 1930/31 they were granted the indulgence to don plates ornamented with a **Govt** prefix. There is still uncertainty though why motorcycles of that ilk were eternally precluded from becoming recipients of their own renditions.

While on the subject of motorcycle registrations, both standard and dealer, these had since Kittle days always sallied forth in pairs. Up to this same 1930/31 issue however their outlines had differed in that plates indicated for forward positioning were vertical and rear ones, with equivalent dimensions, shaped laterally. This now changed when the two were transformed into identical twins sharing a horizontal perspective.

### *1932-41*

The 1932/33 series stood out from its predecessors in more ways than one:

- A restyled die was instituted across the board reliant on slimmer and moderately rounder numerals.
- The loop-hole exposing potential fraudulent reuse of low numbered registrations outside the margin of their indicated period of validation (and truly a few rogues must have been lured into doing this) was closed. Henceforth every single plate, irrespective of how many digits countenanced, would be compelled to divulge a fitting symbol.
- In a decree which must have left most of humanity perfectly dumbfounded, passenger serials were no longer to be given the freedom to spill over into six figures. What attributable rationale may have lain behind this conspiracy has long been lost in the mists of time but what it boiled down to was a stipulation that

after **99,999** the whole process revert to **1** but thereafter succumb to being chaperoned by a prefacing **X**.

■ Five other innovative letters also came to the fore whose role it was to distinguish between all the varieties of commercial appliances. The outcome was the début of **H** and **L** for the preserve of heavy and light vehicles, **P** and **S** catering to buses and service cars as well as a **T** set aside for taxis.

■ Up to 1931/32 the geographic diffusion of registrations had intractably conformed to the same dreary and rigid pattern, unwaveringly beginning at the top and then meandering down country to its other extremity. This had led to northerners perpetually getting hold of curtailed serials whereas their southernmost brethren always ended up with the highest. But gradually amplifying murmurs of resentment about this partisan situation finally must have wafted into the right ears for a more impartial distribution programme was now proclaimed. Hence, commencing straightaway, the yearly apportionment of plates to the 17 postal districts (which crept up to 20 by the late 1940's) was to assume greater diversification (see [Appendix 3](#) for a summary and maps). Furthermore each region was made aware that, whenever its mounds of registrations in any category were at low ebb, it had pre-approval to raid and help itself to a neighbour's estimated surplus. Only in the event a nationwide shortage was prophesied would the manufacturer be called on to forge more plates the foremost crop of which, in terms of priority, were then to be expedited to those hollering the loudest.

The extraneous **X** factor rode the waves for another three years when the genius who had dreamt up the controversial idea must have been removed from office and escorted into a padded cell. His successor, having reinstated the sixth numeral to its rightful position, certainly illustrated superior creative acumen as can be gathered from the infinitely more imaginative symbols employed on the three issues from 1937/38 on.

An **R** was introduced in 1933/34 for rental and private hire cars but was withdrawn after twelve months and given in their place to trailers. Peculiarly, in this latter capacity, the registrations proliferated in pairs up to 31 May 1937 when someone of intelligence must have awoken to the futility, not to mention associated wasted expense, of this gesture.

And in 1934/35 **V** plates were catapulted in to pamper contrivances whose ambition it was to be contracted out for specified duties (school buses, tow trucks, hearses, etc.). The next year paired motorcycle plates of both species were elongated from 7¼ to nine inches. Supposedly, as this was amenable to enlarging the numerals, the goal was to improve legibility.

In 1939/40 (yet unlikely to have been activated before the declaration of war in September 1939) the United Kingdom High Commission was endowed with the privilege to mount impressive, professionally hand painted, gold on black registrations on all its limousines, official or otherwise. This was an unusual step in those days as the protocol sponsoring conferment of diplomatic plates was, in the

main, not to catch on universally until after that major conflict. The following year the two other legations with ties to the British Commonwealth were equally honoured with distinctive registrations.

Also in 1939/40, and in an attempt to curb the barefaced exuberance of tearaway learner motorcyclists to go as fast as their wheels could convey them, each was made to affix a pair of plaques (some four inches wide by five inches tall) with a big red **L** on a white backdrop. These did not go down at all well, typically among the younger faction, as their display signified being restricted to 30 m.p.h. on all public roads. No wonder then, as the seasons rolled by, the metal rectangles habitually kept 'falling off'.

More plaques became the vogue a year later but these were to be exclusive to trucks and the service cars inducted into their league. Ultimately to be popularly referred to as weight class plates, they were physical replicas of those slapped on hapless novice bikers but coloured black on fawn where each, containing a letter from **A** to **Q**, was to be appended to one end of a conventional heavy truck registration. This was all a tangible throwback to the Act first undraped in March of 1925 (whose name had been such a mouthful) that had spelt out the levels of annual outlay due once trucks had been classified in line with their ratios of weight carrying capacity. Thus, in theory, this would now facilitate law enforcement officers to ascertain, without the inconvenience of stopping and checking the documentation of every carrier beheld, what maximum load it was entitled to have onboard by simply glancing at the external character on view (see [Appendix 7](#)).

#### *1941-46*

When the 1941/42 series was on the threshold of completion it became exceedingly discernable the crippling gravity World War II was having on Precision (who by now had branched out into Auckland and Christchurch). The principal impasse was the reality that England, up to then the lone source of steel, could no longer export the crucial commodity. With no alternative cure therefore, there was nothing to be done other than pronounce these latest plates 'permanent' in the hope they brave the elements until the settlement of hostilities when, expectantly, the raw material would become accessible again and a resultant superseding series practicable.

However, so as to compensate them for no longer enjoying the influx of their traditional twelve monthly registration fees (up to then raked in courtesy of new plate issues), the Government made it obligatory for motorists to obtain and adhere annually renewable windscreen stickers (see [Appendix 8](#)). But as the preliminary ones were not going to be available before the first week of June 1942, with the rest of the month reserved for their purchase, the registration year had to be reworked again to coincide with a 1 July to 30 June span.

Meanwhile **Govt** registrations, unqualified to house a fifth number, were to make the acquaintance of, and live in tandem with, a **GVT** sibling who could take up the cudgels when serials exceeded **9,999**.

### 1946-56

With the formal end to military incursions in 1945, discourse resumed to analyse what the oracles had to say apropos impending plate issues. While Precision was in a position to quell short-term apprehensions by promising a substitute series would be ready for circulation in mid 1946, it maintained it could not re-enact the feat in 1947 as it was still being ruefully hampered when it came to wheedling metal out of Britain. And, as things did not look a lot rosier in the years ahead, this irrefutably put paid to any notion of regressing to annual registrations. But not all was doom and gloom for, when the current plates were given a health check, there was unanimous jubilation at how splendidly well they had fared on their prolonged tour of duty and lengthy exposure to a multiplicity of climatic conditions. So, now conscious that the validated technology was at their fingertips to formulate products of protracted durability, it did not take much for decision makers to be of one mind that, from then on, all series be encouraged to abide for five years.

The exasperating acquisition of steel would be a recurring nightmare well into the nascent 1950's. So much so Precision was sporadically coerced into having to get by with an inferior alloy of native descent. What is more, it also extemporised a shrewd procedure where unused registrations from an elapsed issue could be reconditioned into up-to-date ones thereby further assisting to ease the pressure.

With the onrush of the 1951-56 series more fine-tuning took place:

- Motorcycle plates ceased to emerge in pairs. But hold the applause for paradoxically it never struck anyone to also rescind the legislation making it essential to bear two plates. This deficient foresight left ambivalent riders in the unenviable dichotomy of having to rustle up a front one of their own composition or be in breach of legal niceties. Not only was this convoluted charade ludicrous but also the most incomprehensible aspect is this discrepancy was permitted to go on for **ten** years.

- A dapper **DPL** stepped into the limelight to mollify the diplomatic staff of a burgeoning circle of embassies with representations in the capital. High Commissions too were indoctrinated into accepting the new registrations thereupon relinquishing the eminence they had soaked up for just over a decade.

- But this was to be of no good to those in the consular corps who had to go on pinning their faith on ordinary passenger plates. However its members and their families were now invested with add-on metal plaques, reminiscent of the ones foisted on truckers in 1940/41, embellished with a **CC**.

- Still more 'add-on' accessories (one later evolving into a self-adhesive sticker) which advertised the initials of select Government departments are also thought to have begun making themselves felt at about this time.

- As for the **L** plaques, which had so invasively offended riders while striving to conquer the intricacies of their motorcycles, these were supplanted in 1953 by quasi-normal looking registrations from the 1951-56 issue which had been

lengthened so as to give refuge to an **L** suffix. Once and for all, surely, this would stamp out the insolent trend the plaque precursors had demonstrated in their callous tendency to go absent without leave. But, not willing to throw in the towel just yet, learners would soon provide evidence they were a resourceful breed who had one more ace up their sleeves...

■ And the other types of plaques, widely alluded to by the brotherhood of truckers as weight class plates, they were, in one fell swoop, to take a farewell bow when the 1951-56 series was made redundant.

### 1956-65

Cracks started becoming apparent in August 1959 when trailer plates had to break through the **R99,999** barrier and seek succour from a supplementary issue ranging from **RA1** to **RA9,999** (there being no room for a fifth numeral). When this also, in a jiffy, was eaten up even more expansion had to be beckoned culminating in **RB**, **RC** and **RD** overruns, this notwithstanding **E/R** registrations had been hastened in (for exempt, primarily farm, trailers) to alleviate some of the burden. Oh, and **H** plates too had been compromised into an **HA** overflow.

What was to be the concluding series of 1961-65 is apt to have been greeted in glum mood as the increasingly visible writing on the wall unerringly testified to the fact the present system was terminally ill and a day of judgement not far away. For, as in any all-numeric scheme, there comes a stage when its innate inflexibility can no longer stand up to the unremitting stresses pulverising it as a result of the relentless sprawl of the vehicle base. Predictably, so it was here. But, even as the weakened infra-structure came tumbling down in ever larger clumps, a good deal of frenetic patching up could be seen underway where overruns went berserk in four sectors with three of them moreover having to steal from the passenger allowance which itself was nearing **900,000**.

And yet, as everything was spiralling out of control, one more category - almost as an afterthought - was intent on leaving its mark whose registrations (with an attendant small **E**) profited exempt motorcycles. But with only 100 made the reasoning behind this last gasp exertion is difficult to comprehend ([Appendix 13](#) goes on to table the full ensemble of prefix and suffix letters, plus what they bedecked and how long they subsisted, brought into existence during the lifetime of this system). On a constructive note however the restrictive **Govt** finally had been given the sack and its job handed to the incomparably more efficient **GVT** which had no cause to worry about the quantitative integrity of any serial.

In the wings, impatiently chomping at the bit, were regiments of alpha-numeric plates, all rather conservative in appearance with their burnished silver characters on a humdrum black background, assiduously prepared to infiltrate and seize full command over the next two years. The first contingent of the old guard therefore to passively place their heads on the block were the cluster of motorcycle registrations (private, dealer, learner and exempt), as well as their larger sized dealer chums, who in their totality bit the dust as of 1 July 1963. To the day a year later passenger, taxi, rental and private hire plates became casualties of the same fate. And,

inescapably, on the closing day of June 1965 the full sum of those still outstanding on the left over divisions were also enjoined to mournfully kneel under the raised axe.

### *Epilogue*

So that was that. A forty-year-old scheme had given up the ghost and would now permanently be confined to the annals of history. As the English author C. S. Lewis once penned, “All that is not eternal is eternally out of date”.

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