

## 1939/40

**SYMBOL:** A lower-centre pentagon.

**COLOURS:** Black on radiant orange.

For the third time on the trot motorists were afforded the opportunity to doff their hats and acclaim a cutting-edge symbol. Not only that but they also came face to face with a background colour many would have had to wear sunglasses to gaze at, let alone appreciate. Dismally, this transient yet ground-breaking age was to sink into oblivion at the close of this registration year when a regression was made to regurgitating blasé emblems (although not always of the same dimensions) that had become commonplace in the past.

Late in 1939 more tenders were invited with Precision again being re-consecrated to produce registrations for the next five years. But of course back then no one had quite been prepared for the volatile powder keg that was about to blow up as a consequence of the news that had crackled over the radio a few weeks previously. For the tidings had not been good. War had broken out in Europe which, because of Britain's fervid involvement, was to see all Commonwealth nations around the globe now equally obligated to the impending fracas.

**Passenger** - Of the 228,000 pairs accounted for, the now divorced Private Hire and Rental minorities again shanghaied the leading 2,000.



Giving us food for thought is a belief proclaimed by an ex-army man who is doggedly convinced the quality of most passenger plates still abiding with us today is tremendously superior to the one found on registrations that graced other categories. His analysis is, seeing a national call-up to arms took place in the third quarter of 1939 (when this series was but a few weeks old), the odds are a majority of the new recruits went to the trouble of locking away their beloved cars in a garage before reporting for duty at a camp or barracks. Since, on the whole, their subsequent absence was to be a prolonged one, so throughout this entire interlude these autos would have been completely shielded from all inclement weather. And naturally the flow-on effects of such protection rubbed off on the plates shackled to them which were able to bask unmolested for untold months in anticipation of - sometimes in vain - the homecoming of the vehicles' owners.

**Motorcycle** - An unusual home-made registration has been salvaged which would have been intended for forward lodgement as it is both arched and double-sided. The most logical motive why someone should have spent his energy fabricating an adaptation of his own is that the despondent biker must have lost one from the





22,500 sets issued that year. So he had to resort to substituting it with a ring-in if he was to elude running foul of the boys in blue.

**Large Vehicle Dealer** - The thumbs up was given for 2,300 pairs.

**Motorcycle Dealer** - A paltry 200 sets were amassed.

**Exempt**



*E.1 to E6.500*

**Government**



*Govt.1 to Govt4.500*

**Heavy Vehicle**



*H.1 to H23.500*

**Light Vehicle**



*L.1 to L28.000*

**Bus** - 800 pairs stood up to be counted.

**Service Vehicle**



*S.1 to S.850*

**Taxi** - 2,500 sets were sent out.

**Private Hire** - After peacefully cohabitating with its rental pal for the last six years, the wheels fell off this practical arrangement when it was seen equitable to tear asunder that blissful union and get each to concentrate on earning diverse portions of low-numbered passenger plates. For some reason it must have been sensed the attendance of a capped chauffeur behind the wheel did little to assist in distinguishing a private hire limousine from the swarm of rental vehicles buzzing about. So it came to be this new self-supporting division found itself with serials **1** to **500** (with **501** to **600** held in a reserve capacity).



**Rental** - Also egged on to make its own way in the world this fledgling lot was conferred with 1,100 pairs, from **601** to **1,700**, with the next 300 kept aside in the event of an emergency.

#### Trailer



*R.1 to R11.900*

#### Contract Vehicle



*V.1 to V2.100*

**motorcycle Learner** - As motorcycles had become more and more powerful over the years, they had the capability by now of zooming along at phenomenal rates. This had of late mercilessly exasperated upholders of the law no end but particularly so, when an incorrigible speed freak was collared, it turned out the rider was an absolute tenderfoot to the saddle who had yet to duly master the complexities of his machine. So, in an effort to combat this all too routine an occurrence, plaques were conscripted, revealing a large red **L** on a white backdrop, which hereafter it would be compulsory for every learner motorcyclist to show front and rear when out on a public road.



The new regulation was first publicised on 11 May 1939 when, via a press release, major newspapers featured a photograph of a grinning Minister of Transport standing next to a motorcycle while holding up one of these three and seven eighth wide by four and seven eighth inches tall plaques against a forward plate of that day. The accompanying captions went on to advise readers that in three weeks' time, in conjunction with the investiture of the 1939/40 series on 1 June, all those new to handling a motorcycle would be made to attach identical ones alongside their regular issues.

It should not be hard to decipher this ruling was never a magnet for many admirers, especially from amongst the younger crowd. For not only did these appendages advertise the rider was still wet behind the ears but moreover their presence also underlined he was constrained to pattering along at 30 m.p.h., a handicap most impetuous adolescents baulked at. Nevertheless the little rectangular inhibitors flourished until 1953 when belated action had to be taken to nullify what in the meantime had become an inveterate problem - **L** plaques that had a fondness for continually going missing because they surreptitiously, and most conveniently, kept 'dropping off'.

**Diplomatic** - It has been gazetted this was also the year those on high began tossing around the idea of giving their approval for the United Kingdom High Commission (this being the jargon to describe an embassy of a State which is a member of the British Commonwealth) to bear registrations of a supremely distinctive nature on both their official and private automobiles. After appraisals, it was formally acquiesced these plates need only embrace the initials **U.K.H.C.** but, most baffling, each of the pair be of different sizes. Relevant documents indicate it was ventured the front ones be 13½ inches across by 4½ tall while those for the rear correspond to a width of 14 inches and height of 3½ inches. The stipulated hues were to be gold on black girdled by a white border.

As inexorably comes to pass though what eventuated was rather at loggerheads with what had been envisaged. Now that one of these registrations has come out of seclusion, it can be seen to adhere to standard Precision measurements and includes a serial number (although it is probable the plates on the High Commissioner's conveyances would only have used the four letters). Yet, congruent with the original recommendations, it does depict dextrously hand painted gold characters on a black base, although the edging is also gilt and not white.



It is more than credible this honour was endowed at a time when New Zealand had yet again faithfully followed Britain into a third far-removed armed conflict (the Boer War in colonial days having led the way) and was symbolic of its deference to the mother country. However it is worth noting that in doing so, the host nation became one of the foremost in the world to reconcile itself to issuing diplomatic registrations. As far as we can tell it was not to be until after the conclusion of World War II that this etiquette gained extensive international acceptance.

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