

1941-46

SYMBOL: A lower-centre vertical diamond.

COLOURS: White on black.

When the maiden crop of these diamond bejewelled registrations hit the streets in the opening days of their May 1941 phase-in period, they were naturally assumed by most lay people to be the advance guard representing the 1941/42 series being groomed to make its *début* on 1 June. Unbeknown to them at the time however was the truth that their creation had acutely whittled down what had already been, even a month or two ago, unusually miserable stockpiles of steel stored by Precision. And, to aggravate the predicament, the prospects of it gaining further quantities of the metal in the comparatively near future were downright non-existent.

The war in Europe was now nearing its second full year and embroiled in it up to its eyeballs was Great Britain from whence all the previous raw material had emanated. Gone therefore was any contemplation of getting hold of more supplies while that country, whose desperate citizens were under constant threat of invasion and effectively fighting for their very survival, was duty bound to veer the entire national output into its own domestic armament and munitions industries. So, with an almost empty warehouse and no chance to refill it while their source continued to be sidetracked, the management at Precision could do little else but contact the Government in August 1941 to give resounding warning any present-day notion of executing 1942/43 plates next year was an unmitigated impossibility.

Never ones to rush things, Parliamentary doyens left it until May 1942 before imparting how they aimed to transcend the immediate difficulties when they published a legal instrument titled the “Motor Vehicle Registration Emergency Regulations”. Succinctly, this verified no replacement plates (whose forerunners should already have been out and about by then) would be forthcoming until the war had ended and, regardless of how far away that was, the current ones stay valid and in place until that stage. But, so as not to be denied their revenue from annual registration fees, it was also prescribed owners now be made to buy and display self-adhesive windscreen stickers which had to be renewed every twelve months. And, to ensure this obligation was complied with hereon in, as well as easy to monitor, the colour of each consecutive yearly batch was to be altered accordingly. Drivers whose vehicles were bereft of a screen (mainly smaller trucks of older vintages it is reckoned) would be provided with, at cost, a durable made-to-measure glass-fronted sticker holder with the stipulation it be placed in an eye-catching location inside the cab (see [Appendix 8](#)).

Having been a trifle late with the announcement of their latest directives, functionaries had no option but assure motorists they had until the end of June to obtain their preparatory 1942/43 stickers which were at that very instant being printed. This understandably caused the registration cycle to be readjusted yet again, it now being coerced to start on 1 July and finish the following 30 June. Happily this was to be the last occasion it was tampered with while this system held sway.

Back in less traumatic days, when the configuration of this issue was as yet on the drawing board, the idea had been to give it an Oxford blue background. But, as the production deadline drew nearer, that intent had to be jettisoned seeing it was not feasible to evoke enough of the proper pigment by the due date as the expected shipment from France had wound up becoming another casualty of war. With the advantage of hindsight this may have been just as well. For, when it is recollected how exceptionally feebly most plates from the two long-gone, identically hued, series of 1929/30 and 1934/35 had coped after a maximum of twelve months' exposure to the environment, one shudders to think how exact looking ones might have muddled through over a protracted term that was to drag on for another four years.

Meantime it can be disclosed 314,510 mobile appliances were registered across the land at the beginning of 1946.

Passenger - 262,000 pairs were gorged on but this included 1,000 salted away for



Cabinet Ministers and their higher ranked minions. (This innovation is examined later in the chapter, as is the revelation what serials were ordained to solace Private Hire and Rental).

Motorcycle - 34,500 sets were shepherded to post offices. Also pictured is a home-made effort prepared for forward positioning which



it is surmised at some point was made to stand in for one of a pair which had gone astray.

Large Vehicle Dealer



D.1 to D2.300

Motorcycle Dealer

D.1 to D.150

exempt

E.1 to E17.900

Government - With their bent for such a drawn out prefix, it was inescapable a snag would arise when the yell went out exhorting this category to give shelter to a fifth digit. The only solution was, of the 20,000 paired plates hustled in, for the first 9,999 to go on persevering with the dyed-in-the-wool **Govt** while the ensuing 10,001 needed to be deferential to a compacted prefacing **GVT**. This was embossed diagonally from upper left towards the lower right where the whole tier stood 3½ inches tall, the same height as the serial it watched over.

**Heavy Vehicle**

H.1 to H45.400

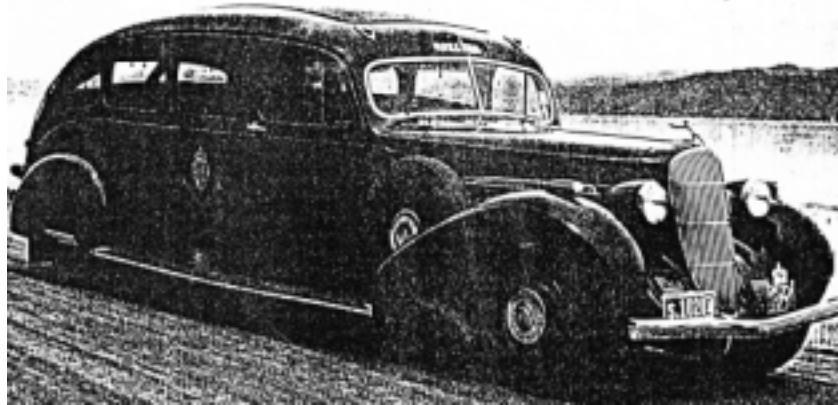
Light Vehicle

L.1 to L49.000

Bus

P.1 to P1.350

Service Vehicle - This segment had forever found itself split on how individual entities were segregated between buses and trucks, this depending on which one of two mathematical formulae had been brought to bear when newly registered. It is of interest therefore to behold an illustration of a service



car classified as a truck and as such induced to affix weight class plates/plaques to one of the 1,000 sets of **S** registrations delegated overall. The letter **E** signifies it was restricted to a gross load factor of 4½ tons.

Taxi



T.1 to T4.400

Private Hire - These were tickled pink to get passenger serials **1** to **600**.

Rental - And this clutch had to settle for **601** to **2,000**.

Trailer



R.1 to R32.500

Contract Vehicle



V.1 to V6.500

Diplomatic - The automobiles of the British, Australian and Canadian High Commissions went on being decorated with glitzy, expertly hand painted, gold on black plates.

Ministerial - In early spring of 1944 Precision received a communication on Government letterhead, dated 26 September, asking it to make available 1,000 pairs of registrations with the specific serials **237,000** to **237,999**. The memorandum went on to elucidate these would hereinafter be withheld for exclusive use by all state-owned chauffeur-driven limousines accessed by Ministers of the Crown and their senior staff.

Three niggling questions promptly surface in respect to this solicitation, alas not one of which has ever been satisfactorily addressed. Heading the list (and still a complete mystery) is, why was such a devastating magnitude of these unprecedented plates earmarked when the original missive had gone on to avow only something like 50 cars nationwide were foretold to become their beneficiaries? And what was so captivating about the numerals singled out? Furthermore, can any sense be made of the timing of the requisition?

While official clarifications prefer to go on ducking for cover, perhaps in the interim we can clasp at a couple of likely theories vis-à-vis the last two queries. Thus, when the choice of serials is scrutinised, it must be recognised the passenger issue had not yet quite progressed that far along by the third and fourth quarters of 1944, and so eliminates any disquiet there was a magic wand or an ulterior motive behind the selection of those precise numbers. That said, it must also be understood the standard series, prior to becoming defunct at the close of June 1946, did go on to catch up with and subsequently overtake the Ministerial reserve.

As for Precision and its continuous poignant privation of the staple substance necessary to eke out steel registrations, it seems this distressing plight was resolved, to some degree at least, a while after D-Day on 6 June 1944 when there are indications random but partial British deliveries were resumed. Hence that would give us the fundamental clue to why administrators might have felt comfortable this was now a propitious moment for them to press ahead with their written request.

Even though this allocation would become and, from then on, remain anonymously buried within the regular issue, no revisions whatsoever were made to the serials all the way through to the demise of the scheme. One reason promoted for this is that traffic enforcement officers the length and breadth of New Zealand had been notified, from the inception of these wondrous plates, a revised ordinance now facilitated the driver of any auto sporting a registration commencing with **237** to have a defence to a charge of speeding (but only on the open road, not in metropolitan areas). Yet this was only applicable when the accompanying Minister lounging in the back could confirm it was he who had instructed his chauffeur to go hell for leather.

U.S. & N.Z. Military - With the comprehensive annexation of the Philippines by Japan in 1942, it was to become this country's turn to entertain prolific brigades of American troops, some of whom were posted here permanently while others merely stopped over on bouts of rest and recreation. With them, apart from other weaponry, they brought a varied assortment of vehicles all of which, as far as

we are conscious, vaunted U.S. military registrations of one type or another but on which no burden was ever imposed that they be removed or exchanged for local renditions.

At conflict's end the vast majority of this equipment was sent back to the United States leaving behind only those contraptions that were assessed to be of no more value due to their sad mechanical condition.

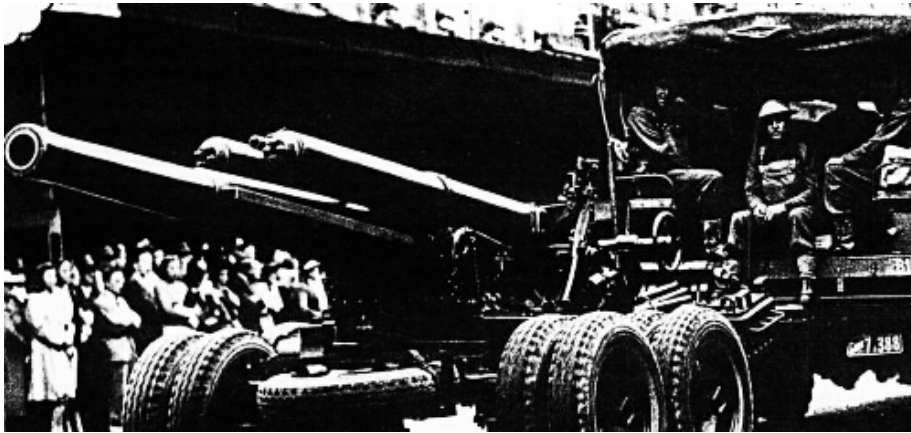


One such dilapidated sacrificial victim was a truck whose main activity between 1943 and 1945 had been to haul provisions from the docks in Auckland to the U.S. army's PX depot outside town. Moreover it is claimed the **S.C.73** (Southern Command?) stencilled plate seen here was detached from its fender by a resident souvenir hunter shortly after abandonment.



It has also been related by those with excellent memories that conveyances with serials **USJPB 7** and **USJPB 24** were seen in Auckland during the dying months of the war together with, in most major cities, numerous yellow on red registrations divulging only the letters **U.S.M.C.**

As for mechanical devices in the custody of the New Zealand armed forces, they had, until the outbreak of World War II, always worn plates from the passenger series (although a fleet number with a leading NZ was routinely painted onto the



bodywork in one or more sites). However all were now superseded by **Govt** or **GVT** registrations, right from the instigation of hostilities in September 1939 to their wrap-up in 1945, at which time a reversal to those from the normal measure was effected. Some distance down the track these were accompanied, where pertinent, by white on brown booster plates solely incorporating the word **ARMY**.

Motorised contrivances from the private sector commandeered by the military, or indeed any other Parliamentary ratified agency putting into practice war-time contingency statutes, were also persuaded to give up their assigned registrations while 'on active service' and switch over to Government ones.

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