

## 1946-51

**SYMBOL:** A hyphen at mid centre.

**COLOURS:** Black on fawn.

In contrast to some of the other combatant parties in the recent catastrophic war, which had terminated in Europe in May 1945 and some three months later in the Pacific theatre, New Zealand had the prodigious fortune to regain, faster than many, a more instantaneous semblance of normality once altercations were over. This therefore permitted it the luxury to focus immediate attention on a host of temporarily disregarded matters like, for instance, the groundwork for a substitute plate series. But what are the probabilities, on the day the subject was first broached, a deep-rooted presumption about there being a return to traditional annual issues would have pervaded deliberations? After all, some of those early participants might have disputed, had this not been the cherished status quo until it was so rudely interrupted by the escapades of a moustachioed and utterly demented ex-corporal later fuelled by a rabble of far-off inscrutable soul mates?

As discussions wore on however it became clear such sentiments were to have scant chance of taking hold when the ramification tied to a significant stumbling block was tabled by the manufacturer. In short, after consensus had been reached new registrations would definitely be implemented by July 1946, the company could not confidently vouch it had the ability thereafter to unearth sufficient steel whenever it was wanted. True, Britain had slowly re-initiated exports although to date receipts at this end had been microscopic and terribly intermittent. Not too surprising really when one comprehends it was that nation's overriding priority to divert as much of the end product as it could into indigenous rebuilding programmes. But, when push came to shove, what all this entailed was that there could be no airtight assurances the situation would improve in New Zealand's favour in both the short and middle terms. So, while Precision could corroborate it had near ample raw material in storage to get a move on with the scheduled mid 1946 series, severe restocking problems were prophesied should another one be longed for the year after.

With this sobering news hanging over their heads the prudent next stance unmistakably taken by all concerned was to express how magnificently well they thought the present plates, which ostensibly had started out as part of the 1941/42 issue, were standing up to the elements. Principally when it was taken into consideration most had been summoned to prolong their life span by a factor of up to five fold the one originally projected. This influenced them to submit that, if the proven technological platform was obviously by now in place from which to launch registrations competent at enduring the extremes of climate for half a decade without undue deterioration, was it not reasonable to go down the same route again? Even more so when one remembered this could efficiently be squared off against the successful sticker dissemination procedures already in operation. And, to cap it off, just imagine the savings that could be realised henceforth in time, energy and, more importantly, money. Not surprisingly the motion was passed without a hitch and agreement attained that all prospective series be given a validity of five years with intervening windshield stickers coming into play during the last four. It was also

endorsed the cost of a pair of plates to motorists be upped from one to two shillings, a price unheard of since 1925/26.

By and large everything went to plan. The only fly in the ointment - and it was to be a big brute - reared its ugly head some sixteen months later when Precision once more found itself in the unenviable position of being unable to lay its hands on fresh amounts of steel, this when extra registrations were urgently being demanded of it. This triggered the wretched firm to confront the crisis with a two-pronged counter-attack. Its key response was to put out a plea that every un-issued plate from the foregone series be shipped back to its premises so it could be determined whether there was any way of reconditioning them into ones capable of acting as understudies to those currently in use. From the outset however the Registrar of Motor Vehicles was very lukewarm to this concept and quite convinced the makers were far too optimistic if they believed their brainchild would engender any positive results. But, in the end, he concurred a trial of the proposed transformation process be administered on three specimens (which he himself handed over having snatched them from the 1941-46 Ministerial surfeit) providing he could inspect them afterwards. Pleased to oblige the experts at Precision diligently went to work on the trio straightaway. This involved completely stripping the glossy white and black pigments down to the plates' bare bones, flattening the lower situated diamond emblems and supplanting these with manually applied embossed central hyphens. After a dip into a rustproofing emulsion they were then re-enamelled in the contemporaneous colours of black on fawn. The finished articles were dispatched for evaluation on 5 November 1947 and approval to proceed with recycling registrations using this method must have been received fairly smartly since by all accounts the prime converts were ready to sally forth and peddle for business just as 1948 was dawning.

Digressing slightly, it is more than curious - when one is apprised of it - the aforementioned plates pulled out to undergo the reconstitution experiment were numbered **237,062** to **237,064**. Would this not imply, keeping in mind they were mint and still in their wrappers (and recalling serials had commenced at **237,000**), that only 62 cars ever had the actual thrill of coming into contact with registrations held at bay for Ministers? This from their emergence in late 1944 to the minute they were reined in on the last day of June 1946? Which of course brings us full circle in our journey to ascertain why 1,000 pairs were contracted for in the first place.

Back at the coalface, Precision's second step was to concentrate on searching for and procuring a proxy metal, this one from a domestic source, to make sure production by whatever conduits could carry on without interruption. Unfortunately what it ended up with, and ultimately had to draw on, was an unimpressive aluminium compound of dubious merit which would eventually give rise to two adaptations of plates, affecting just over half the categories, having to live side by side. Basically those with lower serials, having been machined in former days, were made of steel whereas a prevalence of their counterparts in the higher echelons tended to rely on the alloy composite which by the late 1940's was the only alternative to be had. Frankly, the quality of these featherweight registrations left much to be desired. Thin and flimsy to begin with, many also did not weather well with the unavoidable consequence both surface paints sank into the bad habit of flaking off in huge chunks. Yet on a salutary note there is affirmation, as 1951

loomed and with it 447,384 mechanical appliances reportedly registered in the country, Precision did at that juncture triumph in its efforts to entice out of Great Britain another load of the precious commodity it had so unrelentingly lobbied for which it then swiftly put to good use.

Meanwhile Masterton and Whangarei were each pushed upstairs to the rank of postal district thereby bringing the nationwide total to 20.

**Passenger** - Of the 292,400 pairs to hold court, which embraced the 1,000 for Ministers but not those sequestered by Private Hire and Rental, an indeterminate sum



*Reconditioned*



*Alloy*

from an ensuing run were intimidated into relenting to aluminium and another slice, supposedly between **261,300** to **264,000**, came forward in the reconditioned style.

**Motorcycle** - 41,000 sets, a minority of them alloyed, were farmed out.



*Alloy*

**Large Vehicle Dealer** - As the 3,100 pairs were herded together in one go at the beginning, all of them were dependent on steel.



**Motorcycle Dealer** - Like their bigger brothers the meagre trickle here of 300 sets was to be steel based.



**Exempt** - 53,900 pairs were accrued, some of which could not get out of meeting up with the inferior metallic compound.



*Alloy*

**Government** - All the 9,999 sets with a **Govt** prefix, and the next 2,001 sustained by the edited **GVT**, had the reassurance of steel to back them whereas the rest of the



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4,100 dragooned in at a later date had to make do with aluminium. Hence the aggregate for both breeds came to 16,100, a considerably reduced quantity when compared to the 1941-46 issue, seeing military contrivances (and so too any appropriated ones) had recovered the freedom to reinstate passenger registrations.

**Heavy Vehicle** - Of the 60,300 pairs divvied up an indefinite few were of alloy while others, somewhere around the **45,000** mark, were reconstituted.



*Alloy*

**Light Vehicle** - A portion of the 71,100 sets appointed withstood the vagaries of aluminium but plates in the region of **48,000** to **49,000** had to contend with conversion.



*Alloy*

**Bus** - The full complement of 2,600 pairs had steel to thank for their formulation.



**Service Vehicle** - These 1,600 sets also had the good luck to be infused with the consummate overseas substance.

**Taxi** - A certain abundance of those with high serials of the 7,000 pairs convened had to surrender to alloy.



*Alloy*

**Private Hire** - Since day one soothsayers at the Registrar's office had never demonstrated any flattering forte for gazing into a crystal ball to accurately establish how many plates a defined grouping might yearn for within the bounds of a given time frame. If this had been glaring in the age of annual issues, we cannot underrate the daunting enormity of their assignment once compelled to predict volumes covering a five-year stretch. So it is not astonishing to learn in this instance too they managed to slip up badly more than once. Perhaps here, in the intrinsic case of Private Hire (and Rental as well), their chief failing lay in placing too much credibility on data scraped together from the last series which they then tried to meaningfully correlate to the prevailing era. All this while ignoring the fact the war would have seriously distorted those, now truly obsolete, statistics.

Indeed inside a couple of years it would become patently evident their allowance for a measly 499 sets of plates snaffled from the vanguard of the regular issue had been a gross misjudgement and auxiliary ones were now required. But, as there had to be caution these supplemental plates did not infringe on numbers already spoken for by the anticipated needs of the passenger quota, the only avenue open was to order a string of serials far in excess of what the private run could ever converge on. The outcome (since Rentals were experiencing the identical misfortune) was the delivery of 601 paired registrations bearing **400,000** to **400,600**. Although we are uncertain of which metal they were composed, one could do worse than wager it was aluminium.

**Rental** - The even more colossal deficit unmasked here resulted in, once the



*Alloy*

foremost helping of **500** to **2,000** was on the brink of extinction, the canvassing of another 1,799 sets which summarily came back showing off **300,001** to **301,799**, abjectly every one of them banking on alloy.

**Trailer** - Of the 59,500 unfettered a percentage had to find the resilience to get familiar with the mediocre local metal.



*Alloy*

**Contract Vehicle** - Notwithstanding a final tally of 4,800 pairs staked claim while this series was alive, they did nevertheless fail to do so sequentially and a pronounced gulf became perceptible after completion of the first 3,800, all of them having put their trust in steel.



*Reconditioned*

When many moons later reinforcements were called for these came on deck not, as might have been expected, shrouded in aluminium and commencing at 3,801, but in the shape of a stack of 1,000 virgin 1941-46 **V** prefaced plates suitably transmuted into revealing modern-day attributes. And the simple reason for the easily detectable rift between the two

partners is that the belated ones came cloaked in serials **5,501** to **6,500**.

**Diplomatic** - A most puzzling registration was the object of an almost accidental discovery at a Rotorua automotive swap-meet in mid 2001 whose owner disappointingly was not armed with any opinions as to its provenance. Resplendent



(on the assumption the ambassador's registrations had no serial number), would have been seen on the road. At this phase however it is not advisable to pin too much hope on any imminent answers.

with a professionally painted gold **U.S.A. 5.** on a black base, it not unnaturally ignites more than an ounce of controversy among plate groupies as to why and when it, and at the very least five others of a kindred nature

So one can but hypothesise. As we are aware, diplomatic plates had been in existence since 1939/40 when they were bestowed on conveyances of the United Kingdom High Commission and, the very next year, on those of the two remaining embassies whose homelands had historical links with the British Commonwealth (joined too by India after self-rule in 1947). What then were American emissaries now doing charging around with correspondingly élite registrations when their last known liaison with that august body had come to a bloody end on independence in 1776? A plausible explanation might be that, soon after the war, New Zealand may have informally elevated the United States mission to the same exalted status savoured by the other Commonwealth members. This as a token of its gratitude for

that country's military presence on native soil throughout the Pacific skirmish and with it, for an inestimable spell, their willingness to help defend these islands against the omnipresent peril of a Japanese armed onslaught and, heaven forbid, occupation. We should also be mindful a good many U.S. troops while stationed here were responsible for achieving a raft of construction projects comprising roads, hospitals, air fields and reservoirs, exploits immensely esteemed by central and local administrators, not to mention the general populace. Hence it is not overly unreasonable to suggest that, with their resultant newfound stature, American envoys too may well have been granted the same prerogative to fasten diplomatic plates.

**Ministerial** - In 1948 nigh on 70 pristine right-hand drive Chrysler sedans were purchased directly from that corporation's Highland Park, Michigan assembly plant to act as successors to the by now archaic models in the Ministerial collection strewn about the main centres. This no doubt would have raised a few eyebrows among those in the British motor trade for, up to then, England had virtually been the sole contributor of vehicles into this market. As it happens the unparalleled consignment had initially been destined for Éire (as the Republic of Ireland was called from 1938 to 1962) until at the last minute its leaders turned their back on the deal citing inadequate funds as the basis for cancellation. Left in the lurch, Chrysler next offered the whole fleet, at a discount, to other worldwide jurisdictions whose traffic drove on the left, which is how it culminated finding a safe haven in New Zealand. Once here and unloaded, each car became heir to sets of registrations from the **237,000** to **237,999** apportionment. One must wonder though whatever became of the outstanding 930-odd pairs. Were they ever made? If so, was their everlasting doom to see them lie on dark and dank shelves in the dungeons of some governmental edifice never again to frolic in the sunlight? Would this not have been deplored as a staggering waste by the folk at Precision at a time when the main raw material was at such a premium and dreadfully hard to come by?

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[PREVIOUS CHAPTER](#)

[NEXT CHAPTER](#)

[MAIN MENU](#)