

1951-56

SYMBOL: A lower-centre comma.

COLOURS: White on black.

Even now, approximately six years after the Second World War, the manufacturer was to be disconcerted by cursed intervals, predominantly in the primary twenty months or so, when the tracking down of reliable provisions of steel became a real headache. Indeed Robert Burn, Precision's still very energetic managing director, dejectedly acknowledged as much in a letter he fired off to the Ministry of Transport in September 1951. Yet if nothing else this state of affairs did again underscore, and once and for all locked in place, the veracity that this issue too, like its two predecessors, had no option but soldier on for five years.

Whereas imports of the metal from Britain did ultimately calm down to mirror the consistent and reliable pattern of pre-war days, the company left nothing to chance and would replicate its knack for reconditioning unused registrations from the series before. In this fashion it was able to guarantee an almost trouble-free harvest of plates throughout this epoch with only once, during a cursory hiccup, having to use the blighted alloy for a few thousand passenger issues.

A tiny peculiarity which may have gone unobserved by most, if not all, at Precision, their client and almost certainly the best part of the population, is that the comma symbol took on a marginal, yet overt, lean to the left on standard registrations with serials in excess of **377,000**. First cottoned on to at the time by a keen-eyed plates buff, he is also quick to point out this defect was equally as well defined on some of the higher numbered non-passenger varieties which would similarly have been the products of later runs.

Passenger - Commencing at **10,001** (see Private Hire and Rental below) the bulk of the 474,200 residual pairs, which encompassed the by now mundane 1,000 Ministerial share, was tempered in steel although a small gaggle (roughly in the ambit



Alloy



Crooked comma

of serials **300,000** to **325,000**) felt the bleak incursion of aluminium. Refer also to [Appendix 9](#) for proposed nationwide distribution details.

Also inclusive in this count were a few plates with the legacy to participate in the pomp and pageantry of a royal visit embarked on by Queen Elizabeth II in late 1953, the first ever to these sceptred isles by a reigning British monarch. This made up for the trip she had been forced to cancel the preceding year when the then Princess and her husband, whilst on their way to Australia and New Zealand, received word in Sagana, Kenya that her father had died on that same day of 6 February 1952. In the course of their present tour across the country the travel agenda was to take them far and wide, thus causing ad infinitum difficulties to perpetually deploy appropriately elegant modes of transport to every habitation on the itinerary in which a motorcade was planned. As these convoys were frequently made up of a bevy of cars to accommodate not only the regal entourage but also national, provincial and home-town dignitaries, plus their spouses and other endemic hangers-on, it was decided to temporarily ‘borrow’ a few respectable conveyances in strategic venues from amongst the strata of the wealthier local inhabitants.

But, for fear that the associated prestige was not in itself enough to massage the ego of any highflier still reticent after being approached to provisionally forgo his automobile for this commendable task, an added bait was offered. And this was, all those willing to lend their prized motors would be allowed to attach a set of registrations ranging from **400,000** to **400,100**. So, it might justifiably be asked, where pragmatically was the incentive in that? Well, the only thing then making these serials avant-garde was that the ordinary series had not yet climbed up to such giddy heights and therefore arguably this gave the plates an ambience of distinction not afforded the balance of the unrefined hoi polloi. But in the end, not unpredictably, all this perceived grandeur would turn out to be awfully momentary when, before long, the registrations were ruthlessly swallowed up and surpassed by the remorseless encroachment of the passenger issue. Not too astonishing either is the fact not all the 101 pairs had the opportunity to assist with majestic duties and the snubbed ones had to be thrown back into the pool of the communal cache to subsequently be carted off to any district desirous of them.

With the above limited edition plates also came metallic embellishments



(more conventionally known as toppers) designed to be screwed onto the upper rim of every registration so as to further enhance it visually. Actually these badges, which also went on to be sold to the everyday bourgeoisie, were merely another example of innumerable ones trendy in



the 1950's which mostly trumpeted the zone in which the owner resided.



For the record, on young Elizabeth's accession to the throne in 1952, the plates on the Governor General's limousines would have been substituted with a set highlighting a silver Queen's crown on a black base in place of the King's variant (larger and distinctly more rotund at the apex) which had been prominent until then.

Motorcycle - In what was a revolutionary move all registrations, now and eternally, would come on shift as singles only with the view they be mounted at the rear. While the majority of riders indubitably would have rejoiced at this astute initiative, any premature exhilaration radiated by them was to be abruptly cut off at the pass. For, in a classic case of a breakdown in communication between Government agencies, somehow it was overlooked to repeal the legal requisite insisting on the presence of two plates on a



motorcycle. This clanger naturally led to a mad free-for-all as every fractious biker in the land indignantly sought to come up with a home-made version to coalesce with one of the 58,300 officially supplied. The farcical upshot, propelling us back to the days of council dispensed serials, was a mighty outpour of amateurishly engineered, double-sided registrations for frontal lodgement which either had hurriedly been hand painted or embodied a row of more viably purchased decals (usually used to identify house numbers on mailboxes). As for the conforming symbol, it appears its turnout as a rule was not indispensable and consequently seldom included.

Scandalously, and quite beyond the pale, not only was nothing done to fix this boo-boo during the lifetime of this series, but these crazy circumstances also had the chutzpah to go on and be inherited by the next issue as well, thus leaving this indefensible sloppiness to rankle for a full ten years.

Large Vehicle Dealer - All the 5,200 pairs tumbled out together at the start and so were impervious to any shady looking commas.



Motorcycle Dealer - Manifestly, these 400 came under the cosh of their private colleagues and therefore also no longer dared to forage in sets.



Exempt - Of the 80,500 pairs winkled out those with higher serials drew attention to a crooked comma, this a signal they were afterthoughts. And some, from the early 50,000's up to 53,900, went along with being reconstituted.



Reconditioned



Crooked comma

Government - In all 24,000 sets were let loose which again had to straddle the two



prefixes. The 14,001 lumbered with the compressed **GVT** may well have been dealt with in a sole run.

Heavy Vehicle - 79,000 pairs were reeled in where the errant comma left its blot



Reconditioned



Crooked comma

on those with more advanced serials. Moreover at least a couple of thousand sets (up to and including 60,300) were agreeable to revamped makeovers.

As for weight class plates still doing the rounds, these ran out of puff at the end of this series and so were mothballed.

Light Vehicle - Of the 93,000 pairs to rub shoulders with their heavier equivalents some five thousand, from circa 66,000 to 71,100, were recycled 1946-51



Reconditioned

registrations. And those from a later run could not shirk from being tarnished by the nefarious wonky symbol.



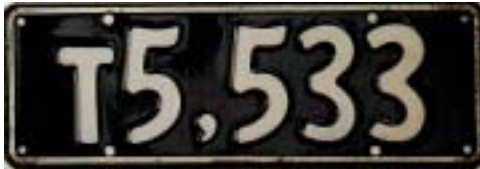
Crooked comma

Bus - The whole 2,900-set exodus likely negotiated a bright and early getaway in an unbroken mass and thus did not have to be fearful of any errant commas.

Service Vehicle - And here too it is probable the 1,500 pairs clubbed together at the kick-off and went lickety-split on a one-off migration.



Taxi - The 8,300 sets were interspersed with a few hundred transformed plates,



Reconditioned



Crooked comma

conditionally judged to have been in the realm of serials **6,500** to **7,000** and, beyond them, a second posse was penalised by the out of kilter comma.

Also instituted jointly with this inbound issue were motorcycle-sized plates depicting the solitary word **TAXI**. Each was individually stamped with its digits etched vertically to the right of the **I** which, much like Precision's logo, oftentimes were almost invisible until the surface was tilted at an angle. Confusion still prospers as to what strict purpose was fulfilled by enumerating these boosters but it has been borne out by a handful of senior citizens, whose livelihood back then had been to drive cabs, that a log was maintained of each recipient's name and the chronological numbers engraved on the two he was handed. Another unorthodox characteristic regarding these plates is the arrangement of the two boltholes, which were either at the lower extremities (to facilitate coupling to the upper inside perforations of a regulation-sized forward registration) or in the top corners for comparable bonding to the underneath of the hindmost plate.



From the unadulterated condition of most specimens still in our midst today, it must be concluded there was never any compulsion to use them, which only makes the rationale for their introduction even more bewildering. Anyway, according to

those same venerable informants, the whole half-baked stunt had already lost the plot by mid 1954 when there was nothing else left to do but kick it into touch.

Private Hire - These were unruffled about luring **1** to **1,100** from the passenger issue. But, unenthusiastic about potentially having to face the same rigmarole of a few years ago (when they had to be subsidised by another spate of plates), the next 900 pairs were squirreled away as spares.



Rental - And ditto here where 5,500 sets, from serials **2,001** to **7,500**, were bequeathed while the following 2,500 were also put on ice.



Trailer - Of the 95,000 pairs to weigh anchor some would become conversant



Reconditioned



Crooked comma

with the reconditioning practice whereas a medley of those with more profuse serials had to cede to the cockeyed emblem.

Contract Vehicle - The 5,300 sets were sent to the frontline as a solo contingent in 1951 and as such all were garlanded with above-board commas.



Motorcycle Learner - Since 1 June 1939 every rookie biker had been meant to display **L** plaques at both ends of his machine during the sessions he was still learning to passably get the hang of it. All the same it should not take a mastermind to deduce this millstone never won any popularity awards seeing the metal rectangles broadcast to one and all the rider was new to the pursuit and also confined to a top speed of 30 m.p.h. So, many who took umbrage, effectively abstained from befouling their motorcycles with the items in favour of risking being nabbed by the long arm of the law. And, if and when apprehended, all they then had to do was to innocently mutter something along the lines that their absentee plaques must have fallen off earlier in the day.



Finally, in 1953, after nearly a decade and a half in which cohorts of callow greenhorns had pulled off what by now had become a standing joke, the not so speedy Gonzalezes soporifically chewing the cud in governmental confines had a flash of inspiration. Let us, they exclaimed, do away with the mischievous plaques altogether and bring in much more sophisticated surrogates where the **L** would not have to subsist separately but essentially become an integral part of new learner



registrations. Careering in therefore came 17,500 single registrations in the standard hues of white on black which, while the same height as their regular opposites, had a length of ten and three eighths inches so a small **L** could be suffixed to the serial. Surely, short of a motorbike carrying no plates at all, this would now stop the letter dead in its tracks from the uncanny flair it had persistently shown in the past to keep on vanishing in a puff of smoke.

But not all was to be plain sailing as condescending administrators were soon to get the message. For, if bygone generations of tyros had successfully managed to flout the regulations for 14 years, then certainly this latest mob was not going to be game just yet to scamper away waving a white flag. Inventive to the end, many would soon latch onto the trick of neatly folding back the furthestmost couple or so inches of their registrations to effectively hide the interfering letter. And, hey presto, left visible to many an untrained eye was a plate identical in dimensions and looks (apart from the missing white border on the right) to any other motorcycle issue pertaining to the current series.

Diplomatic - Whereas to this point only the accredited members of the four High Commissions (and seemingly so too the U.S.A.) had been admitted the honour to exhibit diplomatic registrations, it was now dictated this same courtesy be proffered to the personnel of all the other embassies then in the capital.

To put everyone on an equal footing the painted plates in evidence since 1939/40 were pensioned off and succeeded by an embossed delegation with a kitschy prefixing **DPL**, this to cosset the complete diplomatic corps irrespective of past privileges. Furthermore, the assimilation of **A** and **B** suffixes would aid in differentiating between the official and private automobiles of each Chef de Mission. All others registrations (issued in blocks but not embassy coded) were to be denied a last character.

While to date there is no telltale sign of any example that may have successfully conquered the continuum of time, one witness at any rate can hark back to when he glimpsed **DPL 4A** on a 1948 Buick this being, he was later informed, the U.S. ambassador's official wagon. Also detected by another onlooker was **DPL 3A** on a Rover in the parking lot of the Japanese embassy. Incidentally, there is nothing to indicate how many diplomatic plates (with or without suffixes) were ever chalked up but hearsay advocates it could have been 400 sets.

Consular - The smaller retinue of consular corps staff in cities other than Wellington had hitherto never been accorded any reverence in terms of distinctive registrations. However consuls and their families were now given the minor accolade of being permitted to make the most of, if wished, white on black plaques (evocative of weight class plates but where the two left corners were rounded) in combination with their normal private plates. Each, buttressed by a thickset **CC.**, was as tall as a passenger registration onto whose leading edge it could thus easily be adjoined.



Government Agencies - On one side of the coin we know full well add-on plaques (and later, in one instance, stickers) also became chic among a few state departments. On the flipside there is much haziness surrounding when precisely they came on the scene or indeed whether the colours they portrayed always coincided with those of a particular series.

Meanwhile there can be no reservations that, at some phase or other, four agencies were rewarded with their own initialled metal plaques. These were PTO (Public Trust Office, which then went on to use stickers), SAC (State Advances Corporation), SFI (State Fire Insurance) and SIO (State Insurance Office). From yarns passed on by an ex-employee with a history of 40 years service in one of these establishments we are able to validate that, when the Government first formed its own insurance company, the preference was to call the new venture State Fire Insurance (seeing only fire related transactions were being written at the time). Later, when Parliamentary shoguns urged it to broaden its activities into the accident field as well, the name at that juncture should have been changed to State Accident Insurance. But, on some esoteric grounds, this did not transpire and the organisation went on being referred to by its former alias. Apparently it was not until 1963 that this misnomer was corrected when at last it was baptised with the new title of State Insurance Office.



There are though two other matters of which we can be assertive. All the plaques (and stickers too) were narrower than those for consular expediency although the height of the metal ones also matched that of passenger-sized plates. What is more it has also been confirmed, by the same above pundit, these identifiers were never the rage among the workforce constrained to fit them and hence most ensured the stud through the top bolthole was always inserted very loosely. In this way, outside office hours and weekends, it could be removed by hand and the plaque then readily swivelled behind the registration in order to conceal it. The logic for that was to forestall the laying of any complaints by members of the great unwashed who were prone to do so whenever they begrudgingly saw a driver, while noticeably not on official business, gaining advantageous benefit of what most of them intuitively perceived was a Government-owned auto.

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