

1925/26

SYMBOL: A mid-centre square on all passenger registrations and large dealer plates with four numerals. The initials NZ were also portrayed throughout either horizontally or vertically.

COLOURS: White on green.

When it was promulgated in 1924 to replace the time-honoured council coded registrations on 1 January 1925 with a pivotally supervised scheme supported by countrywide embossed plates, the principles for having them devised in the dominion were insensibly brushed aside in favour of rummaging about for an external producer with an acknowledged reputation in the field. Thus it was an order was dispatched to an establishment on the west coast of the United States called Kittle Manufacturing Company boasting installations in Los Angeles and across the bay from San Francisco in Oakland.

It eventuated however the communication from Wellington (which had itemised fixed volumes of registrations in four categories, all of them to be emphatically white on black) landed on Kittle's doorstep as it was on the verge of running off ancillary 1924 California plates whose make-up that year, providentially, consisted of white serials on a green background (and coincidentally vaunted a little square as the separator). So while indubitably the company's vats were brimming with paint at the time, unfortunately they were restricted to containing only those two colours. When, following a terse trans oceanic squabble, it was brought to the attention of the customer that substituting one of the pigments would incur a not so negligible supplemental expense (to be reflected of course on the final invoice), over the barrel kingpins in the capital had no option but to diffidently agree that a green base was preferable to grappling with escalating costs.



And whose insight was it to tack on the NZ letters to every registration? By all accounts this was an instinctive, yet unilateral, action signalled by Kittle's hierarchy who had simply ploughed on with their customary compulsion to embody the name or abbreviation of the ultimate issuing authority on all articles of this nature they created. So, without fuss or pausing to consult, they took it upon themselves to assimilate the characters in the deluded belief the powers that be in isolated New Zealand would be just as over the moon to witness the absorption of some form of bailiwick identification.

The paired totals initially sought were 88,000 passenger, 20,000 motorcycle, 5,000 dealer and 700 motorcycle dealer plates. But by as early as mid January 1925 a festering anxiety had begun to gnaw at the Registrar of Motor Vehicles regarding those figures for in his assessment it was now plain many had been severely underestimated and the quantities presently on request clearly not up to scratch if impending deficiencies were to be averted. This persuaded him he had better transmit another requisition to Kittle pronto (but somehow he did not get around to it until 18 February) calling for a far too modest, as we shall see later, top-up comprising 20,000

sets of passenger, 5,000 motorcycle and 300 motorcycle dealer registrations on the understanding they be expedited by April. As it turned out only 299 of the diminutive dealer issues would be forthcoming, numbered **D701** to **D999**, due to the limitations of space met when the serial was asked to harbour a fourth digit.

It had always been the quintessential goal, once the foremost plates reached these shores, that they be couriered to all postal outlets by the end of December 1924 so as to be punctually accessible to motorists from new year's day onwards. But this perfect world scenario was shot down in flames when Kittle failed to meet its prearranged delivery date, and not by a slender margin to boot. This short-circuited alarmed administrators into extremely rapidly commissioning some 2,000 pairs of locally struck transitional registrations in order to console those who from 1 January had a maiden occasion to register a conveyance.

Whereas no rave critiques can be directed at the woeful calibre of these specimens, it must be said they did at least get to serve their intended short-term function. Hence it is not unnatural there is still inquisitive speculation as to the identity of the domestic contributor who so willingly came to the rescue of panic-stricken officials. Well, on the basis of congruent evidence, there is much to indicate it was probably the New Zealand Railways Workshops billeted in Wellington. Already under central Government control, and therefore constrained to comply with the fetishes of their political masters anyway, the Workshops had, into the bargain, an elaborate conglomeration of machines and presses (as well as the expertise) to fashion swags of signs of every conceivable size and description for use on the nation's rolling stock, stations, junctions and level crossings. So, in this precise circumstance, it cannot be too far-fetched to suggest the urgent formulation of a couple of thousand sets of plates, where quality was to be of minimal significance, should in any way have proved to be an insurmountable assignment.

Also affected by the tardy U.S. shipment was the projected registration term. The original strategy had been, in this the budding year of the novel system, to accord the overseas series a validity spell of 14 months, from 1 February 1925 to the next 31 March 1926, and thereafter take on annual April to March cycles thereby tying them in nicely with the country's tax year. It was also forecast to grant the public the whole of January to facilitate transfer to the modern plates. But because of the unexpected adjournment, which would see the leading registrations only being disseminated in the closing days of February, the month of March was now withheld as a period of grace when the changeover could be accomplished. Yet, as the consequence of a blunder, this did not let current owners off the hook as far as having to re-register their vehicles before the end of January. For, most absurdly, on the statutes there remained the incontrovertible stipulation all driving licenses had to be applied for by 1 February and, as everyone was aware, a certificate of registration (obtainable only when the registering process had been completed) was a vital document when it came to carrying out that procedure.

Behind the scenes meantime, while most inhabitants continued to hold their breath for the American consignment to materialise, several renowned personages of influence were simultaneously jockeying for position with supplications they be permitted to reserve specific serials of their choosing, the predilection evidently being for those with low numbers. One of those making a racket was the brazen mayor of

Auckland who, in his perception of himself as a citizen of paramount importance, saw absolutely no grounds why he and members of his council should not be awarded **NZ 1** to **NZ 50** from both the passenger and motorcycle rations. Not surprisingly this haughty petition only succeeded in flaring the nostrils of the Minister of Internal Affairs ensconced in Wellington who had no hesitation in declining it with the explanation it would be both difficult and embarrassing to acquiesce to such an entreaty in view of the many other solicitations of this type he had been obliged to turn down.

Furthermore, as if to emphasise his dour resolution and discourage any additional fresh pleas, the Minister then went to the inordinate lengths of instructing his staff that, the minute the freighter from California had docked, they immediately sprint up the gangway, sniff out and impound all passenger and motorcycle plates displaying **NZ 1** through **NZ 50**. Once realised, they were to be spirited away and smuggled forthwith into his inner sanctum where he would make sure they were locked away in perpetuity so as to never ever be on hand for issue to anyone at all. As for any caustic outside mutterings this spitting of the dummy would have generated, these he nonchalantly rebuffed by announcing their withdrawal had been prompted purely because he considered those particular registrations “looked ugly”. Actually it is quite plausible the Minister did indeed have an abnormal deep-seated phobic mindset towards all condensed serials due to the vast expanses of blankness they revealed, a facet he palpably found hard to stomach. So much so at a later stage he even toyed with the notion of doing away with them altogether as of the next year’s series by seriously contemplating it should commence at **1,000**. Happily though history goes to show this personal foible never bore any fruit.

Passenger - To be observed in three distinct adaptations of consistent size (thirteen and seven eighth inches wide by four and seven eighth inches high), the primary two were imported while the third relied on the labours of an indigenous concern. All came with a pre-drilled bolthole in each corner plus four slightly bigger perforations along the top and bottom some three inches in from either end. The price of all plates was two shillings a pair.

1) On those with serials **51** to **99,999** (keeping in mind the first 50 sets had been incarcerated for life) a 2¼-inch tall NZ preceded the lankier 3½-inch numerals where



both letters were lined up one after the other. Moreover a small square ventured forth as a separator which, on two and three digit registrations, was lodged between the prefix and sequential numbers. After that it took up permanent residency at the thousands site where it thrived throughout this and the two consecutive renditions.

2) Upon attaining **100,000**, the extra numeric drafee caused the prefacing characters to be adjusted by virtue of insufficient room. Thus the N, now infinitely squatter, was transplanted to the upper left-hand extremity while its correspondingly pudgy Z partner was steered underneath. In this manner a stacked configuration was achieved where the height of the two combined components equated that of the serial. The issue terminated at **108,000** on the outright depletion of stocks.



3) The third variant welled up but briefly and was no more than a locum delegated to take charge during the interval the Kittle plates had become prematurely exhausted



The upper plate has been repainted thus highlighting the very inferior quality of its twin underneath.

and the advent of the noticeably detained 1926/27 issue. Here too a horizontal NZ was spotted but this time austerey trimmed down to an elevation of less than one inch. Starting at **108,001**, it is estimated the outflow may have hit a **114,000** peak although nowhere near the 6,000 pairs to come on parade had impetus to form a relationship with a motorised entity and, those not so prevailed upon, were presumably doomed to suffer a fiery end. This, together with the substandard workmanship on the handful of registrations cajoled into active service (which patently were portended to hold out for no more than some weeks), means only six examples - at most - are surmised to be with us today.

There is value at this point in recapping the two major faux pas that inflamed the requisite for the above fillers. The prime one indisputably lay at the feet of the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and his cronies who not only once but twice had flopped abysmally in determining how many plates were needed to allay the rising totals of mobile contrivances in the land as well as their spectacular rates of growth. Not astonishingly, in the fullness of time, this elementary ineptitude caught them with their pants down when they were left staring into a bare cupboard destitute of registrations a whole lot sooner than anticipated. The second slip-up occurred when functionaries exhibited an altogether much too lackadaisical attitude before naming Wellington's own Precision Engineering as the new national contractor. With all their dilly-dallying it is no wonder the recently designated firm would always find it a formidable battle to be loyal to a 1 April target for the introduction of the 1926/27 series - a task they were infallibly to find out was an impossibility. Lump these binary factors together and it becomes transparent why the flawed sages of the day were again compelled to take cap in hand and meekly beg for yet more intervening plates.

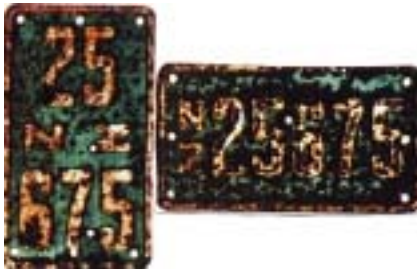
Motorcycle - 25,000 paired registrations were contrived where the ones supposedly to be mounted below the handlebars were upright while their rear accomplices retained a traditional lateral profile. But it is baffling as to what would have spurred such a weird move and besides there are no records to inform us whose wacky idea this was. Could the client have had solid input by insisting they have divergent silhouettes (if so, why, when no other jurisdiction in the cosmos had ever taken such a tack) or was this just another one of Kittle's covert manoeuvres? We do know, unshakeably, Wellington wanted all the plates to be in sets of two, yet there is nothing to verify a demand ever being made for them to be of different layouts. Kittle conversely was very much into the habit of spewing out perpendicular plates seeing these were what Californian motorcycles had become attracted to since 1920 (but only as singles). The air of suspicion therefore is inclined to gravitate towards the latter.



Anyway, when all was said and done, both registrations had the same dimensions ($7\frac{1}{4}$ by four and one eighth inches) and sprouted a petite NZ which was outrivaled by $2\frac{1}{4}$ -inch numbers. On front ones the initials were put to work as a separator at the thousands mark while a much stubbier and exceedingly elongated mutation of these loomed over all serials on those aiming to be fastened at the back. Six boltholes of constant circumference were located equidistantly in rows of three along the two stunted sides but in neither instance did a square ever come into the offing. As mentioned previously those numbered **1** to **50** had also been thrown in the clink.



In a virtual replay of what befell their portlier cousins here too supplies were incapable of lasting the distance, this unavoidably giving rise to a congregation of 'home-bred' provisional plates where again the handiwork was profoundly poor. Of the 6,000 pairs reportedly yielded (**25,001** to **31,000**) there is a carbon copy hunch only a teeny portion ever got to accost a motorcycle, which is why (on the same assumption the rest were annihilated) there is such a dearth of any survivors.



Note the location of the NZ initials on the horizontal plate.

Large Vehicle Dealer - Accentuated by an N over Z followed by a **D** (with serifs) and then the serial, where all the elements stretched to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, the placement and measurements of the boltholes paralleled those on passenger registrations. As for the square, this shied away from those sporting three or less digits but it positively did sneak in when serials clambered up to four figures. 5,000 sets were consented to, an extraordinary extravagance when one appreciates such a wanton apportionment was not to be seen again until mid 1951. From the relatively few to be assigned it appears only a fraction were not cast aside at



the expiry of their legality hence making it arduous these days to catch sight of any that may have braved the ravages of time.

Motorcycle Dealer - In empathy with their regular counterparts these 999 also came in vertical and horizontal pairs with identically aligned boltholes and 2¼-inch main characters. The forward ones divulged a fairly narrow **D** (also with serifs) over an **NZ**, which in turn was nestled above the serial. Up to now we are conscious of only one lone frontal relic whereas no such luck has extended itself to ferreting out a lateral companion. Is it feasible then the rear plates may have trod on the heels of their passenger-sized dealer relatives by becoming mini versions of these? Or, and it cannot be ruled out until more substantiation is exhumed, were they more similar to private motorcycle registrations where a drawn out **NZ** would have been strung out along the top over a prefixing **D** and the serial? The one thing however one can be confident of is, akin to their mates, none were ever anointed with a square.



[PREVIOUS CHAPTER](#)

[NEXT CHAPTER](#)

[MAIN MENU](#)