

1926/27

SYMBOL: A hyphen at mid centre.

COLOURS: White on black.

Improbable to have revelled in the colloquialism ‘people power’ in 1925, it is fascinating nonetheless that even back then constituents of a democratic Government could be squeezed through the wringer when confronted by a hopping mad electorate. For, having blindly bulldozed ahead with lavishly frittering away oodles of money out of the not over-stuffed public purse on the purchase of a gamut of registrations from abroad (which in themselves had been intensely unpopular and objects of wholesale derision), Parliamentary hotshots were conclusively driven to admit this may not have been one of their wisest ploys. More so at a juncture in the nation’s development when there was considerable industrial and social unrest in the wake of rising prices.

Having copped such a fierce blast of universal flack, blushing bureaucrats had to do some contrite navel gazing and re-diagnose most carefully their misgivings whether plates, of suitable qualitative standards and within viable cost parameters, could in actuality be purveyed internally. In due course this led to the summoning of tenders from local businesses and, after much prevarication and what seemed an eternity, the nomination of an outfit in the capital known as Precision Engineering Coy. Ltd. to effectuate the whole of the registration series for 1926/27.

But this new appointee was not going to find he could be complacent over the next few months as it was well into November and rigidly ingrained plans were clamouring for a re-issue to be ripe for distribution to all post offices ahead of 1 April 1926. Still to be conjured up from naught was the mechanical equipment to make and paint plates while integral raw materials, none of them procurable in New Zealand, had yet to be sourced and then shipped out. So it was to be no bolt from the blue when Precision, who had been disadvantaged from the beginning, fell short by a month in its undertaking to respect the ambitious deadline dumped on it. This automatically undermined the registration year which had to be emended to a 1 June to 31 May time frame.

When unveiled the most flagrant feature appreciable straightaway on the Precision plates was the lack of an interloping NZ, this appraised superfluous in a microcosm fringed by no others. But, even though the more stick-in-the-mud fogies hibernating in administrative cloisters now had their hankering fulfilled to gawk at white on black registrations, what should happen hereafter to ensure an explicit annual contrast? Naturally the easiest solution was to alter the hues every year (it being recalled plates were to stay undated). But was this sufficient? Would that alone deter the odd plebeian or a hundred from hauling out their own pots of enamel whenever an ascribed series made an appearance so they could demonstrate their tint matching proficiencies with a brush?

The answer was no, it vividly was not going to be anything close to enough. For even the dopiest brain of the day could have confirmed that since the birth of civilisation there have been segments of humankind who see it as their divine right to

fleece government departments out of every penny possible. For that reason thought had to be given to some auxiliary tool capable of setting future issues apart while also doing its utmost to thwart scurrilous cheats and counterfeiters. The winning concept was not only unpretentious but one which was to become peerless on the planet - the as of now yearly amalgamation of diverse embossed symbols to take on the role of separators on every plate crafted.

There are two persuasive clues lending credence that the behest to implement assorted annual pigments and emblems was sanctified when 1926/27 registrations were already in circulation and, by inference, not during the Kittle era. Firstly, on the question of colour choice, the fact that the backdrop on the 1925/26 series had been green was little more than a quirk of fate for, had native wishes been upheld, it should have fronted up in black. So, who can tell, both these issues might have looked more or less alike had the fundamental script been adhered to (which of course had never boded the NZ initials). And as for the prevailing hyphen, surely this was not the outcome of an initiatory expedition into the creative world of symbol selection? Was it not merely a more distended imitation of what the Americans had used?

Secondly, once the Registrar of Motor Vehicles was satisfied all mechanisms were performing smoothly as far as the current series was concerned, he appealed for more tenders in late May on condition they be on his desk by 2 July 1926. While again there is nothing of substance to assist in establishing how many submissions he may have been inspired to weigh up, he did at the end of the day opt to rehire Precision Engineering and, what is most startling, this time for the next four years. So it was only when subsequent meetings were convened to discuss not just the prospective 1927/28 issue, but so too the three ones after it, that such topics as colour and emblem preferences would first have been debated and thence decided on.

This latest show of faith in Precision no doubt must have spawned much relief and satisfaction for its founder Robert Burn. Not only had his wee firm proved it could foot it with the élite (and, notably, at substantially reduced costs), but all that bygone unstinting investment in machinery and related assets had thankfully paid off. Now, invigorated by the confidence he had a binding legal agreement stashed away covering another four years, he could finally concede himself the luxury to flex some muscle and intrepidly go about consolidating his company as the one and only bona fide national plate manufacturer. Moreover from then on, until the death-knell of this registration scheme, he was never to relinquish his grip on the reins or hand them over to anybody else.

With undeviating consistency every passenger-sized plate to exit Precision's premises, for this and all successive series, mirrored the same proportions as the Californian ones. So did, bar large dealer registrations whose traits are touched on in a later paragraph, the positioning and diameters of the four by four asymmetrical boltholes. This also holds tight for the 3½-inch pinnacle of the numerals **except** for this series where they were moderately more pronounced than those prevalent on the Kittle die. On the smaller plates the digits now ascended to 2½ inches, this being an increase of a quarter inch over those of yore.

Passenger - Perhaps it was for aesthetic motives the hyphen was omitted on all registrations up to **999** and only came into the picture upon the integration of a fourth



number. The observation might have been made it would not be pleasing to the eye to leave it suspended there in an arid void as a prefix to an up to three-figure serial when its appropriate mission was to act as a separator at the thousands area. But at least one can be grateful these plates made it through production. Their destiny after all had hung in the balance for many months due to the frothy mouthed and neurotic behaviour the still sitting Minister of Internal Affairs had manifested towards them the foregoing year.

Meanwhile a torrent of benevolent institutions all over the country had been lobbying Parliament the past 14 months urging to be excused from the necessity to pay registration fees. Primarily these were privately funded associations whose pursuits were perceived to be propitious to the common good (e. g. ambulance services, fire brigades, orphanages, etc.). When all this beseeching was at last heeded with the arrival of this series, it was affirmed they would be eternally exempt from having to cough up an annual outlay for any appliance in their safekeeping which was being plied solely in an official capacity. But they all had to go on bearing normal passenger plates (125,000 pairs came up for air that year) acquired at no cost on presentation of an affidavit of waiver available from central Government chambers. As for state-run public aid agencies, they had always been spared from registration charges and the plates their motors lugged around were unaffected for they had never fretted over converting to the embossed ones that had accompanied the new system instigated in 1925.

Motorcycle - The hyphen never crawled out onto the 33,000 front registrations - even after gaining four and then five numerals - seeing its flat and lifeless outline did not visually lend itself for inclusion on a vertical plate. On the rear ones the same



malady was to be rampant that had infected the passenger issue where it was neglected until **1,000**. So far no justification has surfaced to extenuate why Precision went on to mimic Kittle's penchant for registrations in two formats.

Large Vehicle Dealer - A fractionally taller yet distinctly more willowy sanserif **D** now prefaced the serial where both evinced the same height - which here



too was a shade more bountiful than last year's 3½ inches - and conferment of the hyphen was again confined to those with four numbers. And, in a departure from the Kittle products, ¼ by ¼-inch slots were herewith deputised in place of the two top inward boltholes. To become an undying hall-mark of all large dealer plates their purpose was to accelerate, with the help of two buckled leather straps, the temporary attachment of the registrations to a contrivance and later their equally as swift removal.

Counter to the vastly disproportionate saturation of the preceding year, a diminished allotment of 3,300 sets was endorsed of which only three derelicts are believed to be about today.

Motorcycle Dealer - The hyphen forsook all 600 upright and lateral plates with



these also being, now and forever, deprived of the benefits of any slots. Making itself at home however was a stunted and squarer sanserif **D** either above (front) or prefacing (back) the serial. As there is no inkling of any representatives in our midst to foment study, this has had to be compiled from drawings for this series drafted by the Registrar's office on 21 August of 1925 (about a month after those foremost tenders were proffered).

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