Flags of the city and country flying over the historic city of Zipiquirá (department of Cundinamarca).

License Plates of *Colombia*

By Derek Lehane #2441

Columbia is a fascinating country, with long coastlines facing both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and extensive, thinly-populated regions bordering Venezuela and Brazil. The population of the country is 47 million, with population density varying widely from over eight million inhabitants in the capital, Bogotá, to only 33,000 people in the department of Vaupés. Administratively, the nation is divided into 32 departments (*departamentos*) and one Capital District (*Distrito Capital*). Departments are formed by a grouping of municipalities (*municipios*), ranging from a single municipality in the department of Guaviare to as many as 123 in the department of Boyacá. Each municipality issues license plates bearing its name for both private and public service vehicles. Given that there are 1,103 municipalities

in Colombia, it would indeed be a daunting task to achieve a complete run for the entire country. Considering the population size and the administrative complexity of Colombia, it's somewhat amazing that virtually all license plates are issued in one format: ABC-123.

License plates in Colombia are issued in pairs and are 15 cm by 33 cm in size (about 6" x 13"). Since 1988, plates for private vehicles have had a background of deep reflective yellow with a black border and black letters and numbers. The letters and numbers are separated by the logo of the Transport Ministry of Colombia. Plates for public service vehicles (taxis, trucks, buses, etc.) have a reflective white background, again with border, letters and numerals in black. Unlike previous series of private and public service plates, the current plates do not carry the country name Colombia (a source of concern to some sectors of the public on the loss of the national identity for their vehicles).

The combinations of letters and numbers are assigned by the Transport Ministry and are not repeated anywhere in the nation. All letters of the alphabet (except for the Spanish letter Ñ) are used in the assigned series. Acute accents (') indicating stressed vowels are not used on the license plates. This is seen with plates for the national capital, with both an earlier version of the current series STFE DE BOGOTA (Santa Fé de Bogotá) and the current version BOGOTA D.C (Bogotá, D.C.). Other examples include MONIQUIRA (Moniquirá), UBATE (Ubaté), etc.

Also following the ABC-123 format are plates used for antique autos. However, the plate background is a central yellow area flanked by lateral bands of purple. "ANTIGUO" appears at the top of the plate, and letters and numbers are separated by a blue graphic of an antique auto.

Motorcycle plates use the same reflective yellow with black letters in the format AAA-12A. On these plates, the country name appears at the bottom of the plate. Other color combinations of plates (e.g. white letters on a blue background for diplomatic plates, white letters on a reflective deep-green background (R12345; "R" signifies remolque) for trailers, etc., also bearing the country name at the bottom of the plate) are seen, but are not the focus of this short review.

Plates are assigned to a vehicle in perpetuity and are only replaced in cases of deterioration, loss or relocation to a different municipality. In such cases the originally-assigned letter and number combinations are re-issued.

Private Vehicles

BIY-548 STFE DE BOGOTA
Santa Fé de Bogotá

CFT-573 BOGOTA D.C.
Bogotá D.C.

DLV-692 MEDELLIN
Municipality of Medellin (department of Antioquia)

IPZ-332 CALI
Municipality of Cali (department of Valle del Cauca)

HUK-825 UBATE
Municipality of Ubaté (department of Cundinamarca)

YXA-18D COLOMBIA
Colombia Motorcycle

Public Service

UPO-720 VELEZ
Municipality of Vélezi (department of Santander)

UPN-342 MONIQUIRA
Municipality of Moniquirá (department of Boyacá)

TRG-534 BELLO
Municipality of Bello (department of Antioquia)

Antique Auto

JAJ-727 COMBITA
Santa Fé de Bogotá

Invitation from CLAC (Colombian Antique & Classic Autos Club) to "Easily process with us the acquisition of plates and inspection for your antique vehicle"