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On the Road in New Zealand

By Derek Lehane #2441

How about a country with standard-issue license plates where "zero" is represented by a slashed zero (Ø)? A country that allows additional personal messages to be added to personalized plates? A country where a strictly sequential system of issuance of license plates has been in place since 1964? All of these features are abundantly clear on the license plates of New Zealand.

New Zealand, the "world's most peaceful country," has a population of 4.7 million people and has 2.5 million vehicles on the road. Close to one third of the population (and, presumably, of the vehicles) is located in the Auckland metropolitan area. Thus, the remaining areas of the North and South Islands tend to be thinly populated. Apart from relatively short stretches of four-lane, divided expressways in major metropolitan areas, the roads of New Zealand are primarily of the well-maintained two-lane type. In New Zealand, the driving age is 15 and traffic moves on the left. The vast majority of private cars are of Japanese manufacture, with smaller numbers of Australian (although General Motors' Holden is now no longer manufactured in Australia), British, German, French and American vehicles (like Jeep

Grand Cherokee).

Vehicle registration plates in New Zealand are comprised of six types. This article covers the three most numerous plate types: ordinary plates, single plates and personalized plates. In addition, trade plates, diplomatic plates and overseas visitor registration plates are also issued.

Ordinary registration plates in New Zealand follow a strictly sequential pattern, running from AA1 (issued in 1964) to (as of early March) LGC123. The plates are issued on a national basis, with no indication of individual regions or cities. This straightforward system covers every type of powered vehicle: cars, SUVs, pick-ups, trucks, buses, taxis, police cars, ambulances and fire trucks. The initial permanent plates, silver characters on a black background, ran from AA1 to MZ9999, covering the period 1964 to 1986. In 1986, black-on-white reflectorized plates were introduced. These plates covered the sequence NA1 to ZZ9989. In this format the letters I and O were used and, in the early 1990's, the use of the slashed zero (Ø) was introduced on ordinary plates. The AAA1Ø4 format, without the use of I, O or X but utilizing the letter Q, was introduced in 2001. On reaching

ORDINARY PLATES



Issued 1985



Issued 1985



Issued 1995



Issued 1996



Issued 2005



Issued 2016



Issued 2016



Issued 2017



Issued 2018

PERSONALIZED PLATES



Pre-2006 Dies



Message Plate



Message Plate



Message Plate

MOTORCYCLE PLATES



TRAILER PLATES



DEFN100 in 2006, the plate design was changed to use heavier and thicker dies. This black-on-white format is currently in use for ordinary registration plates.

Single plates include those used for trailers (truck trailers, utility trailers and house trailers). Earlier formats utilized one letter in various positions with one to four numbers (i.e. 9E430). The current format is letter/three digits/letter (i.e. P997L). Plates

for motorcycles, mopeds and tractors were initially in the two digits/three letters format (i.e. 23YBL) but are now issued in the letter/three digits/letter format (i.e. A3WKF).

Personalized plates have been available since 1988 and can have up to six numbers or letters. Unlike ordinary plates, which are permanently assigned to a vehicle, personalized plates are transferable. Creative purchasers of personalized plates frequently

make use of 0 to extend the options available (i.e. H00TY or W0MBLE). Since 2016, Message Plates, where buyers can place any text at the top and/or bottom of the plate, have been available. Personalized and message plates are sold through KiwiPlates.nz in a wide range of formats and options. The additional personalized message is allowed "as long as it fits and doesn't cause offence."