

# 1903-86 Series Plates of The Republic of Ireland

By Derek Lehane #2441

On January 1, 1987, the Republic of Ireland switched to a completely new design for its registration plates. This European-style plate included a year designation for new vehicle registrations and a simpler indication of the county of registration. The design also indicated a closer link between Ireland and the European Union. The switch in plate style ended the 83-year run of the original series of plates in use in Ireland. This is the story of the historic 1903 to 1986 series of license plates.

The original series of license plate identifiers issued in Ireland were part of the British system introduced in 1903. Uniquely, identifiers in Ireland contained the letter "I" as part of 38 two-letter codes that were allocated in alphabetical order

to the 32 counties, two cities (Dublin and Belfast) and four county boroughs (Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Derry). The initial registration format consisted of the two-letter code followed by a number sequence from 1 to 9999. The original codes allocated ran from IA to IZ and then from AI to WI; the letters G, Q, S and V were not used and II was skipped. In 1921, two additional codes, XI and YI, were issued to Belfast and Dublin, respectively.

In 1922, the southern 26 counties of Ireland became the Irish Free State, with the remaining six counties becoming Northern Ireland. In the Irish Free State, a new series of two-letter codes with the letter Z in first position (ZA to ZZ) came into use in 1927. In

Northern Ireland, the new two-letter codes have Z in the second position (i.e. HZ for Tyrone). The single-letter prefix Z was used in Dublin County from 1927 to 1938.

## ORIGINAL IRELAND SERIES OF LICENSE PLATE IDENTIFIERS INTRODUCED IN 1903

PREFIX	COUNTY	PREFIX	COUNTY
IA	Antrim	AI	Meath
IB	Armagh	BI	Monaghan
IC	Carlow	CI	Leaois (then Queen's County)
ID	Cavan	DI	Roscommon
IE	Clare	EI	Sligo
IF	Cork County	FI	Tipperary North Riding
IH	Donegal	HI	Tipperary South Riding
IJ	Down	JI	Tyrone
IK	Dublin County	KI	Waterford County
IL	Fermanagh	LI	Westmeath
IM	Galway	MI	Wexford
IN	Kerry	NI	Wicklow
IO	Kildare	OI	Belfast
IP	Kilkenny	PI	Cork City
IR	Offaly (then King's County)	RI	Dublin City
IT	Leitrim	TI	Limerick City
IU	Limerick County	UI	Derry
IW	Londonderry County	WI	Waterford City
IX	Longford	XI	Belfast
IY	Louth	YI	Dublin City
IZ	Mayo		

## IRISH FREE STATE Z LETTER CODES INTRODUCED IN 1927

PREFIX	COUNTY
Z	Dublin County
ZA	Dublin City
ZB	Cork County
ZC	Dublin City
ZD	Dublin City
ZE	Dublin County
ZF	Cork City
ZH	Dublin City
ZI	Dublin City
ZJ	Dublin City
ZK	Cork County
ZL	Dublin City
ZM	Galway
ZN	Meath
ZO	Dublin
ZP	Donegal
ZR	Wexford
ZT	Cork County
ZU	Dublin
ZW	Kildare
ZX	Kerry
ZY	Louth
ZZ	Temporary Registrations

Having exhausted all available two-letter codes, Dublin began a three-letter, three-number format (i.e. ARI 123) in May 1954. Other registration authorities also adopted this format once all two-letter combinations had been issued. In County Leitrim, a rural western county, this process took until 1972 to complete. In 1970, Dublin exhausted all its three-letter combinations and began issuing "reversed" two-letter registrations (i.e. 1234 RI). In 1982, with Dublin and





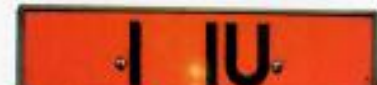
Cork County, issued in 1952



Dublin, issued 1964



Cork County, issued 1968



Limerick County, issued 1971



Dublin, issued 1975



Cork County, issued 1977



Cork County, issued 1980



Dublin, issued 1981



Clare, issued 1986



Dublin, issued in 1957



Donegal, issued circa 1967



Waterford City, issued circa 1969



Cork County, issued 1972



Cork City, issued 1976



Limerick County, issued circa 1978



Westmeath, issued circa 1981



Cork City, issued 1982



Dublin, issued 1986



Dublin, issued 1963



Limerick City, issued circa 1968



Dublin, issued 1970



Kilkenny, issued 1974



Kildare, issued 1977



Tipperary North Riding, issued circa 1979



Limerick County, issued 1981



Cork City, issued 1985

several other counties having exhausted all possible combinations using their original two-letter codes, new codes employing letters G, S and V were assigned to a number of registration authorities.

From 1903 to 1969, all license plates had been white (usually raised plastic characters riveted to a metal base) or embossed silver characters on a black base. Sometimes, reversed colors (black on white) are seen.

In 1969, the option of black-on-white for front plates and black-on-red for rear plates was introduced. In subsequent years, drivers exercised significant creativity with regards to colors, fonts, designs and plate sizes with their allotted registrations.

This registration system was in use for all vehicles (passenger, commercial and government) and validation was, and still is, accomplished by a windshield paper

disk. On occasion, while driving in Ireland, motorists will encounter a roadside inspection by An Garda Síochána (national police force) checking for valid tax and insurance windshield disks.

Today, only a small and vanishing number of plates from the 1903-86 series is seen on Irish roads. These plates must remain with the original vehicle and cannot be transferred to other vehicles. Thus, in time, these plates will become more and more scarce on the road. The plates photographed for this article were primarily seen (in the rain!) at a classic car meet held as a feature of the Mallow Garden Festival on May 27, 2018.

In Northern Ireland, the original two-letter county and city codes are still in use, in a TUI 1234 format...but that's a story for another day!

#### NEW CODES EMPLOYING LETTERS G, S & V WERE ASSIGNED INTRODUCED IN 1982

PREFIX	COUNTY	PREFIX	COUNTY
IS	Mayo	ZG	Dublin
IV	Limerick	ZS	Dublin
GI	Tipperary South Riding	ZV	Vehicles 30+ Years Old
SI	Dublin		