

# It's All About the NUMBERS.....

By Judy Badgley

Doug and I have always done as much traveling as we could. We are always looking to see what is “just over that hill”! As long as I can remember we have played the license plate game. You know, the one where you keep track of all the different states. This is a fascinating game and “kids” of all ages love to play.

License plates are not just a means to identify your car. They tell a story. Most of the states, through the years have featured a scene or picture that tells something about the state: Maine-lobster, Florida-orange, Arizona-cactus..... You get the idea.

Since personalized plates



have become popular, they have expanded to also tell a story about the driver: IMANRSE (I Am A Nurse), 2LZ2WRK (Too lazy to work), GRR8 (Great). Military plates are also quite popular, they identify the owner as having served and defended the United States of America.

License plates may also feature an endangered animal, college/university or non-profit groups. These special plates have a double benefit. They are quite profitable to the issuing state as they charge

extra fees for personalized plates. These extra fees are reported to total hundreds of millions of dollars! The other benefit is a portion of these fees is then sent to the organization featured on the license plate.

Now to the history..... Cars were first manufactured in the United States in 1897. We all know that first car manufacturer was Oldsmobile. It wasn't long before it was determined governments needed a way to identify the owner of the car. Larger cities required license plates or ID tags to be provided by the vehicle owner. These tags could be made out of virtually any substance and brought in to a location to be registered. They could be mounted on the dash, or outside of the car. Leather, rubber and iron were the most common base materials used.

The first state to manufacture license plates was Massachusetts. The year was 1903, 6 years after the first car was



produced! The plates were made of iron and covered by enamel porcelain. There was no uniform size to the plate. The size was determined by

the amount of numbers used. The first plate issued was number “1”. The family of the original owner still has this plate. The year the plate was issued was not added until 1908.

By 1918 nearly every state was producing and issuing license plates. Each year owners were required to get a new plate. This plate was a different color scheme than the previous year, making it easier for police to make sure the owner was current with their registration. By 1924 New York and California had each manufactured and issued 1,000,000 license plates.

License plates are manufactured in nearly every state at state-operated correctional facilities. Only 3 states, Alaska, Hawaii and Oregon license plates are made by privately owned facilities and then distributed by the issuing state.

Several states require both a front and rear license plate. Over 30 states DO NOT require a front license plate. Many auto enthusiasts in those states install a personalized license plate that doesn't follow the guidelines for the “official” registered plate. This offers owners some additional opportunities to be creative and express their own ideas.



Collecting license plates is a popular hobby. Some collect representatives from each state, others focus on all the different plates or years from a particular state, others just collect any license plate! They look great when displayed, there is such a variety to look at. There is a national group (Automobile License Plate Collectors Association) of collectors if you are interested in this unique hobby. Their website is: [www.alpca.org](http://www.alpca.org) or snail mail to: ALPCA, 118 Quaker Rd, Hampton VA 23669-2024

Here are some license plate 1<sup>st</sup> milestones and trivia:

- 1896- Germany issues the 1<sup>st</sup> license plate
- 1903- Massachusetts issues 1<sup>st</sup> plate in USA
- 1912- Illinois issued a front plate that allowed air to flow through and not block air to the radiator.
- 1924- California and New York each had issued 1,000,000 license plates
- 1928- Idaho was 1<sup>st</sup> to use a graphic on plates, a potato



- 1931- Pennsylvania manufactured the 1<sup>st</sup>

personalized license plate

- 1936- Mexico was the 1<sup>st</sup> to use reflective plates
- 1937- Connecticut issued the first plate intended to be “permanent”, and just add yearly tabs. It was 11 years before the next “permanent” plate was issued there.
- 1941- Georgia issued the 1<sup>st</sup> reflectorized plate in the USA
- 1942- Delaware was the last state to issue a porcelain plate
- WWII- During these years because of the shortage of metal, many states used wood or fiberboard. The latter was quite popular with goats and horses for a snack!
- 1948- Connecticut was 1<sup>st</sup> to introduce beads-on-paint reflective plates
- 1960- 3M was first to introduce reflective sheeting used on most license plates now
- 1992- New Jersey was the final state to issue a reflecting license plate.

License plates can be more than just a way to identify your vehicle and collect a tax. If you have a personalized plate, how about sending in a picture to the newsletter and explain why you chose it. Better yet, if you are a collector send in a photo of your license plate display. In the meantime, keep an eye on the road and look for those out-of-state and unusual license plates.