

NZ Triple-M Register – Annexes

Early NZ Registration Plates

New Zealand Registration Plates, 1929–1940 (Triple-M, & MG TA/TB eras)

From 1925, registration plates were issued annually in NZ. Each year the vehicle had a different registration plate, with the plates having a different coloured background from the letters. Unfortunately, as most pre-war photos are black and white, this colour of numbers and the letters: it could be a triangle, a dot, a comma, etc. so, from black and white photos (which clearly show a car's registration plate) the year the photo was taken can be positively identified, assuming the car had a current registration. This all changed in 1941, when, because of WW2 and a shortage of steel, NZ decided to go to five year registration plates.

Triple- M Engine colours

Triple-M Engine Colours by Mike Alison

Early NZ Registration Plates

Year Issued	Letter/Number Colour	Plate Colour	Symbol	Symbol	Centre or Low	Example
1928-29	White	Brown	◆	Diamond	Centre	132.644
1929-30	White	Blue	●	Circle	Centre	115.452
1930-31	White	Black	•	Colon	Centre	125.741
1931-32	Orange	Black	▲	Triangle	Centre	122.481
1932-33	Black	Orange	—	Hyphen	Low	x27.588
1933-34	White	Brown	★	Star	Low	34.457
1934-35	White	Blue	◆	Diamond	Low	91.279
1935-36	White	Green	,	Comma	Low	2.513
1936-37	Black	Yellow	▼	Inverted Triangle	Low	12.323
1937-38	White	Black	♣	Escutcheon	Low	156.881
1938-39	White	Green	⊠	Maltese Cross	Low	192.953
1939-40	Black	Orange	⬠	Pentagon	Low	41.478
1940-41	White	Venetian Red	▲	Triangle	Low	69.960

Many thanks to Rex Benns and Peter Chandler for providing this information.

Engine Colours

*An essay from the horse's mouth
by Mike Alison. Reprinted with
permission*

Back in the late 1950s, Kenneth Ulyett wrote a book called the 'M.G. Companion' in which he stated that in the Triple-M period engines were painted green for touring cars, red for the sports models and blue for the racing cars. Since he had spent some time with John Thornley and Cecil Cousins, we all took this as the gospel of truth, no-one queried it, and it has passed into M.G. folklore as the absolute truth.

In the mid-1960s, I was working at the Factory and was restoring my Monte Carlo N-type, keen to get every detail 'right' as one does, wanting to know the correct shades of colour. So I tried raking over the old muck heap. Martin Brent was also researching paint colours to relate original shades to then-current colours, so we worked together on the subject for a time, and published a piece.

Anyway, I recently came across my notes taken at the time, and set them here so that future generations may know what was said in 1965:

1. J.W.Thornley:

"This was put to me as a statement of fact, and I said little to contradict it, except that I knew that the early engines were grey, and could only remember the Triple-M units being red., but to be quite honest we did not take a tremendous interest in such details."

2. C.E.Cousins: (Racing Teams Manager, but Works Manager when I knew him)

We used to paint engines almost any co-

lour asked by the customer, but most of the cammy units were red. 14/40s were a sort of deep blue, I think, and 18/80s were grey. I think we painted all the engines at Oxford grey so that they were different from the Morris units. When we moved to Abingdon, we changed to red, but I don't remember the racing car engines being a different colour from the production jobs. If they were painted at all. I thought we changed to green with the push-rod Morris engines in the T and S cars.

3. R.C.Jackson: (Racing Shop Foreman, but Chief Inspector when I questioned him - he was the Boss then!)

"I remember production engines being dark red, like the MGB now but I don't think the racing cars were a different colour, if they were painted at all! When we built the K3 for Bira he specified that the whole car, engine and all should be his special colour, and since the car went to Olympia (for the Motor Show in 1934) we did paint that engine. All engines in production were spray painted at Erdington (the Wolseley Factory) and I don't think we had separate stores for units for two and four seaters, so they would all have been the same colour I am sure."

4. A.Hounslow: (Foreman, Experimental Department, when I knew him, but a racing mechanic in the thirties)

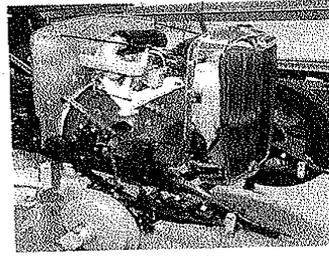
"After all the time we spent building the engines we never had time for painting them!"

5. **H. Stone:** (Racing mechanic in the thirties, but Deputy Foreman, Experimental Department, when I knew him)

"We did not paint engines as a rule, but sometimes the customer might specify a colour, Eddie Hall always had green, and I think Ron Norton had red, but I don't remember blue being used."

6. **J. Butler:** (Paint-shop Foreman) After consulting the paint-shop records:

At Cowley (Edmund Road) Morris built engines were grey, and Wolseley engines were red. After we came to Abingdon, all engines were red until 1936, when the colour was changed to green for the T-series, the 1 112 litre, 2-litre and 2.6. The red used was nominally the same throughout, similar in shade to the MGB engine colour now. The engines came to us painted at the source factory like they do now, but if an individual customer wanted a different



colour, we would mask it up and paint it here, before fitting to the car if possible. There is no standard colour for racing shop engines, which we would not have painted anyway, since we used cellulose for all the production units."

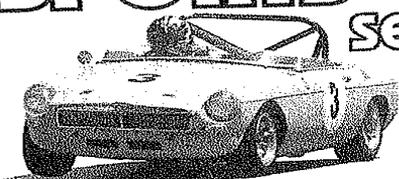
7. **Tom Viner:** (Line Inspector at the time, but Deputy Chief Inspector when I knew him).

"I can only remember the cammy engines being dark red like the MGB now, but ear-

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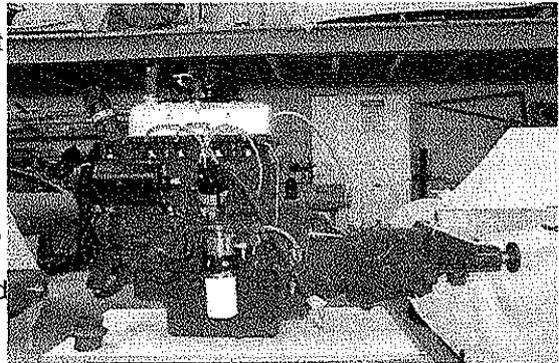
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lier ones, the 14 and 18 hp jobs, were grey, I think, and the Morris engines we fitted just before the war were a sort of lurid green."

Back to the present, and there we have it. MMM engines were painted red, similar in shade to the MGB, a Burgundy colour. I now paint my own with Hammerite Smooth, Burgundy, which is a pretty good approximation to the MGB colour. A customer could specify any other colour, but there was no standard green used until the coming of the SVW cars. There was no standard blue for the racing shop engines, so we were all wrong. What upset me at the time was that when I started to talk about this, all the self-appointed experts said I must be mistaken, so I shut up. After all, a customer could specify what he wanted if he paid for it, so in a sense we were all right!

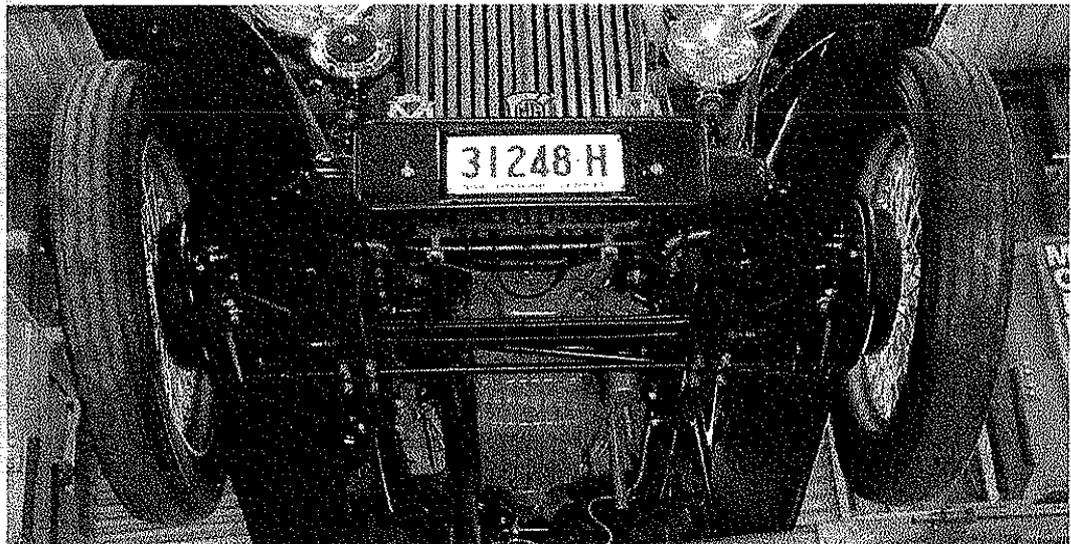
I think the most interesting point is that the racing shop people to a man said that they would not normally have painted the engines, Reg Jackson stating that it would have not been thermally beneficial anyway. He also said that they leaked a lot of oil and didn't need painting!

I have no doubt that if you use this everyone will clamour to say they know for a fact



that their engine was green, blue or sky-blue-pink when they stripped all the paint off, and that must have been the original colour. However, I know for a fact that most engines were rebored before the war, and it is most unlikely that any unit was not repainted. Wolseley painted all their factory reconditioned engines green before the war!

Oh yes, in the same piece of sleuth work, I found that cream was the undercoat used for all chassis parts, which were painted black at the Factory, except for some of the pieces which showed, in which case they were sprayed body colour... but that is a story for another time.



Opposite Lock Dec/Jan 2010-11