

## **History of Victorian Registration**

In Victoria, up until 1910, motor vehicles were not "registered". At this time, the Government determined a need to regulate the use of motor vehicles and on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1910, *The Victorian Motor Car Act 1909* came into force. This required motor vehicles operated on public roads in Victoria to be registered and drivers to be licensed.

Originally there was no requirement to record any vehicle serial numbers (e.g. engine, chassis or body) until the introduction of the "two card scheme" in 1932. This scheme, administered by the Motor Registration Office of the Victoria Police, used two separate cards. The first card (the engine record) recorded the engine number (and changes in engines), horsepower and registration number; while the second card (the owner record) contained the engine number, registration number and owner details. All of the early records dating back to 1910 were transcribed onto new record cards for those vehicles still on the road.

These were times of austerity - the engine record cards were made by cutting owner and driver licence records in half and using the other side! These orange/buff coloured blanks were rubber stamped with "ENGINE No.", "MAKE" and "REG. No." but those details were then usually inserted by hand. The quality of handwriting was satisfactory, although the quality of ink was sometimes marginal as it was probably diluted at times. Today, some 80 years on, these original engine record cards are in remarkably good condition.



From the 1940s there was a succession of purpose-designed cards printed on coloured card stock, ranging from pale yellow, through orange, to pink. During the early 1940s it was common for vehicles to be registered and cancelled after 3 to 6 months, and then re-registered the next year. In the early 1950s it appears that there was a surplus of yellow owner record cards and that these were printed on the blank reverse side to be used as engine record cards. At this time, provision was also made for recording the engine number plus chassis number.

Why did it take so long to record the chassis number? The first motor vehicles usually comprised a chassis, body and engine. In some cases these three parts were from different sources and there was no requirement for any identification numbers to be located in an easily visible or accessible place. With the gradual introduction of mass produced steel bodies and less use of wood framing the

body numbers were generally located somewhere on or near the firewall. So it was often the body number that was recorded rather than the chassis number. Monocoque construction (without a chassis) made identification easier. Generally it is the body number that was used from the 1950s onwards, even though some vehicles might still have had a chassis. The term “Chassis Number” continued until 1984 when the Victorian records were computerised.

### **Donation to the AOMC**

In 1992, the Victorian Government donated all of the engine record cards (but not the owner cards) to the AOMC. This was no small endeavour, as the cards are stored in over 400 filing cabinets and archive boxes.

Since that time, AOMC volunteers have been maintaining the information, as well as making searches for particular vehicles easier by slowly transferring the information into a specially designed database.

In 2006, the AOMC obtained a listing of all vehicles registered in Victoria from about 1910 to 1920. These records contain the registration number, registration date, owner name and owner address for vehicles built from 1900 to 1920. These are known as the AOMC Veteran Records.

The AOMC also has access to similar information for registrations that continue from 1920 up to the 1930s (The External Vintage Records).

This collection of vehicle registration details from 1910 to 1984 is referred to as the AOMC Engine Number Records.

### **Interesting Facts**

The AOMC Engine Number Records provide an interesting insight – not only into our motoring heritage, but Australia’s military, Olympic and manufacturing history. Here are some examples the Engine Number Records have uncovered.

#### The First Holdens

Do you know when the first Holdens were registered on Victorian Roads? You may be surprised to learn the first prototypes were manufactured in the USA by the General Motors Chevrolet Division and initially registered in Australia as Chevrolets. The 12<sup>th</sup> February 1947 was an auspicious day as three demonstration cars with engine numbers 1946/2, 1946/3 and 1946/4 were registered as JP480, JP481 and JP482 respectively with the latter two listed as



coming from NSW. Engine numbers 1946/5 to 1946/9 appear to have been subsequently installed in these first three vehicles and we are left to speculate as to when and why. The vehicle JP481 appears to have had another engine change and been later registered as OX411.

### Olympics – the advent of special plates

Special event registration numbers are generally thought to have started in the late 1970s and, with the advent of personalised and custom plates, they are now a common sight on Victorian roads. But back in the mid-fifties there was one significant world-class event held in Victoria - the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. The Engine Number Records reveal that several Ford Customline Sedans were used as official vehicles. At least two were registered as 'Olympic 110' and 'Olympic 131' in October that year, and then reregistered with standard plates just two months later. Do any of these official Olympic vehicles still exist?



### Unique Vehicle Descriptions

While making searches of the Engine Number Records, some vehicle descriptions are recorded that at first glance appear to be incorrect. For example, the term 'Utility' and 'Tray Truck' appear in the Rolls Royce records. The explanation is simple - the Rolls Royce engine was used in a number of British military vehicles, such as Austin Champs, Ferret Scout cars and Humber trucks.

Similarly, some records relating to local production of the major manufacturers appear strange. For example, the Standard Triumph arm of Australian Motor Industries (operating in South Melbourne) produced a few vehicles which had inconsistent engines and body types. However the giveaway clue with these is the 'X' prefix on the numbers, indicating they were eXperimental prototypes for the Australian market.

Sometimes, during the continuing process of sorting and checking the Engine Number Records, an otherwise different vehicle catches the eye. An example is a Ford Mercury Engine in a Marmon Herrington chassis. Those truck enthusiasts familiar with military vehicles will recognise Marmon Herrington as a manufacturer of 4 wheel drive trucks. A Ford 3 ton truck

chassis was used as the basis of an armoured car developed in South Africa in the early 1940s. This type of vehicle was used by British forces during the North African Campaign of WWII. The example found in the AOMC records was listed as Tray Truck so it would appear to be a (simple) 4WD chassis rather than an armoured car.

Similar uncommon types are found among the International engine records with a range of Military vehicle types e.g. Hospital Van, Kitchen, Troop Carrier, Crane, Radio Van, Pole Borer, Wincher, Pumper etc. The 4WD feature and power take off on some trucks made them very useful for field contractors in post war years under private registration, with Fuel Tanker, Mobile Saw, Machine Repair Van, Wrecker, Travelling Tower and Generator being just some of the types listed on the record cards.

### Finding Your Vehicle

If you are tracing the history of your treasured vehicle to prove it has been registered in Victoria, determining its original registration number, proving its racing career, concours originality of various items such as overdrive etc. or you are just inquisitive and want to settle a bet, then these irreplaceable records may be able to fill the gaps. Note that VicRoads currently



requires evidence of previous registration in Victoria (or elsewhere in Australia) if a vehicle is to be re-registered. Many historic vehicles purchased as restoration projects might not have had any registration details supplied and the AOMC records may provide sufficient evidence to prove previous Victorian registration. The data may also be very useful in family history studies by providing dates and ownership of long gone family vehicles.

Car clubs have also successfully used the records to determine how many vehicles of a certain make and model were assembled in Australia, especially in cases where original factory records no longer exist.

For a fee, the AOMC is able to undertake a search of these records and provide a report summarising some of the key details of a vehicle's registration history in Victoria. Information on what can be provided, and the information required, can be found on the AOMC website, <http://www.aomc.asn.au/eng&regrecords.htm>

To organise a search, contact the AOMC on [secretary@aomc.asn.au](mailto:secretary@aomc.asn.au)