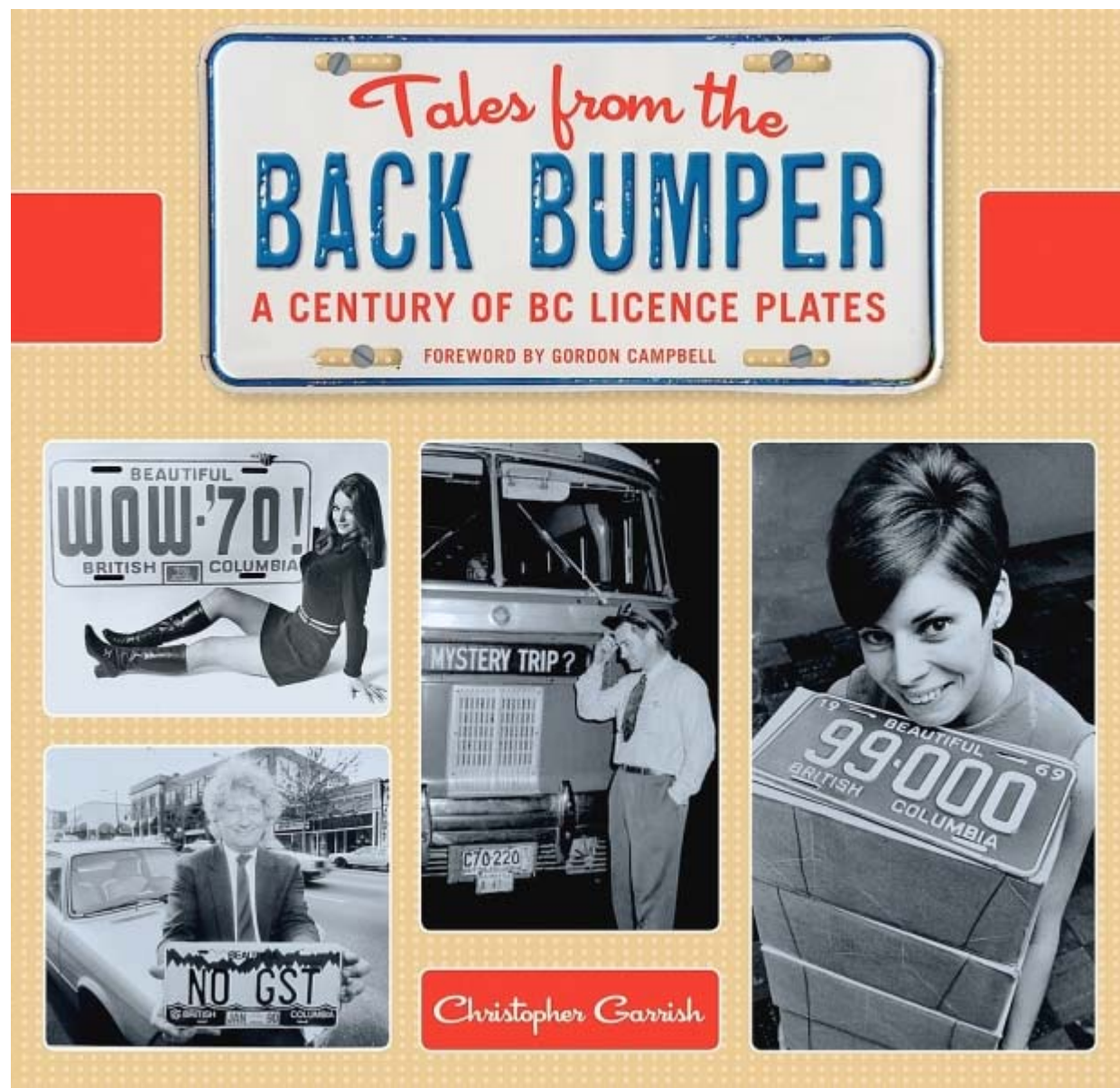


Tales from the Back Bumper a page turner

Compelling account of 100 years of B.C. licence-plate history

BY NIGEL MATTHEWS, THE PROVINCE JUNE 5, 2013

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Tales from the Back Bumper is a compelling and interesting read.

Photograph by: Nigel Matthews

One of the most neglected or seldom thought about parts of a car is its licence plate.

Depending on the term of the licence fee for your vehicle — short term or yearly — attaching your decal and when you check into a hotel or pay for parking via telephone are probably the only times you look or think about your plates.

Christopher Garrish has enjoyed licence-plate history since childhood and has written a book called Tales from the Back Bumper, and appropriately has released it in the centenary year in which the first vehicle licence plates in B.C. were issued by the provincial government.

The book is full of interesting stories and facts, and with a retail price of \$19.95, makes a wonderful gift for any vehicle enthusiast.

Early B.C. plates (1913 -1915) were manufactured by McCleary, a company that made household appliances. Consequently, the steel plates were enamelled, and so were heavy and chipped very easily during shipping and when being fitted to vehicles.

Painted steel plates were introduced in 1915 and changed colour every year up until 1963 when the colour was standardized to the current blue and white. Apparently, these two colours were picked by Minister Earl Westwood because they were the colours of a B.C. Toll Authority, B.C. Ferries. The following year, 1964, is when 'Beautiful British Columbia' appeared on our plates.

Some of us associate the manufacturing of licence plates with prisoners serving their time, and indeed that was the case in the province from 1930 until the late '70s at Oakalla Prison in Burnaby.

I arrived in B.C. in 1975 and recall my first set of plates were raised blue letters and numbers on a white background. Five years later the colours were reversed when we all had to get new plates.

In 1938, doctors were issued with special plates but soon asked for the idea to be dropped after a number were held up for the drugs that they might have been carrying in their medical bags.

I don't want to give away all of the incredible research that has gone into this fascinating book, so I suggest you buy a copy. I couldn't put it down until I finished it from cover to cover.

It is available from heritagehouse.ca. The ISBN number is 9781927 527030.

Nigel Matthews is the Director of sales and marketing for Hagerty Canada – Hagerty is the world's leading specialist provider of collector car and boat insurance. Contact him at nmatthews@hagerty.com or visit hagerty.ca

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