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A View from the Road A Look at Disney Souvenir License Plates

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One form of Disneyana collectible that has become increasingly popular in recent years is souvenir license plates. They are relatively inexpensive, numerous in their variety and fun to search for, as well as being colorful reminders of favorite vacations and Disney events.

My involvement in collecting Disney license plates began in the 1980's. While many of the plates in my collection were purchased

firsthand at Disneyland, Walt Disney World and Disneyland Paris, I have relied on friends and Disneyana shows to keep me current.

Although Disneyland in California is credited with having the earliest known souvenir license plates (a series of small bicycle-size plates in the early 1960's), these are extremely rare and very difficult to find today. In fact, I don't even have an example I can show you. Additionally, Walt Disney World has produced plastic license plates in conjunction with their annual Walt Disney World Golf Classic golf tournaments, but for this article I will limit my presentation to those license plates of the 'standard' 6" x 12" stamped-metal variety. I would like to apologize for the 'glare' you may notice on some of the illustrations. This is

caused by the protective shrink wrap packaging on the license plates. I have chosen to leave the shrink wrap in place so the original price stickers on the back would not be lost.



The first known Disney license plate of this type was for the pre-opening of Walt Disney World in 1971.

Quite plain and ordinary looking, it's green with cream colored lettering. Sold at the WDW Preview Center, it was only

available in limited quantities prior to opening day, October 1. Recently, in honor of WDW's birthday, this pre-opening license plate was recreated by Company D, the WDW Cast Members store, in dark blue and white.

During the United States Bicentennial of 1976, The Walt Disney Company commemorated our country's 200th anniversary with a yearlong event known as

America on Parade. Both Disneyland and Walt Disney World celebrated with parades and a myriad of themed *America on Parade* collectible merchandise (so much so that there are individuals that collect only this subcategory of Disneyana). From the multitude of AOP merchandise came the first souvenir license plate sold within a Disney park - *America on Parade*. This plate was not park-specific, being sold on both coasts.

WDW then took the lead and began to intermittently produce license plates with various generic WDW-themes until the celebration of its 15th birthday in 1986. Disneyland didn't have a new license plate after AOP until its 30th



birthday in 1985. Following these anniversaries, both coasts began creating more frequent license plates.

After 1985, Disneyland issued dated plates each year until 1990, when a special 35th birthday license plate was available. 1991 was the last of the dated Disneyland license plates. Since then, a generic *Disneyland*, *The Original* and several special event plates have at various times been available (I think Disneyland really missed a golden opportunity when they didn't

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put out license plates for either the farewell season of *The Electric Light Parade* or its replacement - *Light Magic*).

WDW, on the other hand, began issuing license plates for Epcot, Pleasure Island, Typhoon Lagoon and, in 1989, the Disney/MGM Studios, as well as for special anniversary events. With all the license plates for the theme parks, water parks and resort hotels, it wouldn't be until 1997 that the very first license plate for the 'Magic Kingdom' would be issued.



1992 saw the opening of EuroDisneyland near Paris, France. Ironically, the only EuroDisney license plate created that first year was a pre-opening version available only in the U.S. It wouldn't be until



1993 that license plate production from France really took off. Not only were generic *EuroDisney* license plate issued, but, for the first time at a Disney park, 'attraction' themed license plates were available. After the park and resort complex were renamed *Disneyland Paris*, license plates for the resort hotels were added to the mix.

Knowing a good thing when they saw it, WDW began expanding their license plate line, too, by including Blizzard Beach, River Country and their many resort hotels. And figuring if one plate for each resort was good, than two plates would be better. Several WDW resorts now have both a lettered license plate, as well as a more whimsical 'Mickey & the

Gang' styled version. My own rationale for two different plates is so the average non-Disnoid adult resort visitor who might be inclined to place a license plate on the front of their car could use the lettered version and not fear being ridiculed by the folks back home for having a 'kiddie' license plate.



From modest beginnings, there have now been more than 75 license plates created for WDW, over 20 for Disneyland Paris and a dozen for Disneyland, as well as another half dozen or so with miscellaneous non-park Disney-themes, with more to come (I hope). Most were, or are presently, available to the general public, but quite a few have been created as Cast Member exclusives. These are a quite a bit harder to find unless you know a Cast Member or can find them at a collectibles show. As far as I know, there haven't been any license plates available to the public from Tokyo Disneyland. Tom Tumbush appeared to show one in a short article on Disney license plates in issue #15 of *Tomart's Disneyana Update*, but it's not a license plate - it's a metal tray. *Sorry, Tom.*

The earliest license plates originally sold for around \$2. Up until five years ago, \$3 was the standard price. They are priced at \$6, \$7 and even \$8 in the Parks and Resorts today. You can find many of these plates, even some of the early ones, at *Disneyana* shows for between \$10 and \$15, with Cast Member exclusives and Disneyland Paris plates demanding as much as \$20, \$25 for the rarest.

Now the big question, 'What do you do with them?'. Thankfully, my wife and I share a love of all 'things Disney', so displaying them is not a problem, but they don't exactly lend themselves to living room decor. There are, however, alternative locations. A friend in Florida uses them to decorate an otherwise drab garage, while another friend in California has done as I did and decorated the laundry room from floor to ceiling. Now that the laundry room is full, I've started hanging them in the spare bedroom I use as a computer room, placing bands of license plates around the upper perimeter of the room. Next, I'll start down the walls. When the walls are full, we'll probably have to move! What you do with them is entirely up to you. You could even put one on your car! Keep in mind, however, that while some states, such as Florida, require only one license plate on the rear of the vehicle, other states, like California, require plates front and rear. Using one of these beauties in a two-plate state as a front replacement would be quite illegal.

Rather than giving you just a small sampling of the Disney license plates created over the years, I decided to show you everything I have in my collection. I don't profess that this is all there are. There are probably others I haven't discovered yet, and new ones coming out all the time. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

So, if your looking for something different under the Disney sun, why not give Disney souvenir license plates a try. ☼

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The NFFC even got into the act by creating a license plate for their 10th anniversary in 1994.



When did Brer Bear become one of the 'Fab Five'?



My very first plate (October 1981).



WALT DISNEY World.



All Images © Disney



WALT DISNEY World.



Will it ever open?



All Images © Disney

WALT DISNEY World.



'Beach Resort'



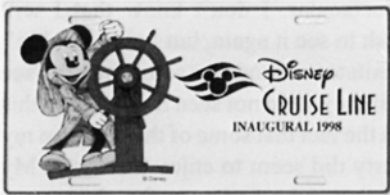
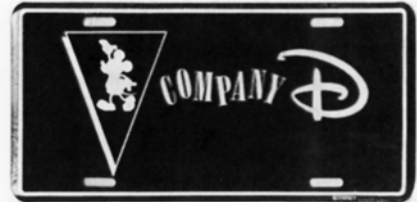
'Resort and Spa'



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Walt Disney World.
CAST MEMBER EXCLUSIVE



All Images © Disney

THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS

These were all purchased at the Disney/MGM Studios in Florida, but they may have also been available at the Burbank Studios in California.





Disneyland.



Disneyland stuttered.

All Images © Disney

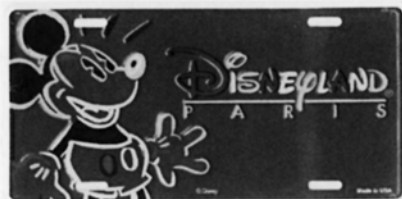
MOUSELLANEOUS



America On Parade and Disney Villains are two plates that are not park-specific, having been sold at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World.



Disneyland
PARIS



A great hotel. Stayed there twice!



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