

PORTUGAL : PREFIX CODES SINCE 1936

Article written by [Thierry Baudin](#). See spreadsheet below

1. Decided by a statutory order on December 1936, 26th, the prefix series have been issued from January 1937, 1st. Only very few information about them is known for the period 1937-1956, and no reliable data can be drawn about the way the allocations were made during that first period.

Fernando Lima reports that in 1951, registrations were issued in XX-18-xx, as well as blocks allocated in 1952 were in the pattern XX-19-xx, with modifications only related to letters and to the second pair of numbers.

2. The Portuguese Road Act, approved in 1955, could have brought some rationality about the allocation, but as the then current series structure was kept, no major improvement can be felt. Especially, the impression of oddness that can be thought about the 1956-1972 allocations can be explained by the fact that the vehicles registered during the 1937-1955 period kept their registrations. Therefore, the newly registered vehicles had to find their place in the gaps left by the period 1937-1955...

The only reliable information concerns the AA-AD, MM-MN, UU blocks, which had been reserved in 1955 for the re-registration of vehicles registered before 1937, respectively for the areas of Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra and so noted Lx, Px and Cx. They were allocated to the old vehicles still in circulation in 1962, at the time when the very first registrations (1911-1936) were canceled. Then, one can wonder why officials in charge of registration have waited from 1962 to 1975 to re-register old vehicles. Perhaps they had waited that the remaining (and decreasing) part of them could have been completely proceeded with these pre-allocated blocks, because if Fernando Lima reports in EU. 66 AA-03-06 as having been reached in 1979, Jonathan Del Mar also reports AC-24-38 in EU. 82 as having been seen at spring 1992.

On the mainland, only these three offices seem to have been in operation at this time for the registration of cars and motorcycles. The allocation of letters A to L, for Lisbon, M to T, to Porto, U to Z to Coimbra seems to have been established from the beginning, as it was confirmed in 1972 by a ministerial instruction dated October, 30th.

3. The situation is slightly different for the islands (Madeira and the Azores) in that prefix series have firstly been issued in 1962, and that it seems that old vehicles have been directly re-registered, not in special series but in the normally allocated series, like AR for the Azores.

4. The above mentioned instruction of 1972 is very important insofar as:

- - it confirms the existence, at this time, of offices and sub-offices ;
- - it confirms the contents of the original or first allocations (see below), office by office, for cars, motorcycles and temporaries ;
- - it restricts the then allocations for official series to : - AM (Air Force) ; AP, MG (*Marinha de Guerra* : Navy) ; EP (Public services) ; ME, MX (Army).
- - it restricts the then allocations for diplomatic series to CD and FM (the latter meaning "diplomats in mission", which could be understood as "International Organization" and not as "non diplomatic staff"). Therefore, CC and PR appear at this time to have been normally allocated to Lisbon and Porto, respectively. Do they have been really issued, partly, for normal series ? But one can notice that, even if registrations had been proceeded concurrently, no confusion between the series could have occurred, as the special pattern xxx-CC-xxx (as well as xxx-CD-xxx or xxx-FM-xxx has always been reported in diplomatic observations. In any case, Les Newall states in EU. 65 that it is very unlikely that the CC series have been issued apart from diplomatic series.

5. First allocations (Lisbon : La, Lma ; Porto : Pa, Pma ; Coimbra : Ca, Cma)

Only few remarks can be done about the first allocation charts figuring in the instruction dated October 1972, 30th. For Lisbon, the 97 marks allocated to cars corresponded to a 10 x 10 matrix, minus CD, LL and LI (the latter ones allocated to motorcycles) as well as for Porto, the 46 marks allocated to cars corresponded to a 7 x 7 matrix minus MT (it seems that this very old mark, very rarely reported, had already been exhausted at this time), TP (allocated to the territory of Timor), and TT (motorcycles). For Coimbra there is no gap in the 3 x 3 matrix insofar as 8 marks had been allocated to cars, and the remaining one (ZZ), reserved for motorcycles.

In fact, after the "incorporation" of (East) Timor into Indonesia in 1975-76, the TP series have been reallocated to Porto, as an extension to first allocation and issued in 1986 with RP and SP.

6. Second allocations (Lisbon : Lb, Lmb ; Porto : Pb, Pmb ; Coimbra)

The same 1972 instruction equally mentioned the blocks reserved for Lisbon second allocation, about which only few comments have to be made : the allocation had taken the A to L letters already allocated to Lisbon, and the matrix had been completed by the use of M to Z letters. The non used marks corresponded to special series (AN, AR, AS, HO for islands, AM, AP, EP for military and government

organizations, EM, EV for Evora office, FM for diplomats, LM, LO, LP, LU, LV, LZ for motorcycles in second allocation and LN, LR, LS, LT already reserved for motorcycles in first allocation). Effectively, in the middle of 1973, the first allocation was abandoned (even if all gaps had not been filled) and the target of the 1972 instruction, i.e. the setting in operation of a second allocation was properly reached.

A subsequent instruction, the date of issue of which is not known, specified the second allocation for Porto and Coimbra.

The principle of allocating M to T marks to Porto and U to Z to Coimbra had been followed still. Nevertheless, as these two offices were very far to have been exhausting their first allocation, their second allocation blocks were, by and large, officially reallocated in September 1982 to Lisbon as third series, with issuing from the end of 1982, after the exhaustion of the second allocation and then the completion of the first allocation. These series are noted *Pc* (in italics) in the global allocation table.

In fact, Coimbra office did not use at all its second allocation and it seems that Porto office has really used very few of its : SA and SE (figured as gaps in the chart reallocating Porto marks to Lisbon, and seen in Porto by Jonathan Del Mar at Spring 1992, as reported in EU. 82) and MB, MC (no Mx mark is mentioned in the Porto reallocation table, and these marks have been seen very rarely by members : MC seen in November 1984 by Les Newall, as reported in EU. 52, on a brand new vehicle and MB seen in November 1987, as reported by Les Newall in EU. 65).

Apart from MB and MC, the other Mx marks reserved for Porto (MF, MH to ML, and latter, MJ) were not issued, either for Porto, or for Lisbon, of course as reallocation for the latter area.

At the other side of the chart, MU, MV, MZ, N., O., P., Q., R., S. which had also been reserved for Porto, have not been issued either for Porto (excepted perhaps for NU, in 1983), or for Lisbon, of course as a reallocation for the latter area.

Under the same focus, but for motorcycles, it is not sure at all that TL, and latter, TJ, which had been reserved for Porto, have been really used. The other marks (TI, TU, TV) are reported as having been issued.

For an unexplained reason, a rather large block firstly allocated to Coimbra (UM to UT, VM to VT) was not reallocated to Lisbon.

7. Third allocations (Lisbon : Lc, Lmc ; Porto : Pc, Pmc)

The reallocation of Porto and Coimbra second allocations to Lisbon, as third allocation, has been dealt with above. Subsequently, new marks coming from the use of J (authorized on June 1983, 28th; issued from), then Q (probably authorized in 1986), then X (probably authorized in 1990), provided Lisbon office with (additional) third allocation as well as Porto. Lisbon and Porto offices have issued and exhausted in parallel their marks, before to start suffix series.

One more time, the principle of allocating A to L marks to Lisbon, and M to T marks to Porto had been followed.

So, as reported by Fernando Lima in EU. 72, 77 and 81, the final sequence of Lisbon series from October 1982 is built up with, NA to NL, AJ to LJ, JA to JZ (JQ and JX excepted), AQ to JQ, OA to OL, PA to PL, QA to QL, LQ, RA to RL, SB to SD, SF to SL, UA to UL, VA to VL, AX to JX, NX to XX, XA to XV, XZ. From October 1987, the corresponding one for Porto, is built up with QM to QP, QR to QT, MQ to SQ.

The gap of DJ and the mention of OO (instead of OJ) in Fernando Lima's report in EU. 72, as well as RS (instead of RQ) in Jonathan Del Mar's one in EU. 82, seem to be misprints.

It seems that Porto office stopped immediately to issue registrations in prefix series when Lisbon office exhausted its allocation, at the end of XZ. The TQ series, very logically allocated to Porto, were not issued and in June 1992, Jonathan Del Mar spotted in Porto SQ-87-92 as a highest, when suffix series had already reached AP.

It seems also that, from this date (March 1992, 4th) the suffix registration covers indifferently all offices, as the progression in sequence is very stable and shows no distortion.

8. Sub-offices

The document dated October 1972, 30th confirmed the list of the older offices, with the blocks originally allocated to each of them. It is also interesting in that it explicitly mentioned the newer offices (or newly authorized to issue car and motorcycle registrations) of Evora, Angra do Heroismo, Ponta Delgada as well as it dealt with the 7 sub-offices in the mainland. The survey of years of issuing shows that they have generally started the registrations in 1974, not before.

If there is no doubt about Evora and the new offices in the Azores, and if the existence of ZE, ZF, Z0 marks in often reported in members' contributions, no formal observation seems to have been done about the other sub-offices.

On the other hand, due to the high number of ZF and ZZ (at a slightly lower level for the latter) observed in Madeira (Les Newall in Nov. 1987, reported in EU. 65), it is possible that these marks have been also allocated to the motorcycles in the island, to slow down the exhaustion of the MA and MD marks, affected to cars and motorcycles both.

9. Islands

It seems that the registrations for MA and MD have been issued in parallel, at least for the end of the series, as several observations (for instance from Les Newall in EU. 65, MA-MD-54-05 in Nov. 1987) report "twin" vehicles, bearing the same serial number, one with the prefix MA, the other one with MD.

Les Newall in EU. 65 reports that, as MA and MD marks are issued for cars and motorcycles both, blocks are reserved for the registration of motorcycles.

10. Military and Government

It has been mentioned above that AM, AP, MG, EP, ME, MX had been allocated to these special series. The concerned vehicles are still registered in prefix series, because, as Portugal issues suffix series rather quickly (MG having been reached in November 1998), AM, AP, EP, ME, MG have been already allocated to normal series, and not reserved in anticipation for the official series.

There is no information about the way marks have been issued when they are in pair (AP with MG, ME with MX). AP is likely to be more recent than MG, and MX, more recent than ME, but there is no absolute certitude. For instance, Les Newall in EU. 65 mentioned that ME vehicles were older than those bearing MX marks, and MX is generally more seen than ME.

Line= First letter, Column = Second letter

	-A	-B	-C	-D	-E	-F	-G	-H	-I	-J	-L	-M	-N	-O	-P	-Q	-R	-S	-T	-U	-V	-X	-Z
A-	Lx	Lx	Lx	Lx	69/70/82 La	73/82 La	71/82 La	68-9/82 La	63/82 La	83-12/84 Lc	68-9/82 La	(74) Air Force	74 Angra do Her.	73/81 Lb	Navy	86-11 Lc	(74) Ponta	80 Ponta	75-6/81 Lb	80-1 Lb	74/81 Lb	90 Lc	77/80-1 Lb
B-	61-2/82 La	71-2/82 La	70-1/82 La	56-8/71-2/82 La	73/82 La	69/73/80/82/87 La	67-8/82 La	70-2/82 La	70-1/82 La	84 Lc	61-2/82 La	73/81 Lb	74-5/81 Lb	75/81 Lb	75-6/81 Lb	86 Lc	74/81 Lb	80-2 Lb	75/80-1 Lb	74-5/80 Lb	80-1 Lb	90 Lc	76/78-9/81 Lb
C-	73-4/82 La	64-5/82 La	Con sul.	Diplomatics	61-2/82 La	72-3/82 La	72/81-2 La	69-71/82 La	58-9/82 La	84 Lc	63-4/82 La	78/81 Lb	77/81 Lb	74/81 Lb	75/81 Lb	86 Lc	74/81 Lb	73-4/81 Lb	75-6/80-1Lb	82 Lb	79/81 Lb	90 Lc	80-1 Lb
D-	66-8/82 La	66-7/82 La	65-6/82 La	57-8/82 La	66/72/82 La	67-9/82 La	71/82 La	69/70/82 La	56/70/82 La	84 Lc	72-3/82-3 La	78/81 Lb	73/75/81 Lb	74/75/81 Lb	74/75/81 Lb	86/7 Lc	73/5/8/9/81 Lb	73/5/6/81 Lb	76-7/81Lb	81 Lb	77-8/81 Lb	90 Lc	78-81 Lb
E-	60-2/71 La	68/71/82 La	67-8/82 La	68-9/82 La	72/82 La	68/82 La	71-2/82 La	72-3/81-2 La	62-3/68/73/82 La	84 Lc	66/72-3/82 La	Em	75-6/81-2 Lb	79/81 Lb	Public Services	87 Lc	74/81 Lb	79-81 Lb	77-8/81Lb	80-1 Lb	(74) Ea	90 Lc	76/81 Lb
F-	71-2 La	70-1/3 La	66-7/82 La	83 La	64-5/82 La	72/82 La	66/71/82 La	72/82 La	71/82 La	84 Lc	69/70/82 La	(74) Inter. Org.	75/7-8/81 Lb	75/81 Lb	73/81 Lb	87 Lc	78/81 Lb	77/81 Lb	80/82 Lb	80-1 Lb	76/81 Lb	80 ?/90 Lc	78/81 Lb
G-	71-2/82 La	66/82 La	72-3/82 La	57-8/82 La	64-6/73/82 La	60-1/82 La	72-3/81 La	69/70/82 La	66/82 La	84 Lc	66-7/82 La	75/81/87 Lb	74/81/87 Lb	57/75-6/81 Lb	77/81 Lb	87 Lc	79-81 /89 Lb	76/81 Lb	79/81 /89 Lb	77/81 Lb	81 Lb	90 Lc	76-7/81 Lb
H-	72-3/81-2 La	65-6/82 La	66-7/82 La	63-4/82 La	59/60/82 La	65-6/82 La	72/82 La	60-1/82 La	59-60/82 La	84 Lc	67-8/82 La	64/74-5/81 Lb	73-4/81 Lb	Horta Ha	79-81 Lb	87 Lc	78/81 Lb	80-1 Lb	76/81-2 Lb	77/81 Lb	76-7/81 Lb	90 Lc	77/81 Lb
I-	62/82 La	64/9/82 La	70/82 La	67-8/82 La	71/82 La	58-9/82 La	62-3/82 La	71-2/82 La	63-4/82 La	84 /88? Lc	62/69/82 La	73-4/76/81Lb	78/82 Lb	78/81 Lb	76-7/81 Lb	87 Lc	80-1 Lb	79/81 Lb	76/81 Lb	76/81 Lb	81 Lb	90 Lc	77/81 Lb

J-	85-02 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	85 Lc	84 /88? Lc	85-12 Lc	85/6-01 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	87-05 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	86 Lc	90/91 Lc	86-10 Lc
L-	69/82 La	67-8/ 82 La	58/82 La	69/82 La	65-6/82 La	70-1/82 La	66- 7/82 La	70/82/ 85 La	? s.92 Lma	85- 01 Lc	? Lma	89-90 Lmb	59-60 Lma	91 Lmb	91 ? not s. Lmb	88-11- 89-01 Lc	67/81 Lma	93 Lma	67 Lma	76 Lmb	86 Lmb	91-2 Lmc	88-9 Lmb	
M-	Funch Ma	s. 87 Pb	s. 84 Pb	Funchal Ma	Army		Navy					Px	73 or 75 Px	65-67 Pa	56/86 Pa	90 Pc	63-6 Pa	71-3 Pa	57-9 Pa			Army		
N-	82-10/ 83 Lc	82/3 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 Lc	83 /88? Lc	83-10 Lc	73-4/76 Pa	73-5 Pa	75 or 81 Pa	78-9 Pa	90/91 Pc	72-3 Pa	57or 67/85 Pa	83 Pa	83 Pb		91-01 Lc		
O-	87-05 Lc	87 Lc	87 Lc	87 Lc	77? /87 /8 Lc	87 Lc	87 Lc	87/8 Lc	87/8 Lc	87/8 Lc	88-01 Lc	83 Pa	71/73-4 Pa	66-7/78- 9/82 Pa	59- 61/65- 6/73/82 Pa	91-01 Pc	57-8/76- 7/82 Pa	71-73 /82 Pa	82 Pa			91-01 Lc		
P-	88-01 Lc	88/9 Lc	88 Lc	88 Lc	88 Lc	88 Lc	Lc	88 Lc	Lc	88/9 Lc	88-05 Lc	73-5 Pa	68-70 Pa	75-8 Pa	69-72 Pa	91 Pc	President	77-9 Pa	84 Pa			91 Lc		
Q-	88-06 Lc	88 Lc	88/9 Lc	88/9 Lc	88 Lc	88 /90? Lc	88/9 Lc	88/9 Lc	88/9 Lc	88/9 /92? Lc	88-11/89 Lc	87-10 Pc	87 Pc	88 Pc	89 Pc	88? / 91 Pc	89 Pc	89-12 Pc				90- 01- 04 Pc	91 Lc	
R-	88-12 /9 Lc	88/9 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	79? /89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89-04 Lc	87 Pa	84/5 Pa	85 Pa	86 Pc	91 Pc	68-9 Pa	84 Pa	69-71 Pa			91 Lc		
S-	89 Pb	89-04 Lc78?	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Pb	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89-10 Lc	75-6 Pa	67-9 Pa	70-1/ 73 Pa	86 Pa	70- 2/91/2 Pc	76-9 Pa	80 Pa	75 Pa			91 Lc		
T-	Lt	Pt	Ct	Ponta D. Dt	Et	Funchal Mt	Angra At	Horta Ht	s. 84 Pmb	? Pmb	? Pmb	79/83 Pa	83 Pa	61-3 Pa	86 Pa		s. 92 Pa	83 Pa	80 Pma	74 Pmb	s. 84 Pmb	83? / 91 Lc	? Pma	
U-	89-10 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89 Lc	89/90- 01 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90-03 Lc									Cx	Ca	91-04 Lc	79 Ca	
V-	90-04 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90 Lc	90-08 Lc									Ca	Ca	91 Lc	73 Ca	
X-	91-05 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91-10 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91 Lc	91/2 Lc	92 Lc	92 Lc	92- 01 Lc	92 Lc	91 Lc	92-03 Lc	
Z-	Braga Xa	92 Xm	Vila Xa	Real Xm	Aveiro Xa 75	75-6 Xm	Guarda Xa	Xm	Santarém Xa		Xm	Setúbal Xa	Xm	Faro 77 Xaou92	Xm	92 ?				77 Ca	Ca	86/88? Lmc	74 Cm	