

platelet A TYPEFACE DESIGNED BY CONOR MANGAT



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MAIN TEXT by Zuzana Licko, from (sidebar to) 'Space Probe: investigations into monospace' in *Emigre* 43 (Summer 1997). notes by Conor Mangat.

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(A....) monospaced design in the emigre fonts library is **platelet**, designed by conor mangat in

> 1993.



Platelet was released in July 1994, having grown out of a four-day student workshop held at CalArts in October 1992.

The project brief asked for an original alphabet to be designed for a specific outdoor purpose, taking into consideration the context for usage, appropriateness and meaning, and traditional notions of good typography.

with a relatively narrow character width of

J
π
462,
 ç
≠

$\frac{30}{34}$

platelet sets just slightly narrower than base monospace narrow (at approximately 92 percent).

Q
t
ÿ
4
6
2
B
;
N
+
à
f



Setting significantly narrower than its fixed-pitch contemporaries (Courier, Letter Gothic, and OCR-B, top to bottom) Platelet's narrow-gauge efficiency has probably now been bettered: almost every major new type family seems to include a monospaced variant.

Platelet is based directly on characters and figures found on Californian automobile license plates.

Its original character set comprised only a single lowercase alphabet and non-lining figures, ostensibly to complement the existing all-caps characters on the plates.

For its commercial release, however, the set was extended to include alternate small capitals and other commonly used text characters – somewhat

ironic considering that the original brief had principally been to create specific display faces that were not just scaled text typefaces.

e g



similar to the composing restrictions of the typewriter, the manufacturing of license plates also requires the use of monospaced type; not only for mechanical requirements, but also to fulfill the need of fitting a fixed number of characters onto each plate while maximizing their legibility at a distance.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

“ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 ” ‘ . ’

[\$ ç £ ¥] \ { ? ! ; | } | (& @ % & # * ^)

thin | regular | heavy

Å À Â Á Ä Å Æ Ç È É Ê Ë Ì Í Î Ï Ñ Ò Ó Ô Õ Ö Ø Ù Ú Û Ü Ý Þ

Ñ Ñ Ò Ó Ô Õ Ö Ø Ù Ú Û Ü Ý Þ

Œ † ‡ € œ ø • ® © ™ π ð μ

° < ≤ + - ÷ = ≠ ≈ ± ≥ > b f l f l β ~ - - - /

7 f ≥ æ ø 1

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The primary purpose of a license plate, of course, is to identify a vehicle, and the California Department of Motor Vehicles has had various numbering sequences since its inception. For example, when an earlier series of license plates carrying six digits was quickly exhausted by the fast growing usage of automobiles, the current seven digit model was adopted, which has undergone several schemes of number and letter arrangements.

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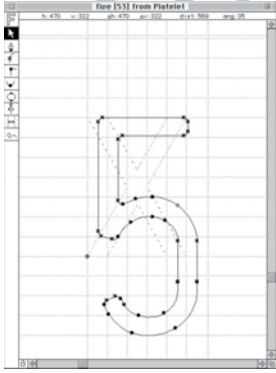
when the DMV runs out of serial numbers next time, it will be a difficult decision to increase the number of digits to eight, since seven is the maximum number of digits that humans can reliably remember; hence the seven digit phone number. Perhaps future license plate serialization schemes will be increased by adding characters such as

£ f 9 i \$ % & * # @ ! ? , b § å

or even symbols and pictures.



So much of our everyday communication is by symbol, icon, or picture – so why not on licence plates too?



Platelet's letterforms originally matched the character widths, stroke widths, and spacing of the existing California license plate characters. Within the short timeframe of the original project, research was limited to quite literally taking wax crayon rubbings from license plates around the parking lot and measuring them by hand. Forms were interpretations of what a lowercase for the license plate might be, based mostly on the existing numerals.

2 x h d / 3 3 a g k
 r o i

8
 11

Platelet also contains some unexpected solutions to the various problems facing monospaced designs; as well as solutions addressing the reduced legibility of geometric designs which have a tendency to render many characters indistinguishable, reducing their function for text applications. The "l" and "L" fill their width not with the standard extended serifs, but with a large curved lead-out stroke. My personal favorite is the lowercase "b" which incorporates the upper case form within the lower case character. This increases the recognition factor of the "b", which would otherwise be very similar to other characters, such as the "d", due to the geometric rigidity of Platelet's letterform construction.

æðìħçłŕñš/[-DÅ°jмíŵG•yēúMōLp@csmpèñÿöe\æðìħçłŕñĤkōzTxûä^œe÷]/[-DÅ°jмíŵG•yēúMōLp@csmpèñÿöe\æðìħçłŕñĤkōzTxûä^œe÷]/[-DÅ°jмíŵG•yēúMōLp@csmpèñÿöe\æðìħçłŕñĤkōzTxûä^œe÷]

12
 15

while Platelet is perhaps too fanciful for application on standard license plates, its usage might be suitable for the vanity plates, which the DMV offers at a premium, to further differentiate them from standard plates. The vanity plate owner is allowed to choose a customized arrangement of characters which usually spells a name, word, visual pun, palindrome etc. since the characters on vanity plates usually have a meaningful arrangement, they are immediately more memorable than a string of random characters, and therefore the design of the letterforms could afford a lesser degree of legibility.

came(r)o

abdegjkqx
 abdegjkqx
 abđεgĵkq̄x

As Platelet developed, it became necessary to bolden the strokes and stray from the all-lowercase model that had been the conceptual framework to start with; some characters just looked forced. A slightly more affected 'unicase' version subsequently developed, dubbed Vanity Platelet.

With a rather awkward marriage of typography and American muscle cars (above) ending nastily, it was clear that all these ideas would be far more successful in a single font. The final family therefore comprised three weights of a single design variant, each with 236 character outlines and four sizes of edited screen fonts.

Honoured by London's Conran Foundation Collection in 1996, adulterated by FUSE in 1997, and moulded into the soles of Camper shoes some time later, Platelet has found commercial success in places as diverse as *The New York Times*, *Bike*, *Wired*, *ID Magazine*, MTV, and PBS.

Platelet's critical appraisals, meanwhile, range from 'tough and uncompromising' to 'perfectly postmodern', 'sparingly conceived' and 'studiously pedantic'.

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Conor Mangat is a typographic designer, born in London in 1968. Educated at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication in London, CalArts in suburban Los Angeles, and The University of Reading, just outside London, his exploits to date include spells in branding and new media at MetaDesign in San Francisco, editorial design for Metro Newspapers in Silicon Valley, and information design with Boag Associates in London.



* 5 x ã π d