

November, 2007, no one even knew how many motor vehicles Americans and Canadians had vanitized.

The *American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators-LCNS2ROM Vanity License Plates Survey* revealed that Americans have vanitized 9.3 million motor vehicles, and Canadians have vanitized 440,000 vehicles; AAMVA represents the American and Canadian departments of motor vehicles. The *Survey* results are listed on page 16. In the U.S., Virginia ranks first, followed by New Hampshire, Illinois, Nevada and Montana; in Canada, Ontario is in first place, followed by Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Pennsylvania issued the first vanity plates in 1931, but limited their messages to the vehicle owners' initials. Connecticut issued the first true vanity plates in 1937, allowing motorists to create messages of up to four characters; soon the Nutmeg State's roads were replete with such vanity plates as **MAMA, PAPA, STOP, and HELP**. Today, every American state, and the District of Columbia, and every Canadian province, except Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador, issues vanity plates.



It is uncertain who coined the term "vanity plate," but it originated in the United States in the mid-1960s. The *Britannica Book of the Year 1967* included "vanity plate" in its "new words and meanings" entries. On September 17, 1967, the *Los Angeles Times* published a story about a Californian who had a Massachusetts "vanity plate," without defining the term, suggesting that it was commonly understood, even though California didn't issue vanity plates until 1970. Today, many dictionaries define "vanity plate," but most North American DMVs call them "personalized plates," as do British, Australian and New Zealand DMVs.

"Vanity plate" is an appropriate moniker, however. License plates are the most public form of identification. Motorists with personalized plates