The world’s most expensive number plates

There used to be a time when a private plate really meant you were doing ok for yourself. Now, though, they’re so cheap that they’re rarely a status symbol. Apart from these beauties that is. We’ll start with the UK’s five top plates, then move onto the world’s list - all of which dwarf our humble registration record breakers, and, interestingly, were all bought in the same country: Abu Dhabi.

In the UK

5 Plate: VIP 1
Price: £285,000
Buyer: Roman Abramovich
When: 2006
The UK’s most famous Russian oil oligarch, whose net worth is an estimated £8.4bn, bought VIP 1 as a nice little boost to his self-esteem. Abramovich was planning on putting the plate on his prized pre-facelift second generation green Fiat Punto, but he decided on his Rolls-Royce Corniche IV instead.

4 Plate: M1
Price: £331,500
Buyer: Mike McCoomb
When: 2006
After Mike McCoomb sold his mobile phone company to BT for around £40m, a number plate seemed a nice way to parade his new wealth. We're not sure what plate he bought for himself though, because this one was for his ten-year-old son. Apparently the boy was furious - he’d specifically asked for a Play-Doh Barber Shop.

3 Plate: 1D
Price: £352,411
Buyer: Nabil Bishara
When: 2009
Lebanese property developer Nabil Bishara paid this staggering price at an auction in Warwickshire, in March 2009. He bought it for his wife's Bentley as a surprise present.

2 Plate: S1
Price: £404,063
Buyer: Anonymous
When: 2008
September 2008 saw the purchase of Edinburgh's first registered number plate, at a Bonhams auction in Chichester. The bidder said, perhaps sarcastically, that the plate would be registered to “an old red Skoda.”

1 Plate: F1
Price: £440,625
Buyer: Afzal Khan
When: 2008
Afzal Khan, owner of car styling company Project Kahn, is officially the owner of the UK’s most expensive plate. He first put it on his Mercedes-McLaren SLR, though we recently saw it on Mr Khan’s white Bugatti Veyron parked in his Bradford showroom.

In the UAE

5 Plate: 7
Price: £1.58m
The world records are all held by single-digit plates bought at a series of auctions in Abu Dhabi, starting in May 2007, with the proceeds going to various charities including to a rehabilitation centre for traffic accident victims. Who’d have believed that a £1.58 million plate could be only fifth on the list?

4 Plate: 9
Price: £1.72m
This is the fifth single digit number plate to sell in Abu Dhabi. The May 2008 auction that it was part of saw 100 plates sold in front of 450 bidders. In total, 52 million UAE dirhams was raised for charity - around £9m.

3 Plate: 7
Price: £3m
A YouTube video shows plate number 7 fetching its staggering price. They don’t do things by half over in Abu Dhabi, selling the plate from a huge stage complete with an Enzo Ferrari, a Mercedes-Benz G Wagen and a Maybach.

2 Plate: 5
Price: £3.4m
Nobody thought that the ludicrous £3.4m paid by Emirati stockbroker Talal Khouri for number 5 would be broken - he said the number meant nothing to him - until the February 2008 auction of number 1.

1 Plate: 1
Price: £7.1m
“I bought it because it’s the best number,” said Saeed Khouri after he paid £7.1m for the number 1. One of 90 plates sold in its auction, the event raised a total of £14.7m for charity.