

Vehicle registration numbers and number plates

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Vehicle registration numbers

1 Why we have vehicle registration numbers

Vehicle registration numbers are a way of identifying vehicles. All vehicle registration numbers are owned by the Secretary of State and are allocated to vehicles (and may be withdrawn) as part of the process of registering and taxing vehicles.

They are assigned to the vehicle, rather than its registered keeper, and unless they are transferred to another vehicle or retained (keep the use of) they will normally remain with the vehicle until it is broken up, destroyed or exported permanently out of the country.

2 Entitlement to a vehicle registration number

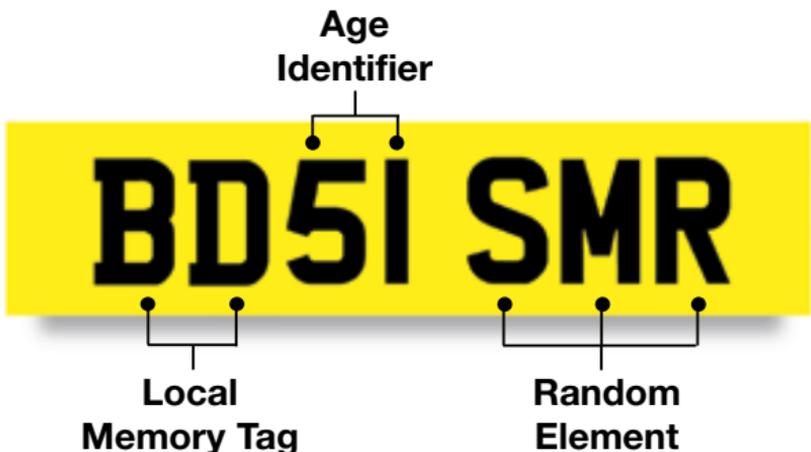
The registered keeper of the vehicle which carries the vehicle registration number gets limited entitlement to display it. When the vehicle changes hands, entitlement to its vehicle registration number will stay with the vehicle – unless the registered keeper has made an application to transfer or retain the vehicle registration number before they get rid of the vehicle.

Details of how to transfer, retain or buy the right to display a vehicle registration number can be found in the leaflet ‘Registration numbers and you’ (INF46), which is available on the website www.direct.gov.uk/motoringleaflets, at DVLA local offices or by phoning 0870 240 0010.

3 Vehicle registration number format

The current vehicle registration number format was introduced on 1 September 2001 for all new vehicles being registered. The format consists of two letters, two numbers, a space and three further letters.

The first two letters (the local memory tag) tell you the office where the vehicle registration number was first issued, the two numbers are the age identifier, and the last three letters are random.



The age identifier changes every six months in March and September. For example, BD signifies Birmingham, 51 represents September 2001 and SMR are random letters.

Note: DVLA cannot guarantee that any specific local memory tag or DVLA local office identifier will be issued.

A list of local memory tags and age identifiers are shown on pages 5 and 6.

4 Display of vehicle registration numbers

Vehicle registration numbers must be correctly displayed on number plates in accordance with The Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations (as appropriate). These Regulations govern the design, manufacture and display of vehicle registration number plates.

It is an offence to alter, rearrange or misrepresent vehicle registration numbers on number plates in order to form names or words or in such a way that makes it difficult to read the vehicle registration number. For example, you should not use fixing bolts to change any of the letters or numbers. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of up to £1000. In some cases, the vehicle registration number may be permanently withdrawn.

If you have misrepresented a vehicle registration number that you have been given (purchased the right to) under the Sale of Registration Marks Regulations (as appropriate), and the vehicle registration number is permanently withdrawn, you would not get any money back that you have paid in the purchase of those rights, or any other costs incurred.

You cannot use a vehicle registration number to make your vehicle appear younger than it actually is.

5 Local memory tags and age identifiers

Letter		Local Office	DVLA local office identifier
A	Anglia	Peterborough Norwich Ipswich	AA AB AC AD AE AF AG AH AJ AK AL AM AN AO AP AR AS AT AU AV AW AX AY
B	Birmingham	Birmingham	BA – BY
C	Cymru	Cardiff Swansea Bangor	CA CB CC CD CE CF CG CH CJ CK CL CM CN CO CP CR CS CT CU CV CW CX CY
D	Deeside to Shrewsbury	Chester Shrewsbury	DA DB DC DD DE DF DG DH DJ DK DL DM DN DO DP DR DS DT DU DV DW DX DY
E	Essex	Chelmsford	EA – EY
F	Forest & Fens	Nottingham Lincoln	FA FB FC FD FE FF FG FH FJ FK FL FM FN FP FR FS FT FV FW FX FY
G	Garden of England	Maidstone Brighton	GA GB GC GD GE GF GG GH GJ GK GL GM GN GO GP GR GS GT GU GV GW GX GY
H	Hampshire & Dorset	Bournemouth Portsmouth	HA HB HC HD HE HF HG HH HJ HK HL HM HN HO HP HR HS HT HU HV HW HX HY (HW will be used exclusively for Isle of Wight residents)
K		Borehamwood Northampton	KA KB KC KD KE KF KG KH KJ KK KL KM KN KO KP KR KS KT KU KV KW KX KY
L	London	Wimbledon Borehamwood Sidcup	LA LB LC LD LE LF LG LH LJ LK LL LM LN LO LP LR LS LT LU LV LW LX LY
M	Manchester & Merseyside	Manchester	MA – MY (MN + MAN Reserved for the Isle of Man)
N	North	Newcastle Stockton	NA NB NC ND NE NG NH NJ NK NL NM NN NO NP NR NS NT NU NV NW NX NY
O	Oxford	Oxford	OA – OY
P	Preston	Preston Carlisle	PA PB PC PD PE PF PG PH PJ PK PL PM PN PO PP PR PS PT PU PV PW PX PY
R	Reading	Theale	RA – RY
S	Scotland	Glasgow Edinburgh Dundee Aberdeen Inverness	SA SB SC SD SE SF SG SH SJ SK SL SM SN SO SP SR SS ST SU SV SW SX SY
V	Severn Valley	Worcester	VA – VY
W	West of England	Exeter Truro Bristol	WA WB WC WD WE WF WG WH WJ WK WL WM WN WO WP WR WS WT WU WV WW WX WY
Y	Yorkshire	Leeds Sheffield Beverley	YA YB YC YD YE YF YG YH YJ YK YL YM YN YO YP YR YS YT YU YV YW YX YY

- We will not issue I, Q or Z as local office identifiers.
- We will still issue existing 'Q' marks.
- We will only use Z as a random letter.

Age identifiers

Date	Code	Date	Code
		Sept 2001 – Feb 2002	51
March 2002 – Aug 2002	02	Sept 2002 – Feb 2003	52
March 2003 – Aug 2003	03	Sept 2003 – Feb 2004	53
March 2004 – Aug 2004	04	Sept 2004 – Feb 2005	54
March 2005 – Aug 2005	05	Sept 2005 – Feb 2006	55
March 2006 – Aug 2006	06	Sept 2006 – Feb 2007	56
March 2007 – Aug 2007	07	Sept 2007 – Feb 2008	57
March 2008 – Aug 2008	08	Sept 2008 – Feb 2009	58
March 2009 – Aug 2009	09	Sept 2009 – Feb 2010	59
March 2010 – Aug 2010	10	Sept 2010 – Feb 2011	60
March 2011 – Aug 2011	11	Sept 2011 – Feb 2012	61

This pattern will continue until all permutations are exhausted.

Number plates

6 How to get a number plate

To have a number plate made for the vehicle, you will need to go to a Registered Number Plate Supplier (RNPS). You can find details of your nearest RNPS at www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

You will need to produce at least one document from each of the lists below to allow the RNPS to confirm your name, address and entitlement to have the number plate made up for the vehicle registration number. All documents must be **original** – not copies.

Acceptable documents that show entitlement to the vehicle registration number.

- The Registration Certificate (V5C or V5C/Nl).
- The New keeper's details section (V5C/2 or V5C/2 NI) of the V5C or V5C/Nl.
- A Certificate of Entitlement (V750 or V750/Nl).
- A Retention Document (V778) (not applicable in Northern Ireland).
- A Renewal reminder for a tax disc/Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) (V11) or (V11/Nl).
- A Temporary Registration Certificate (V379) (not applicable in Northern Ireland).
- A Number Plate Authorisation Certificate (V948).
- A letter of authorisation from a fleet operator (including lease/hire company) – the letter must quote the document reference number from the V5C or V5C/Nl, not the vehicle identification number.

Acceptable documents to confirm both your name and address.

- A driving licence, with or without a photo (whether or not it was issued in the United Kingdom).
- A utility bill from an electricity, gas or water supplier, a landline telephone bill, a council tax bill or Northern Ireland rates bill issued within the last six months.
- A bank or building society statement issued within the last six months.
- A passport (whether or not it was issued in the United Kingdom).
- A national identity card issued by the Government of a state or territory other than the United Kingdom.
- A debit or credit card issued by a bank or building society (name only).
- A police warrant card.
- An armed forces identity card.

The British Standard for number plates

The British Standard sets out the physical characteristics of the number plate. This includes visibility, strength and reflectivity. The British Standard also requires each number plate to be permanently and legibly marked with the following information:

- the British Standard number (currently BS AU 145d);
- the name, trade mark or other means of identification of the manufacturer or component supplier; and
- the name and postcode of the supplying outlet.

Theft resistant number plates

We have been working with number plate manufacturers and others to develop an agreed voluntary standard for theft resistant number plates which are designed to stop a thief reusing a stolen number plate. There are numerous benefits the new number plates can offer:

- they will reduce the number of innocent car owners every year who get motoring related fines for acts they did not commit;
- they will reduce the problem of criminals cloning (copying the identity of) a vehicle and the resale of illegal vehicles to unsuspecting motorists; and
- they will tackle the problem of petrol station 'drive offs'.

For further information please visit the website

www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

What to do if the vehicle number plates have been stolen

You should contact the police, as it is a matter for them to trace and prosecute the culprit to prevent this illegal activity from continuing.

7 Number plate design specification

Vehicles manufactured after 1 January 1973, must display number plates of:

- reflex-reflecting material;
- white background at the front of the vehicle and a yellow background at the rear of the vehicle; and
- the characters must be black.



Mandatory standard character font

On 1 September 2001, new regulations were introduced that put in place a standard character font for number plates, making them easier to be read. This change ended the use of italic, multiple stroke and other difficult to read lettering on number plates.

An example of the standard character font is shown below:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A B C D E F G H
J K L M N O P Q
R S T U V W X Y Z

For vehicles with new or replacement number plates fitted from 1 September 2001, “3-line” number plates are no longer permitted (except where the vehicle was first registered before 1 January 1973). In addition, the characters on number plates purchased from 1 September 2001, will need to meet the following specifications.

- Character height 79mm
- Character width (except the figure 1 or letter l) 50mm
- Character stroke 14mm
- Space between characters 11mm
- Space between groups 33mm
- Top, bottom and side margins (minimum) 11mm
- Vertical space between groups 19mm

Motorcycles and tricycles

There are separate provisions for motorcycles and tricycles. This means, motorcycles registered from 1 September 2001 must only display a number plate at the rear of the vehicle.

Motorcycles registered before 1 September 2001 can display a number plate at the front, but do not have to. The number plate must be a “2-line” number plate and must be displayed on all motorcycles registered on or after 1 January 1973. Tricycles derived from four-wheeled bodies, such as saloon cars and quad bikes must meet the normal requirements above.

Tricycles derived from motorcycles must meet the requirements for motorcycles shown below.

- Character height 64mm
- Character width (except the figure 1 or letter l) 44mm
- Character stroke 10 mm
- Space between characters 10mm
- Space between groups 30mm
- Top, bottom and side margins (minimum) 11mm
- Vertical space between groups 13mm

Number plates fitted before 1 September 2001

Number plates fitted before 1 September 2001 must display characters that meet the dimensions shown in one of the two groups below.

	Group 1 (number plates fitted before 1 September 2001)	Group 2 (traditional number plates for vehicles made before 1 January 1973)
Character height	89mm	79mm
Character width (except the figure 1 or letter l)	64mm	57mm
Character stroke	16mm	14mm
Space between characters	13mm	11mm
Space between groups	38mm	33mm
Side margins (minimum)	13mm	11mm
Top and bottom margins (minimum)	13mm	11mm
Vertical space between groups	19mm	19mm

Traditional number plates for vehicles made before 1 January 1973

Vehicles made before 1 January 1973 may display traditional style “black and white” number plates, for example, white, silver or grey characters on a black plate.

8 The Euro symbol on a number plate

You may, if you wish, display the Euro symbol and GB national identifier on the number plate. This will get rid of the need for a separate GB sticker when travelling within the EU.

The symbol must meet the EC Council Regulation 2411/98 which states that:

- the height must be a minimum of 98mm;
- the width must be a minimum of 40mm (maximum of 50mm);
- the background must be of retro-reflecting blue with 12 retro-reflecting yellow stars at the top; and
- the distinguishing sign of the Member State (GB) in retro-reflecting white or yellow.

An example is shown below.



9 National flags on number plates

You may, if you wish, display a GB national flag with letters on the number plate at the extreme left of the plate. The flags you can choose from are:

- Union Flag,
- the Cross of St George,
- the Scottish Saltire,
- the Red Dragon of Wales

The letters you can choose from are:

- Great Britain or GB;
- United Kingdom or UK;
- ENGLAND or England or ENG or Eng;
- SCOTLAND or Scotland or SCO or Sco;
- CYMRU or Cymru or CYM or Cym;
- WALES or Wales

Although number plates displaying these national flags and letters would be legal when travelling outside the United Kingdom they are not acceptable for identification purposes. To meet international circulation requirements the oval GB Sticker would also need to be displayed when travelling outside the United Kingdom. Alternatively number plates displaying the European symbol may be used when travelling within Europe.

You are not allowed to display any other flag or symbol and this only applies to vehicles registered in England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland (NI) is excluded, leaving the European Flag as the only acceptable symbol there.

10 What to do if your vehicle has been cloned

If you are being contacted about fines or charges for which you are not responsible because someone else is using the vehicle registration number, it is possible that your vehicle has been cloned.

Cloning involves the copying of the identity of a similar (non-stolen) vehicle already on the road. Criminals find an exact match of the car they have stolen, they then copy the identity of the legitimate vehicle, therefore making it look legal based on false or stolen number plates being fitted.

If you suspect your vehicle has been cloned, the following points will help you avoid becoming a victim of further crime.

What you need to do

- Contact the police, it is a matter for them to trace and prosecute the culprit to prevent this illegal activity from continuing.
- Return any fines or correspondence to the issuing authorities providing them with any documentary evidence you have to prove your case.
- Write to us at DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1ZA or fax us on 01792 783083 quoting your crime reference number (if you have one) – we will record your correspondence on the vehicle record for future reference.