

Vehicle registration numbers and number plates

For more information go to www.direct.gov.uk/numberplates



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Vehicle registration numbers

1 Why we have vehicle registration numbers

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 Registration numbers can be withdrawn.

The registration number is given to the vehicle, rather than its registered keeper. It will stay with the vehicle (until the vehicle is broken up, destroyed or exported permanently out of the country) unless the registered keeper of the vehicle transfers it to another vehicle or retains it (keeps the right to use it).

2 Entitlement to a vehicle registration number

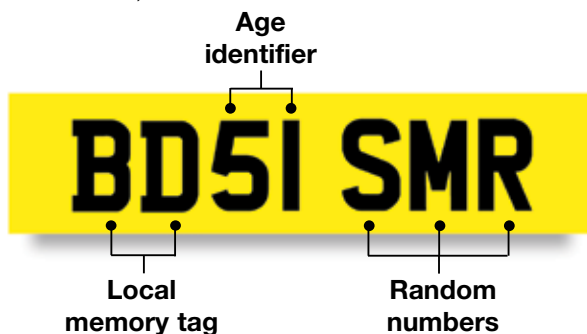
The registered keeper of the vehicle gets limited entitlement to display the registration number. When the vehicle changes hands, entitlement to the vehicle registration number will stay with the vehicle unless the registered keeper transfers or retains the vehicle registration number before they get 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 you can get from www.direct.gov.uk/motoringleaflets, DVLA local offices, or by phoning 0300 790 6802.

3 Format of vehicle registration numbers

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

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



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

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

There is a list of local memory tags and age identifiers on pages 5 and 6.

4 Displaying vehicle registration numbers

Vehicle registration numbers must be correctly displayed on number plates as set out in the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations (as appropriate). These regulations govern how vehicle registration number plates are designed, manufactured and displayed.

It is an offence to alter, rearrange or misrepresent the numbers and letters on a number plate to form names or words, or in a way that makes it difficult to read the registration number. For example, you should not use fixing bolts to change any of the letters or numbers. Anyone with a number plate that does not display the registration number correctly could be fined up to £1000. In some cases, the registration number may be permanently withdrawn.

If you have misrepresented a vehicle registration number that you have been given or bought the right to under the Sale of Registration Marks Regulations, and the vehicle registration number is permanently withdrawn, you would not get back any money that you have paid for the registration number, or any other costs you have to pay.

You cannot use a 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 use I, Q or Z in local memory tags 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
March 2012 – Aug 2012	12	Sept 2012 – Feb 2013	62
March 2013 – Aug 2013	13	Sept 2013 – Feb 2014	63
March 2014 – Aug 2014	14	Sept 2014 – Feb 2015	64
March 2015 – Aug 2015	15	Sept 2015 – Feb 2016	65
March 2016 – Aug 2016	16	Sept 2016 – Feb 2017	66
March 2017 – Aug 2017	17	Sept 2017 – Feb 2018	67
March 2018 – Aug 2018	18	Sept 2018 – Feb 2019	68
March 2019 – Aug 2019	19	Sept 2019 – Feb 2020	69

This pattern will continue until all possible variations have been used.

Number plates

6 How to get a number plate

To have a number plate made for your 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/numberplates

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 your entitlement to the registration number. All documents must be **original**. We do not accept copies.

Documents to show entitlement to the registration number

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

Documents to confirm your name and address

- A driving licence, with or without a photo, whether or not it was issued in the United Kingdom
- An electricity, gas, water or landline phone bill, 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 (this confirms your name only)
- A national identity card issued by the Government of a state or territory other than the United Kingdom
- A debit card or credit card issued by a bank or building society (this confirms your name only)
- A police warrant card (this confirms your name only)
- An armed forces identity card (this confirms your name only)

The British Standard for number plates

The British Standard sets out the characteristics of the number plate. This includes visibility, strength and reflectivity. To meet the British Standard, each number plate must be permanently and legibly marked with the following information.

- The British Standard number (currently BS AU 145d)
- The name, trademark or other way of identifying the manufacturer or supplier
- 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 standard for theft-resistant number plates, which are designed to stop thieves using stolen number plates. There are several benefits the new number plates can offer.

- They will reduce the number of innocent car owners 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 selling illegal vehicles to unsuspecting motorists.
- They will tackle the problem of petrol station 'drive-offs' (when people drive off without paying for their petrol or diesel).

For further information please visit the website at www.direct.gov.uk/vehiclecrime

What to do if your number plates have been stolen

You should contact the police so they can try 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:

- made of a reflective material
- with a white background at the front of the vehicle and a yellow background at the back of the vehicle, and
- with black letters and numbers.



Standard font

On 1 September 2001, new regulations introduced a standard font (style of lettering) for number plates, making them easier to be read. This change ended the use of italics and other styles of lettering that are difficult to read.

An example of the standard 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, registration numbers can no longer be shown over three lines (unless the vehicle was first registered before 1 January 1973). Also, the letters and numbers (characters) on number plates bought since 1 September 2001 will need to meet the following standards.

- Characters must be 79mm tall
- Characters (except the number 1 or letter l) must be 50mm wide
- The character stroke (the thickness of the black print) must be 14mm
- The space between characters must be 11mm
- The space between the age identifier and the random letters must be 33mm
- The margins at the top, bottom and side of the plate must be 11mm
- Vertical space between the age identifier and the random numbers must be 19mm

Motorcycles and tricycles

There are separate rules for motorcycles and tricycles.

Motorcycles registered from 1 September 2001 must only display a number plate at the back of the vehicle.

Motorcycles registered before 1 September 2001 can display a number plate at the front, but do not have to.

The characters on the number plate must be set out over two lines and must be displayed on all motorcycles registered on or after 1 January 1973.

Tricycles made from four-wheeled bodies, such as saloon cars and quad bikes, must meet the normal requirements on page 9.

Tricycles built from motorcycles must meet the rules for motorcycles shown below.

- Characters must be 64mm tall
- Characters (except the number 1 or letter l) must be 44mm wide
- The character stroke (the thickness of the black print) must be 10mm
- The space between characters must be 10mm
- The space between the age identifier and the random letters must be 30mm
- The margins at the top, bottom and side of the plate must be at least 11mm
- Vertical space between the age identifier and the random numbers must be 13mm

Number plates fitted before 1 September 2001

The characters on number plates fitted before 1 September 2001 must meet the size requirements shown 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 number 1 or letter l)	64mm	57mm
Character stroke	16mm	14mm
Space between characters	13mm	11mm
Space between the age identifier and random numbers	38mm	33mm
Side margins (minimum)	13mm	11mm
Top and bottom margins (minimum)	13mm	11mm
Vertical space between the age identifier and the random numbers	19mm	19mm

Traditional number plates for vehicles made before 1 January 1973

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

8 The European symbol on a number plate

If you want to you can display the European 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:

- it must be at least 98mm tall
- it must be between 40mm and 50mm wide
- the background must be reflective blue with 12 reflective yellow stars at the top, and
- the 'GB' must be in reflective white or yellow.

An example is shown below.



9 National flags on number plates

If you want to, you can display a GB national flag with the letters 'GB' on the far left of the number plate. The flags you can choose from are:

- the Union Jack
- St George's cross
- The Scottish saltire
- The Red Dragon of Wales

The letters you can choose from are:

- Great Britain or GB
- United Kingdom or UK
- ENGLAND, England, ENG or Eng
- SCOTLAND, Scotland, SCO or Sco
- CYMRU, Cymru, 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 requirements, when travelling outside the United Kingdom, the oval GB sticker would also need to be displayed (displaying the European symbol removes the need for this sticker when you are travelling within Europe).

You are not allowed to display any other flag or symbol,

and these requirements only apply to vehicles registered in England, Scotland and Wales. For vehicles registered in Northern Ireland, the only symbol that can be displayed is the European logo.

10 What to do if your vehicle has been 'cloned'

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

Cloning involves copying the identity of a similar (non-stolen) vehicle already on the road. Criminals find an exact make, model and colour of the car they have stolen, then use the same registration number on their stolen vehicle to make it look legal.

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 so they can try to trace and prosecute the culprit to prevent this illegal activity from continuing.
- Return any fines or letters to whoever issued them, along with any evidence you have to prove your case.
- Write to us at DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1ZA, or fax us on 01792 783083, giving us the crime reference number the police gave you. We will keep a record of the matter for future reference.