

Vehicle Modifications

Vehicle ownership is something many people take for granted these days, that said the car we own is often our pride and joy. Carefully looked after and often modified to meet our expectations.

However, not all car modifications are legal and many are deemed as unnecessary. The problems occur when people modify their cars without taking consideration of the lawfulness of the modification such as fitting large bore noisy exhausts or heavily tinted windows. These are actually illegal in the UK and are classed as anti-social use of a vehicle.

When modifying your car there are some important matters to consider ensuring your vehicle is legal to drive on public roads.

- Make sure your insurance company is fully aware of the modifications, discuss them with your insurance company before your vehicle is modified. Failure to do so could seriously reduce any future claim you make and in a worst case scenario completely invalidate your insurance.
- Secondly, you should be aware that modifying your car will make it more attractive to thieves.
- If you are thinking of modifying your vehicle, you need to check if the modifications are lawful and comply with the Road Traffic Act ensuring the vehicle is safe and road worthy.
- Any vehicle modifications that you make to your car should be carried out by someone who knows what they are doing, preferable a dealer to ensure that your car remains road worthy.

The following pages have been published for your benefit, to help explain the law around modifications with the intention of keeping all road users within the law and making our roads safer.

If you require any further information or have a query on any modification please contact Pc1119 Ian Foster on 101 or email ian.foster@humberside.pnn.police.uk

Popular Modifications

Exhausts

The vast majority of large or big bore exhausts are illegal for use on public roads. The fact they may have passed an MOT test is irrelevant as this only checks for security of fitting, exhaust gasses and emission legislation compliance.

Big bore and sports exhaust systems are usually fitted to increase the sound emitted and this contravenes the Type Approval of the vehicle, which is an offence.

There is no requirement for police to measure the sound level, it only requires an opinion that the system is not standard and that it is noisier than a normal vehicle of the same specification.

It is not an offence to sell these exhaust systems, but it is an offence to drive on a public road with one fitted.

Other like exhaust offences include the removal of silencers and fitting straight through pipes or removal of catalytic converter.

Motorists who commit this offence may be dealt with by means of fine or may be reported to the court and face a fine and court costs.

Tyres

Stretch tyres are becoming more popular as the craze from Europe hits the United Kingdom. Fitting this type of tyre to your car is illegal and could adversely compromise the handling and stability of your vehicle.

The fitting of this type of tyre contravenes the Type Approval of the vehicle and renders it not fit for purpose as well as potentially invalidating your insurance.

This offence could result in a prosecution of dangerous condition of vehicle, namely Sec 40A of the Road Traffic Act 1988 and is subject to a £100 Fixed Penalty Notice and three penalty points endorsed onto your driving licence or being reported to Court.

Tyres and wheels protruding out beyond the wheel arches is also a popular modification, this is generally done by fitting wider wheels or using wheel spacers. This causes a significant risk to pedestrians, in the event of a pedestrian coming into contact with a protruding wheel can result in the wheel dragging someone under the vehicle causing potentially fatal injuries. This driver also risks a fine and points for such an offence.

Lighting Offences

Blue lights - Under the Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations 1989, it states "except for emergency vehicles it is an offence to fit a blue warning beacon or special warning lamp or device resembling such whether working or not"

Fog lights - For vehicles fitted with front fog lights (rear fog lights are also included), it is an offence to illuminate them unless visibility is seriously reduced, which is defined as driving rain, snow or fog with visibility less than 100 metres. Fog lights cause dazzle to other drivers and can attract a £50 non endorsable Fixed Penalty Notice.

Other lights - It is an offence to show a red light to the front of a vehicle (including a reflector) and a white light to the rear unless reversing. Once again these offences are dealt with by means of a £50 non endorsable Fixed Penalty Notice. It does not matter if the lights are mounted inside or outside the vehicle, just that the light can be seen from the outside. This could also include neon lights fitted under or on the side of a vehicle and red LED windscreen washer jets. Green lights can only be fitted on Medical Practitioners vehicles.

Covering your lights with a tint spray or cloth can also reduce the visibility of your lights, often making brake lights invisible in bright sun light, resulting in an increased risk of collision and injuries.

Tinted Windows

Tinted windows can reduce visibility to a dangerous level, particularly in poor weather conditions or at night.

The minimum legal requirement is that your front windscreen must let through 75% of light and your front door windows at least 70% of light. Rear doors and windows are not included and can be tinted as much as you wish.

If your vehicle is found to have tinted windows contrary to the minimum light requirements you may receive a fine, a fine and penalty points and potentially the police could prohibit your vehicle from being used on a road on vehicles with the most heavily tinted windows.

Number Plates

Number plates must conform to regulations in relation to the size in terms of the number plate itself, characters, spacing, format and font.

You must not misrepresent the characters either, for example by spacing them to make a word or name or by strategically placing fixing screw covers to alter any character. Fonts including italic, bold and shadow are all illegal.

Number plates must be white reflective to the front and yellow reflective to the rear and the characters have to be black. The exception to this rule is if the vehicle (note: the legislation states vehicle not the number plate itself) is registered prior to December 31, 1972, in which case black and silver number plates can be fitted front and rear.

If the number plates on the vehicle do not comply with the above legislation this could result in a £100 non endorsable Fixed Penalty Notice being issued and in the case of cherished registration the DVLA being notified of the offence. Ultimately the DVLA can withdraw the cherished number plate from the vehicle temporarily or permanently, even though you pay for them, the DVLA still own the plate, you are just given the privilege of displaying the mark on a vehicle.

Section 59 of the Police Reform Act – Anti Social Driving Offences

Certain anti-social driving offences can now be dealt with by Section 59 of the Police Reform Act.

Basically what that means is if you are seen:

- Driving in a careless or inconsiderate manner

- Driving on common land, a footpath or bridle way or any land which is not part of a road
- Driving in a manner which is causing/has been causing, or is likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public.

Then a Section 59 warning can be issued to you. This warning is placed against both the driver and the vehicle and lasts for 12 months.

If the driver of the vehicle or the vehicle with the warning issued to it is then seen driving in any of those conditions again in the next 12 months the vehicle can be seized and, if not collected after paying for recovery and storage costs, it will be crushed. Please note that this relates to either the driver with the Section 59 or the vehicle.

