

Vehicle MODIFICATIONS and Antisocial Driving



The modifications you make to your car and the way in which you drive it can have serious consequences.

You need to know where you stand when it comes to your car and the law.



Devon & Cornwall
POLICE



Modifying your car is something that we know is popular but many people don't understand how this fits in with the law and what you can or can't do. Not all the modifications we see are either legal or safe. New cars are type approved to meet safety standards and The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. Any modifications you make also have to meet these standards, as well as pass an MOT at anytime.

Number plates

Number plates must be white reflective to the front, yellow reflective to the rear and the characters have to be all black. If the vehicle is registered prior to 1 January 1980 then black and silver number plates can be fitted to the front and rear but you must apply to DVLA and the vehicle be registered as 'historic'. It is illegal to change the size, spacing, format, font or characters of a number plate and only national identifiers relevant to the United Kingdom or home nations (England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) may be displayed. Where a vehicle's number plate does not comply with the relevant legislation a Fixed Penalty Notice will be issued and/or the DVLA notified of the offence. Ultimately, the DVLA can withdraw the cherished transfer number plate from the vehicle temporarily or permanently. A number plate must be displayed on the front of the vehicle and cannot be in the windscreen. DVLA leaflet INF104 refers.





Suspension

Good quality and well-fitted parts are fine but cut springs and DIY mechanics are a recipe for disaster. Your suspension must comply with the 'construction and use' regulations and also be able to pass an MOT at any time. If your suspension is so low that it causes the vehicle to be dangerous in its handling or the wheels/tyres rub on parts of the bodywork then this is an offence. If your vehicle is found to be in a dangerous condition then it will be prohibited from use on the road. You must not cut your springs and your springs and dampers must be maintained in good condition. You should also check your wheel geometry after fitting new suspension parts to avoid uneven tyre wear or adverse handling.

How loud can you go?

There are times all of us feel like listening to loud music. However, listening to loud music can affect your health and your driving style. The louder the music, the faster the beat, the more likely you are to drive faster, jump a red light or have a collision.



Wheels and wheel spacers

Common modifications are largely cosmetic, however can cause problems with offsets, stretched tyres etc. Wheel spacers to push the wheels further out in the arches need to be declared to your insurance company and can in some cases adversely affect the handling of your vehicle. It is not safe to cut the original wheels studs in order to fit the spacers. Any wheel other than what was fitted to the car when it left the factory is a modification, this includes wheels made by the same manufacturer. Your wheels must not be so big that they cause the tyres to rub on the bodywork or mechanics of the vehicle and tyres must not protrude beyond the arch to leave the tread pattern exposed.

Tyres

Fitting stretched tyres is not only illegal but could adversely compromise the handling and safety of your vehicle. Fitting this type of tyre contravenes the type approval of the tyre and renders it not fit for purpose. This could lead to prosecution for dangerous condition of the vehicle. Your tyres are the only part of your vehicle that actually touches and keeps you on the road and they must be kept in good condition. The minimum legal tread depth is 1.6mm over a continuous band comprising the central $\frac{3}{4}$ of the breadth of tread and the entire circumference of the tyre. You should really replace your tyres at 2mm minimum tread depth as the performance of the tyre is greatly reduced below 2mm. Check for uneven wear on your tyres if you have lowered suspension and always buy the best quality tyres you can afford. Each illegal tyre is a fixed penalty notice, a fine and three penalty points on your licence.

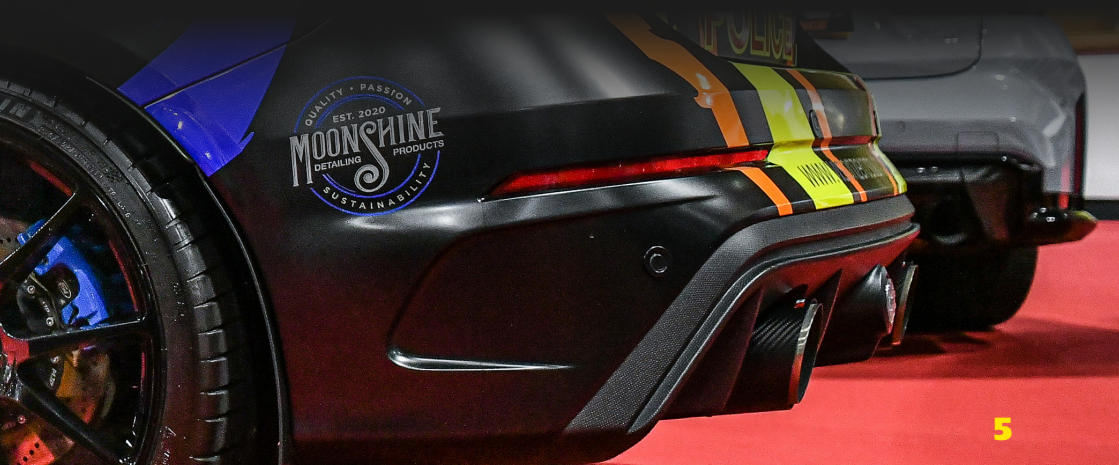


Body work

All bodywork modifications must be secure and have no exposed edges likely to cause injury – if there are exposed sharp edges a vehicle will be prohibited.

Exhausts and performance enhancers

Exhaust gases must pass through a silencer (and a catalytic converter where fitted from the factory) before leaving the system. You cannot remove the catalytic converter but may use a sports catalytic converter so long as it passes the emissions test/MOT. A vehicle must be able to pass an MOT/emissions test at any time. The centre section box is not classed as a silencer, it is a resonator, neither is the catalytic converter a silencer. The back boxes are silencers/mufflers so are generally required to comply with the regulations. Any change to the exhaust system that makes the system louder is an offence. The police do not need a noise meter to enforce the regulations, they need only to evidence that a system has been 'altered so as to increase the noise made by the escape of exhaust gases'. This can be an objective test (e.g. would a reasonable person come to the same opinion) and this may include comparison against a vehicle of the same model with a standard factory exhaust.



Tinted windows

Heavily tinted windows will seriously reduce your view at night and in certain weather conditions. A windscreen must allow 75 per cent of light through and the front side windows must allow 70 per cent of light through. A window found to be too heavily tinted could result in your vehicle being classed as dangerous and prohibited from being used on the road. The same rules apply to chameleon tint. Sunstrips cannot be so low that they impair the driver's view.

Lights

Blue lights – only registered emergency service vehicles can use blue flashing lights. It is an offence for your vehicle to have LED or neon lighting anywhere on or in the vehicle which emits a blue light that has the appearance of flashing or movement. You cannot fit blue bulbs to your side lights.

Other lights – it is an offence to show a red light to the front of a vehicle (including a reflector) and/or a white light to the rear unless reversing. It does not matter where on the vehicle the lights are, only that they can be seen from outside. Flashing green lights can only be fitted on medical practitioners vehicles.

Fog lights – for vehicles fitted with separate fog lights, it is an offence to use them unless visibility is less than 100 metres. Fog lights dazzle other drivers and can cause a danger.





Wrapping your Car

You can wrap your car however if the colour change is more than 50% (even if temporary) then you must notify DVLA so that it appears on your vehicle V5c.

Insurance

You must notify your insurance company of ANY modifications on your vehicle. Failing to do so could seriously reduce any future claim you make and in a worst case scenario may invalidate your insurance. You need to ensure the modifications are acceptable under The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. Any modification made to your vehicle should be carried out by a suitably qualified person, preferably a licensed dealer, to ensure the vehicle remains roadworthy.

S59 Police Reform Act 2002 - A police officer can issue a Section 59 warning to anyone committing an offence of careless/inconsiderate driving or driving elsewhere than on the road AND causing alarm, distress or annoyance to the public (anti-social manner). The warning will be valid for a period of 12 months and if within this time a further offence is committed the police have the power to seize the vehicle.

For further information and videos please see George's Car Media on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. Please ask us if you are not sure, BEFORE you make the modification to your vehicle.



Disclaimer

The Ford RS Focus Project sees Sergeant Owen Messenger team up with modified car YouTuber GCM to dispel myths about car modification and what alterations can be made safely and legally.

Whilst we value the support of the companies helping with the RS project, neither Devon & Cornwall Police, Vision Zero South West road safety partnership or Owen endorse any particular product or manufacturer. Any paid promotion or sponsorship is solely by arrangement between the company and GCM.

This project is funded by Vision Zero South West and not from other police funding or general taxation. Owen does the vast majority of the work in his own time outside of his duty time. At the end of this project the car will be sold and the money returned to Vision Zero South West.

A big thank you also goes out to everyone who has supported the project along the way.

