

Fast Facts 2

Odometer Fraud – How Car Buyers Can Protect Themselves



DMV Investigations Division

The Investigations Division (INV) protects and serves the public interest and maintains the integrity, security, and reliability of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) data, services, and products by providing consumer protection through the enforcement of laws, rules, and regulations applicable to licensees, business partners, the public, and DMV employees.

DMV Investigators improve public safety through protection of DMV programs and interests and active prevention/detection of fraud and counterfeit indicia.

INV enforces laws, rules, and regulations that apply to new and used vehicle dealers, brokers, dismantlers, verifiers, registration services, driving and traffic violator schools, and other vehicle-related businesses.

Compare Vehicle Mileage and Documents

Review mileage readings on certificates of title, prior odometer disclosure statements, warranties, service records, etc., for any discrepancies or signs of alteration. Look for oil change or inspection stickers under the hood, inside the doorframe, or on the windshield. In addition, look in the glove box for warranty documents or service records.

Compare the vehicle's sale price with similar year vehicles and mileage in the geographic region.

Beware if mileage statements are "unavailable" as dealers are required to keep such records.

Examine the Vehicle for Tampering Clues

Look for physical signs of tampering, such as scratches or marks on the odometer or face dial, misaligned digits, missing or loose screws, etc.

When a vehicle odometer is serviced, repaired, or replaced, and the new odometer cannot be adjusted to reflect the true mileage, the odometer must be set to zero. An Odometer Notice Sticker must be attached to the left doorframe. When the vehicle is sold, the disclosure statement must include the odometer error.

Examine the tires. If the vehicle has 20,000 miles or less, the vehicle should have the original tires. Examine other parts of the vehicle such as the gas, brake, and clutch pedals to see if the wear and tear corresponds to the mileage being represented. Have the vehicle inspected by a mechanic prior to purchase.

Check for odometer discrepancies in the vehicle's history report by utilizing the vehicle identification number (VIN) to order the report. A vehicle's condition and a detailed history report are the best clues a buyer has for determining whether possible odometer fraud has occurred.

When searching the internet for vehicles for sale such as on Craigslist or Offer Up, etc., it is highly recommended to keep a copy of the advertisement. Additionally, retain as much information as you can about the seller (for example, phone number, text messages, emails, identity, etc). This information is helpful for DMV Investigators following up on complaints of possible odometer fraud.

Vehicles 10 years old and older are exempt from the written odometer disclosure.

Odometer Tampering Is Illegal Under State and Federal Law

The law prohibits:

- Disconnecting or resetting the odometer with intent to change the mileage reading.
- Operating a vehicle with a nonfunctional odometer (with intent to defraud).
- Advertising, selling, using or installing a device, which causes an odometer to register incorrectly.
- Knowingly falsifying an odometer disclosure statement.
- Failing to attach the Odometer Notice Sticker of odometer replacement/service to the left doorframe of the vehicle or removing/altering such a notice.
- Conspiring with any other person to violate the odometer fraud statutes or related regulations.
- Theft by false representation of the vehicle's mileage in order to defraud any person out of the monetary value of a vehicle.

Contact DMV if You:

- Have evidence that someone has misrepresented a vehicle's mileage.
- Have reason to suspect that the odometer on your vehicle was altered or set back.
- Know of anyone engaged in odometer tampering.

For additional information, see the *What You Need to Know When Buying a Vehicle* (FFVR 26) *Fast Facts* brochure, available at **dmv.ca.gov**.

Written complaints with supporting evidence may be submitted to your local DMV Investigations Office, on a Record of Complaint Form (INV 172A) available at **dmv.ca.gov**.