

CONSUMER NEWS
BEFORE PURCHASING A VEHICLE
BE CAREFUL OF ALTERED EQUIPMENT

KELLY MANNING: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Kelly Manning, Infocast Editor.

KELLY: I bought a vehicle with tinted windows, fluorescent lights, decked out rims and a horn that plays a song. The dealer said it was street legal and I just want to make sure he's right.

Lt. Frank Baio, division manager of the Dealers and Repairs division explained some of these legal issues concerning vehicles that have been altered after the sale.

KELLY: Lt Baio, if I have a car and all the windows are tinted, is this legal and to what extreme is this allowed?

LT. BAIO: Kelly, there are certain provisions where a vehicle's windows can be tinted.

Under normal situations, the vehicle has to have a minimum of 35% light transitions coming between the outside and inside of the vehicle. Now this is plus or minus 3%. We are now saying that any vehicle with aftermarket window tint, that is, any vehicle that has window tinting applied after the manufacturer has built the vehicle, comply with our standards as far as light transmission and have certification stickers applied to each window so when those stickers are on the window, you can have a reasonable assumption that they are safe for legal operation on the highways of Connecticut.

KELLY: My rear window has a pretty dark tint. Is this okay?

LT. BAIO: Yes. There are provisions in the statute that allow for tinting of the extreme rear window of the car, provided that the vehicle is equipped with both left and right sideview mirrors.

KELLY: I've been driving around and I've seen limousines that have windows tinted so dark you can't see anyone in them. How is this any different from my personal car?

LT. BAIO: There's also a statutory provision which exempts any vehicle involved in livery service from the provisions of this statute. So the short answer is yes, these limousine-type vehicles can have darkly tinted windows.

KELLY: If someone had a medical condition, would this also be an exception?

LT. BAIO: Yes, there are medical exemptions to the requirement which involves having a doctor sign off that the person has a certain condition which renders them susceptible to the sun's rays and therefore can have the vehicle's windows tinted to a darker extreme. This medical exemption needs to be carried in the vehicle at all times when it is operated by that individual.

KELLY: The vehicle I bought also has headlights that are like a fluorescent/bluish color. Is this legal or should I be changing the light bulbs?

LT. BAIO: Pending on the year, make, and model of the vehicle, they may have been original factory equipment. Starting in the mid to late 90's, we've seen, especially on the European cars, high-intensity discharge headlamps which give off that bluish cast. Now certain aftermarket manufacturers are starting to make products that can replace the original equipment manufactured lights and also have this high-intensity discharge. For the most part, all these lights have to comply with federal motor vehicle safety standards, which were adopted by Connecticut.

KELLY: Also, driving around on Connecticut roadways, once in a while I'll see someone with a license plate that has a fluorescent frame around it or I'll see a fluorescent light coming from the bottom of their vehicle or sometimes even, when people are playing loud music, I see lights lighting up within the vehicle when the bass gets louder. Can you explain a little bit about this lighting and if it's allowed on the roadways?

LT. BAIO: These lightings or systems are generally not required or not allowed under statute. Any light that is put around a license plate that gives off a color other than white light is not allowed. Anything that emits a harsh or bright light within a driver's view or if so shining on the oncoming driver's face is also not allowed. So these lighting types of systems are generally not allowed under the statute.

KELLY: The vehicle I just purchased has very shiny rims that spin and they have spokes on the side. Is this okay to be driving around on Connecticut roadways?

LT. BAIO: No, there is no statutory provision which addresses the spinner type wheels or any type of aftermarket wheel such as the large or lowered type rim. Those are generally acceptable, and as long as they stay within the confines of the body contours of the vehicle, should be in compliance.

KELLY: Also, when I blow my horn at other drivers, instead of doing the normal loud blasting sound, it plays a song. I was just wondering if this is okay to be on the roadways.

LT. BAIO: No, the horn that's equipped on the vehicle is manufactured under certain specifications through both the federal government and Connecticut statute. The primary horn of the vehicle has to emit a sound audible up to 200 feet, or a minimum of 200 feet and can not emit any harsh or shrill sound. Songs and

music and other devices, while not prohibited, can not take the place of the vehicle's primary horn.

KELLY: Are there any other issues that you can think of that consumers should be careful about before purchasing a vehicle?

LT. BAIO: Certainly, Kelly, any vehicle with an altered suspension or any type of aftermarket performance parts should be investigated further as they are actually altering the vehicle's both electrical and structural systems and those are things that you should be wary about. The other item also that is becoming very popular is aftermarket exhaust systems where they actually remove or alter the federally required exhaust on a car, and this is something that the consumer should be aware of.

KELLY: Let's say I did buy a vehicle which had windows that were tinted too dark, or a fluorescent light coming from the bottom of the vehicle, or a horn that wasn't up to standards. Who would be liable for this?

LT. BAIO: If the vehicle wasn't safe for operation of the roadway in Connecticut, the dealer is ultimately responsible if those items were placed on the vehicle. Although they are considered aftermarket equipment, if he is selling a non-compliant vehicle, there are certain repercussions that could take place should he be deemed to be in violation of any statute.

KELLY: So if I did get a ticket for this, I should come to the Department of Motor Vehicles and explain my situation?

LT. BAIO: Well, first and foremost, I believe you should probably pay the ticket or contest it so that no suspension action will be taken against your registration or license. And, secondly, you can lodge a complaint against the dealer which would be thoroughly investigated to see if, in fact, there was a violation on his part.

KELLY: Okay. Is there anything else you want to share?

LT. BAIO: No, I believe as long as everyone goes into a sale or purchase of a vehicle knowing the statutes and limitations of those statutes, they should avoid running into any future problems.

KELLY: Well, thank you very much, Lt. Baio, for being with us here today.

KELLY MANNING: This has been an Infocast produced by the state of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for listening.