

## Surviving Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) - a guide for law-abiding drivers

Drivers who consider themselves law-abiding citizens may be pulled over alongside hardcore criminal drivers by police using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems, says The AA Motoring Trust.

Number-plates obscured by dirt or with incorrect letter and number spacing, that can't be read by ANPR camera, may be flagged up as suspect registrations and police sent in pursuit. Number-plates that have been stolen or cloned by criminals and used to evade prosecution for speeding, illegal parking, insurance and other offences may also land the registered car owners in trouble. And then there may be inaccuracies and delays in the data used to identify rogue cars.

A driver who bought a Northern Ireland number-plate and customised the spacing so that it spelt his name was recently pulled over in North Wales by an ANPR police team who initially refused to accept that it was a genuine registration.

The AA Motoring Trust believes that, with increasing use of ANPR, both motorists and enforcement agencies need to understand the implications of this new crime-busting technology and tighten up their respective practices.

For their part, drivers need to appreciate that the need to keep their number-plates street legal has never been so great, and that failure to do so is more likely to bring prosecution for a Construction and Use offence.

"Whereas, in the past, police officers may have unofficially turned a blind eye to number-plates covered in mud or customised registrations unless they needed to stop a car, ANPR may mean that the days of the fancy or dirty plate are numbered," says Paul Watters, head of roads and transport policy for the AA Motoring Trust.

"ANPR will help police to catch illegal vehicles and drivers together at the roadside, whereas clamping and removing rogue cars, although taking them out of circulation, rarely catches up with offenders who simply buy another cheap vehicle. However, there will be other drivers, whose number-plates are obscured or cloned, who may be caught in the net."

From the point of view of police and other enforcement agencies, the AA Trust believes that any inaccuracies in data records held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and any time lag in recording changes in motorists' circumstances may end up with drivers being caught by ANPR.

"Sometimes, wrong information is fed on to the DVLA database by car owners, who may make mistakes or by criminals who try to create a false record. With so many sources of data, such as from post offices, MoT test centres, insurance companies and people who have sold cars privately, it is critical that it is all timely and accurate now that enforcement increasingly hinges on these records," says Watters.

The AA Motoring Trust also feels that, if the use of ANPR is extended to cover documentary motoring offences without a formal appeal process in place, such as late road tax and car registration offences, there is a need for an independent adjudicator to consider quickly cases with mitigating circumstances, or for instance, if there has been an administrative mistake.

NOTES TO EDITORS: The correct layout of car number-plates is detailed on the DVLA website:

[Visit the DVLA website](#)

Living with ANPR - three golden rules for drivers:

1/ **Check your number-plates**, the frequency depending on mileage and road conditions but particularly in winter, and make sure that they are not peeling, faded, or obscured by mud or grime from the road.

2/ **Make sure your number-plates conform with the law**. Most motorists are ignorant of the legal layout requirements for number-plates, particularly when they source personalised ones. The DVLA provides clear guidelines that reputable number-plate providers should be familiar with to ensure that number-plates conform to British Standard AU 145d.

3/ **Report number-plate theft**. If your number-plates are stolen, don't dismiss it as an act of vandalism but report the theft to the police. The police will provide you with a crime reference number that can be quoted if your car is stopped by an ANPR team on suspicion of being involved in road and other criminal offences.

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