



Joining the Kiwi fleet

THINKING OF IMPORTING A CAR? WE TALK TO LOCAL EXPERTS TO GET THE SKINNY ON VEHICLE COMPLIANCE AND THE VINING PROCESS HERE IN NEW ZEALAND

Maybe you've seen a car listed locally as uncompiled, the existing rego has lapsed, or you're a little more adventurous and you've found something overseas you'd like to import? Either way, to be registered for New Zealand roads, said vehicle will need to go through the vehicle compliance process to obtain a New Zealand VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) tag. It's a process that can be scary for those having never been through it before, not helped by the number of horror stories floating around about those too-good-to-be-true, so-called steal-of-the-century buys turning into nightmare purchases. But the process is very black and white, and hopefully after reading this, you too will see it isn't really that daunting, and as long as you've got a good safe car, and the paper trail to go with it, then getting it on the road is nothing to worry about.

CHASING PAPER

The first step when planning to obtain a VIN for a car or when looking at a vehicle that has not yet got a VIN, is to check the paper trail. "When it comes to complying a vehicle, the most important first step is ensuring you have all the paper trail's original documents. If you are

buying a car that is uncompiled in New Zealand, make sure you get a receipt or a paper trail from the original owner on its international bill of sale, pink slip, title, or dereg. document, to the importer and then again, a receipt to you! The key first step is — if you are unsure whether your new potential purchase has all the right documents, make sure you call your compliance centre and ask. Do your homework before buying a car," states The Autochecker's Bronson Dunne.

It's worth stressing the point that having only copies of the documents will not suffice; they must be the originals. If a car doesn't have the original documents with it, walk away — fast.

Main bits of information needed:

- the vehicle's overseas registration papers (certificate of title / pink slip)
- evidence of vehicle ownership (purchase receipt, bill of sale)
- evidence that you are the importer of the vehicle (i.e., import entry documentation in your name, shipping papers or bill of lading)
- evidence of your New Zealand residency (driver's licence).

MAKING IT CLICK!

BRONSON DUNNE, THE AUTOCHECKER

"Pre-1955 original vehicles do not need seatbelts, unless requested by an LVV Certifier on a modified car.

"1955-1979: if the seat belt anchors are OE and the seatbelts are OE and in good condition, the seatbelts can remain. If aftermarket belts are fitted, they must be three-point belts. If the third anchor point is not OE, then these will require LVV Certification. For pillarless cars you can use an aftermarket lap belt to OE anchors and obtain a B Pillar Exemption from your LVVTA [Low Volume Vehicle Technical Association] Certifier.

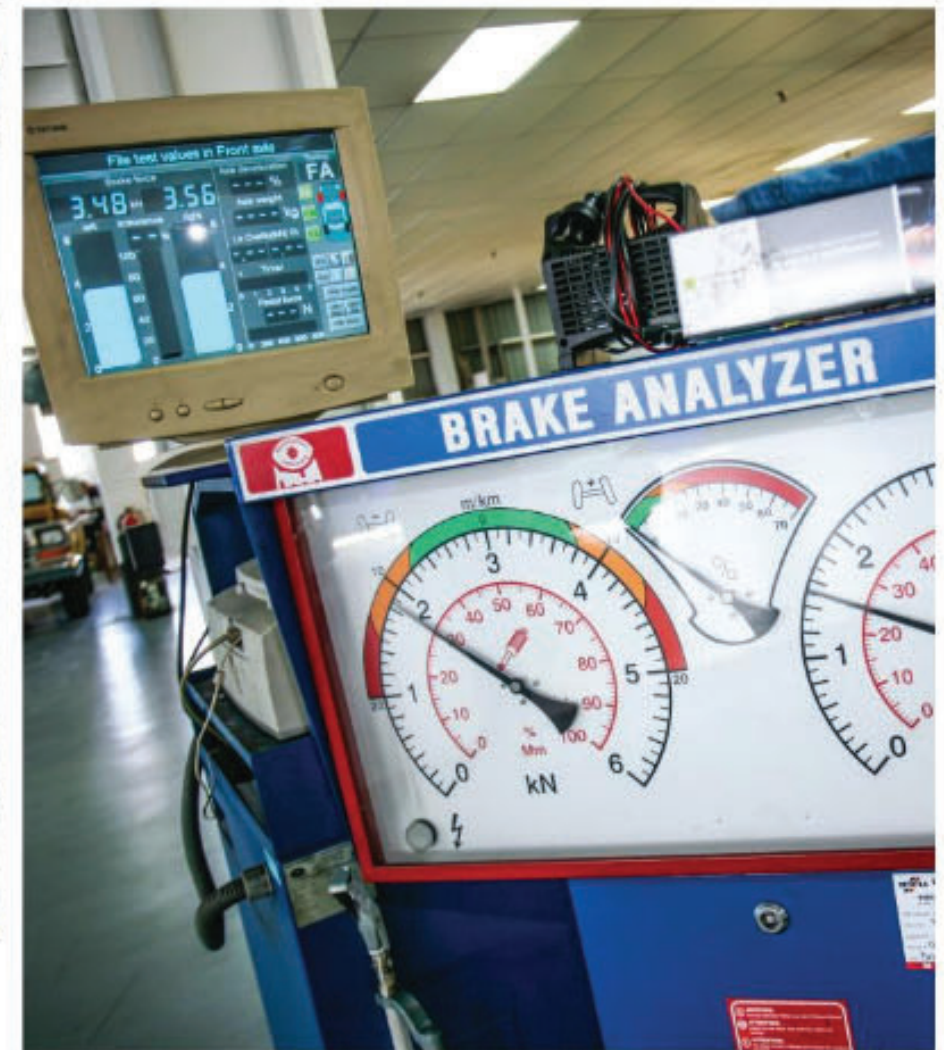
"1979-2003: Unless the car has a driver's airbag, you are required to fit dual-sensitive seatbelts or ELR [emergency locking retractor] belts. If there is an airbag in the car, then you can run the OE single-sensitive seatbelts with an 'SEBELTSOK' tag fitted by the compliance agent."



ENTERING THE SYSTEM

Before any inspection can take place, the vehicle must be assigned a VIN. Technically, applying the number is 'VINing' a vehicle, and the rest of the procedure is 'compliance', but it's more common for the whole procedure to be referred to as 'VINing'. "A Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is the NZTA [New Zealand Transport Authority] identifier for that vehicle. It is normally etched on the rear window and attached to the car on a VIN tag and is entered in the NZTA database along with the details of the vehicle. This tag should never be tampered with or removed, as it is a legal identifier for that vehicle," explains Noel McMillin of Nostalgia Motors.

Until then, all an imported vehicle will have is an identification number given to it by MAF as it came off the wharf. If a vehicle is deemed to be in damaged condition by MAF, it will have been



ENGINE COMPARTMENT

1. Front crush zones
2. Chassis rails
3. Inner guards
4. Firewall
5. Suspension towers and mountings
6. Radiator-support panel

PASSENGER COMPARTMENT

1. Exposed floor areas
2. Floor to inner sill seams
3. Pillars
4. Cross members
5. Seat and seat-belt anchorages

EXTERIOR

1. Door frames, locks, and hinges
2. Pillars
3. Sills
4. Roof guttering

LUGGAGE/CARGO COMPARTMENT

1. Suspension towers and mountings
2. Seat-belt anchorages
3. Floor
4. Rear panel
5. Spare-wheel well

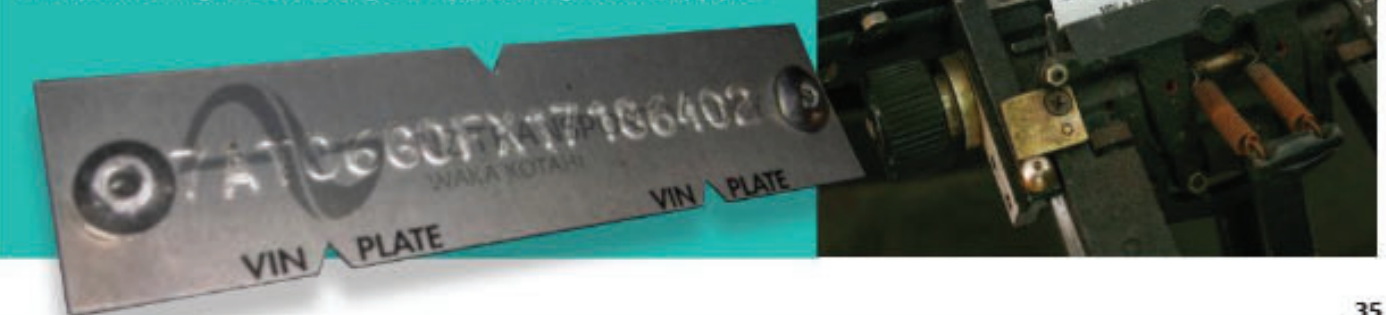
UNDERBODY AND/OR CHASSIS

1. Front and rear crush zones
2. Chassis rails and cross members
3. Floor rails
4. Steering and suspension mountings
5. Subframe mountings
6. Seat and seat-belt anchorages
7. Sills
8. Floor

WHAT IF THE OLD VIN TAG IS MISSING?

NOEL MCMILLIN, NOSTALGIA MOTORS

"If you have a vehicle previously registered in New Zealand that has no VIN tag, you will need to provide evidence to NZTA proving the vehicle or various parts are authentic. The Vintage Car Club of New Zealand is often helpful here and often provides what is called an 'Authenticity Report'. Other types of evidence include a statutory declaration from a previous owner, pictures in magazines, previous registration papers, or original ownership papers."





new floor pans, it may require a repair cert. If this is required, the process would be to get a VIN issued and fitted at an approved shop that you intend to do the complete VIN inspection with at a later date. This way, the 20-day limit does not apply. Once the vehicle has had a VIN issued, you need to contact a repair certifier (there is an online list). They will then carry out an inspection before any repair work starts and advise you on the process to move forward. Once the repair cert has been issued and any other work the vehicle requires is carried out, it can be presented for a VIN inspection."

The vehicle will be lifted on a hoist to check for movement in suspension and steering components. All four tyres are inspected for unusual wear patterns and any signs of rubbing. Aftermarket wheels don't cause any concern as long as the sizing fits within the WOF guidelines, they don't rub on anything, and no wheel spacers are used.

Next up, the hoist is raised to allow the inspector full access to the underside of the vehicle. Starting from the rear, the inspector looks for any signs of rust and damage, as well as the condition of items such as shocks, brake hoses, driveshaft universals, seat-belt anchorages, engine mounts, and steering/



suspension bushes.

The next stage is checking the car's brakes. With all four wheels removed, the front discs and pads are checked for thickness, as are the rear drums. Russell Lowe of The Toy Shed says, "The idea is to present the vehicle for inspection with the best possible chance of getting a pass first time round. This is one of the most common issues that will fail a VIN inspection on an older car, so unless the brakes have been recently rebuilt we would, if required, machine the discs/drums, fit new shoes/pads, wheels, cylinders, and brake hoses as deemed necessary. We have an in-house brake machine to test the brakes, so we can supply a declaration that can be presented when the car goes for a VIN

showing what work has been carried out and who did the work."

Another important thing to remember is, if the wheels on the vehicle have lock nuts, then it's essential to provide the correct tool for removing them. Failure to do so will result in a failed inspection, as the brakes are unable to be fully inspected. With the wheels off, other components such as body mounts, steering joints, and coil springs can also be inspected.

TESTING TIME

Following the visual inspection, it's then time to put everything to the test. The car is driven up onto the brake-testing machine. First the front wheels, then



the rear wheels, then the handbrake are tested. Then the lights, head/tail and indicators, along with the horn are tested. The common failures in these tests are apparently caused by people not changing the headlights from right facing to left facing, or people purchasing cheap lights that they think are left facing but turn out not to be. These must be changed before a car can be compiled. Obviously, if the car you purchase is right-hand drive, you shouldn't have a problem, as in theory it will have come from a country that drives on the left-hand side of the road. The focus of the headlights is also checked, as it would be for a WOF. The Autochecker's Bronson Dunne's top five most common failures are: "Headlights not working, headlights aiming the wrong way, excessive steering-box play, horn not working, and dodgy brake-light switches."

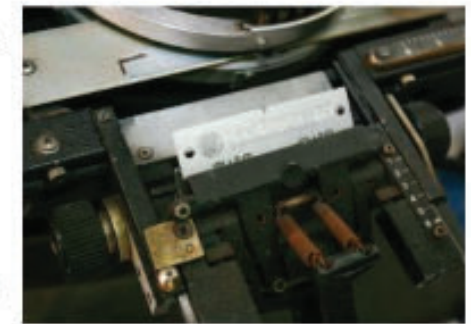
If your vehicle is younger than 20 years, there are also a few other standards that it will have to pass that older vehicles are exempt from, as Bronson continues: "Basically a 20-year or older 'classic vehicle' does not require a few key items that a newer vehicle does; i.e., there is no emission/gas testing, does not need to be frontal-impact compliant, and can retain the OE [original equipment] lap belts, as long as they are not aftermarket."

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

If the vehicle you imported or purchased has been modified in any way it will require Low Volume Vehicle (LVV) Certification. One trap that many can fall into is that, from the time of the VIN inspection, you only have 20 working days to make changes and get it rechecked. If you do not make the required repairs in this time frame, the car will need another inspection, resulting in more cost to you, the vehicle owner.

Especially with older cars, problems can arise when you need to source hard-to-obtain parts that can't be found and fitted to the car within that period. The only way around the 20-day time frame is if

the vehicle remains, and the parts are fitted, at the compliance centre. The smart option, as Russell Lowe from The Toy Shed explains, is to have the certification sorted before undergoing compliance: "When we first check over the vehicle pre VIN, we would advise the owner at this stage if it may require a repair cert or Low Volume Cert. If either type of cert is required, we would take the vehicle to have a VIN issued and affixed to the vehicle, as this is required before the cert process can be started." By doing it this way, you are not locked into a 20-day limit, which would be nearly impossible to meet.



NOT ALL ARE CREATED EQUAL

RUSSELL LOWE, THE TOY SHED

"The biggest problem with buying a modified car from the USA is there are no rules at all controlling how any repairs or modifications are carried out (no cert or WOF required). As a workshop specialising in older American cars, we get to see lots of horrendous repairs and mods — crazy stuff like a '55 Chev pickup we are doing at the moment that has had a fuel tank fitted that was too big to fit between the chassis rails, so they have cut large sections out of the chassis to make the fuel tank fit! Also as an example are suspension modifications that have steering universals that bind and contact the engine and have huge bump-steer issues that result in large investments of cash needed to rectify it and to be able pass the Low Volume Cert system. You would have all seen on American TV shows 'it runs and drives', with no consideration given to safety."



HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

FLO ORLANDEA, CANTERBURY VEHICLE COMPLIANCE

"The duration of the inspection process for a classic/vintage differs from car to car but not by much. The stripping process can take quite a bit of time, especially when dealing with a restored vehicle or a vehicle with a high-end finish. Altogether, there are several hours of work assigned to a vehicle. The vehicle must be presented in a clean state and running order, to be complete as if undergoing a WOF inspection, have enough fuel in it, and definitely not a flat battery. Although the VIN and compliance process can easily be completed within a day, the process will be lengthy if a repair cert or LWTA Certification is required. Most of the classics can arrive with quite a bit of rust hidden in places, or if they have been flagged at the border for rust or damage. Those vehicles will have to be inspected by a repair certifier that will oversee the repair process before issuing a repair certificate to prove that the vehicle has been repaired to the required standard."

SUMMARY

Don't necessarily shy away from buying a vehicle without a VIN, unless you aren't sure about the quality of the vehicle or it doesn't have the required paperwork, as Flo Orlandea of Canterbury Vehicle Compliance states: "Buying a vehicle without a VIN can raise questions sometimes, but if there is a trail link of documents to prove legal entitlement and original documents to prove previous registration in any country, as per [the]VIRM [Vehicle Inspection Requirements Manual], that should not be an issue to get that vehicle through a compliance inspection." Flo also brings up another good point: "Vehicles that require any special permits must be registered on the importer's name and they will have to stay on their



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name for a period of time that can be max four years – i.e., LHD permit [left-hand drive] or SIV permit [special interest vehicles]." So make sure that, if your vehicle has a special permit, it's the importer that you are buying it off, or at least talk to the importer first and know that they are trustworthy. When it comes to getting a VIN, you will have to get them to the compliance centre to sign documentation and provide identification, and the same again when you get the vehicle's registration. If there's a

chance you may not be able to get the importer to the compliance centre, you might end up in a sticky situation.

Overall, the key is to make sure you do your homework, know what you are buying, and absolutely have all the necessary documentation to ensure the process runs smoothly. Happy hunting.

Auto Channel thanks the following companies for their expertise in producing this article:

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