

## WHAT IS A VIN AND HOW DO I READ THE NUMBER?

In 1954, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) began requiring standardized VIN's for all road vehicles.

Most people believe the VIN is just a series of random numbers and letters. But these characters are highly structured codes which have their own meaning. Vehicles from model year 1981 to present have a VIN made up of 17 characters (letters and numbers). The prior VIN length and format varied among vehicles.

The VIN can often be found on the lower-left corner of the dashboard, in front of the steering wheel. You can read the number by looking through the windshield on the driver's side of the vehicle.

The VIN may also appear in a number of other locations:

- **Front of the engine block.** This should be easy to spot by popping open the hood, and looking at the front of the engine.
- **Front of the car frame,** near the container that holds windshield washer fluid.
- **Rear wheel well.** Try looking up, directly above the tire.
- **Inside the driver-side doorjamb.** Open the door and look underneath where the side-view mirror would be located if the door was shut.
- **Driver-side doorpost.** Open the door and look near the spot where the door latches, not too far from the seatbelt return.
- **Underneath the spare tire.**

The first character of the VIN indicates the country in which the vehicle was manufactured. **VIN's starting with 1, 4, and 5 are manufactured in the United States.** The third number or letter is used by the vehicle manufacturer to identify what kind of vehicle it is: car, truck, bus, etc. The 10<sup>th</sup> character of the VIN indicates the model year.

Here is an example of a VIN's meaning:

