

Restrictions on Driving Antique Vehicles

This topic is endlessly brought up on the various Power Wagon forums - and I would expect on all other collector car forums. In almost every case, someone is reacting to what someone told them about all the forbidden uses of an antique or collectible vehicle.

Think before you react.

We all tend to react to these issues emotionally before we react intellectually. That's because almost none of those who write the laws have any first hand experience with these vehicles and do not know how they are driven by the hobbyists who own them.

This ignorance is exacerbated by their poor linguistic skills. If I said they were "anti-semantic" they would probably say, "Not true, some of my best friends are Jewish." I know some of you don't get this joke, so we must cut the law writers the same slack as we cut for you.

Regardless of their poor wording, the restrictions are not intended to restrict the vehicles from being used for any legitimate collector hobby related activity.

So, what are the restrictions?

Quite simply, the intent of the restrictions on antique plates is to keep those vehicles from being used for "everyday" transportation. That means uses such as driving to work or using them in your job.

Also, because most states have reduced registration fees, the restrictions are intended to prevent people from abusing the antique vehicle registrations to avoid paying their true share of these fees.

Additionally, many states exempt antique vehicles from safety inspections and emissions testing requirements. Again, the restrictions are in place to prevent registering a vehicle as an antique to circumvent these procedures.

Some of you say that in your state, "you can only drive it to be repaired, or a parade or other vintage vehicle event." Is that what the code really says?

"You can only drive it to be repaired..."

"You can only drive it to be repaired..." would mean the law was deliberately written to force you to take your vehicle to a commercial repair facility instead of allowing you to do your own repairs. Clearly this law would not be enforceable. In fact, there are few commercial repair facilities that really want to work on antique vehicles.

Parades

This use of antique vehicles may be the one most clearly understood by those who write the laws. Even so, the rules for how far you can drive to a parade are seldom stated so their lack of knowledge shows up again. I have never heard of anyone being challenged by any law enforcement officer on this issue.

Other Vintage Vehicle Event

It all comes down to this. Any activity which is legitimately part of the automobile collecting hobby is such an event.

A well known "other vintage vehicle event" would be that, if your vehicle qualifies for participation, you can drive it across the United States in the "Great American Race" and be within the provisions of the laws.

Included are maintenance, displaying the vehicle to include any of its unique capabilities, attending collector gatherings, and just about every other thing we might do with our vehicles that promotes interest in the vehicles or in the hobby of collecting them.

Maintenance

Obviously the intention of the actual code wording would not be to restrict you from driving it for maintenance. Because several of my vehicles are Former Military Vehicles, this one is too easy. In the Maintenance Section of the Operator's Manual there are specific instructions for Before Operation, During Operation, and After Operation maintenance checks. These same checks are listed in the Owner's Manual of many civilian vehicles. Any time I am driving any of my vehicles, I am applying the procedures of a During Operation maintenance check. You do watch your gauges, don't you?

Maintenance includes road testing to check operation of instruments and controls. It also includes checking out any repairs you have done.

Maintenance clearly includes driving to warm up and circulate coolants and lubricants.

Driving to charge the battery and test the charging system combines a road test with a maintenance function.

I also consider driving my vehicle to the local auto parts store to be an important part of repair and maintenance. Having the vehicle there can save a lot of time when dealing with the (I have chosen to omit any descriptive comments here) youngster behind the parts computer who knowingly tells you there is no such vehicle and never was – according to the computer. It's very helpful to say, "Look out the window and tell me that again."

What other things constitute a "vintage vehicle event"?

I sometimes drive my vehicle to the local coffee shop and visit with other vintage vehicle owners. We are all too old to discuss girls. We have varying loyalties to sports teams. We've all heard each others' "war stories" so guess what we talk about – Vintage Cars.

Because the vintage vehicle I display most often is my 1942 WC-52, I drive it to the local Wal-Mart and park it there to commemorate various World War II events. I always have it displayed somewhere on the anniversaries of D-Day, V-E and V-J days, to remind people of these events. Of course, I celebrate the anniversary of Pearl Harbor a bit more actively. That's the day I drive around crushing Datsuns, Toyotas, Mitsubishis, and Kawasaki's and hollering, "Remember Pearl Harbor!"

I have had several occasions where folks came to the Museum and asked me to help get their 4x4's unstuck, expressing their firm beliefs that only a POWER WAGON was up to the task. These rescue missions were included as antique vehicle events since they were demonstrations of the special capabilities of these great antique trucks.

Again within the scope of a vintage vehicle event, I drive my trucks where ever I expect to find another antique vehicle nut. This includes sales and auctions of antique cars and trucks.

All the above activities contribute to publicizing the Kempner POWER WAGON Museum, certainly meeting the intentions of the restrictions of the law.

In Texas, "Antique plates are issued for passenger cars, trucks, or motorcycles that are at least 25 years old and are a collector's item. The vehicle must be used exclusively for exhibitions, club activities, parades,

or other functions of public interest and not used for regular transportation. The vehicle may not carry advertising." Can you find any of my antique vehicles activities that are prohibited?

It is easier to list the things I do not do with my antique vehicles. I do not drive them to work. That's a "no brainer" since I'm retired.

Just as ATV's and personal watercraft have intruded into the spaces claimed by traditional outdoorsmen and sailors, there is a group of pseudo-antique vehicle owners intruding into the antique vehicle arena. Lately, cars are built better – at least in terms of longevity. As a result, there are many vehicles more than 25 years old that are regularly used for regular transportation. There are many more sitting in yards in less affluent neighborhoods and not used. Some are damaged. Some have been stripped of vital parts. They do not run. In most cases, the registration and inspections have expired. A suitable name for these is "derelict vehicles."

The Texas Transportation Code makes allowances for "antique" vehicles with regards to storage. It recognizes that such vehicles in the hands of a "collector" deserve special considerations which "derelict" vehicles do not merit. Yet, some folks claim "antique" status for these "derelict" vehicles to avoid fees and penalties.

Based on input from Forum visitors, it is clear that some of you drive a POWER WAGON that might qualify for privileges reserved for "antique" vehicles – except you are using your trucks for regular transportation. If you have a regular transportation vehicle and chose to drive your POWER WAGON instead, you have also chosen to meet the "regular" transportation requirements and should accept them.

If your POWER WAGON is your only vehicle, for whatever reason, again you have chosen to use it for "regular" transportation.

Some might argue that such a situation is an issue of economics. Driving an antique POWER WAGON is not the most affordable way to own a 4x4 truck. I can find a great number of decent, late-model 4x4 trucks on area used car and truck sales lots for less than it would take to buy a POWER WAGON in comparable condition.

I remember a time when all the tools I owned fit in a small tool box. I could only do the most limited repairs to the one car I owned. Collecting and restoring a POWER WAGON or two had to wait until I had some land to store some parts trucks and to park a running truck. I also had to wait until I had a workshop and a lot more tools.

I admire the young folks who have become interested in the POWER WAGON hobby. I feel a sense of loss for the entire hobby when I see "Truck for Sale - Must Sell - Need Money" These always seem to be someone who thought they could afford a POWER WAGON, tools to work on it, and the needed repair parts.

Down here in Texas we have a whole crowd of guys named, Bubba" who are constantly wanting to buy one of my restored Army Dodges to "take out to the deer lease" because "that there 4x4 is just the best ol' hunting truck there is." When I tell them the insured value of my restored WC-52, the first thing they say is to tell me I'm crazy to ask that much since there are so many used 4x4's for less. I don't even ask them why they are here at the Museum instead of a used car lot.

Deal with this issue correctly.

I suggest that you actually look up the state vehicle code and see what it really says - not what someone who has not read the code tells you. And never fail to consider that this is a person who envies you and wants to keep you from enjoying your vehicle.

Now, go out and enjoy your vehicle.