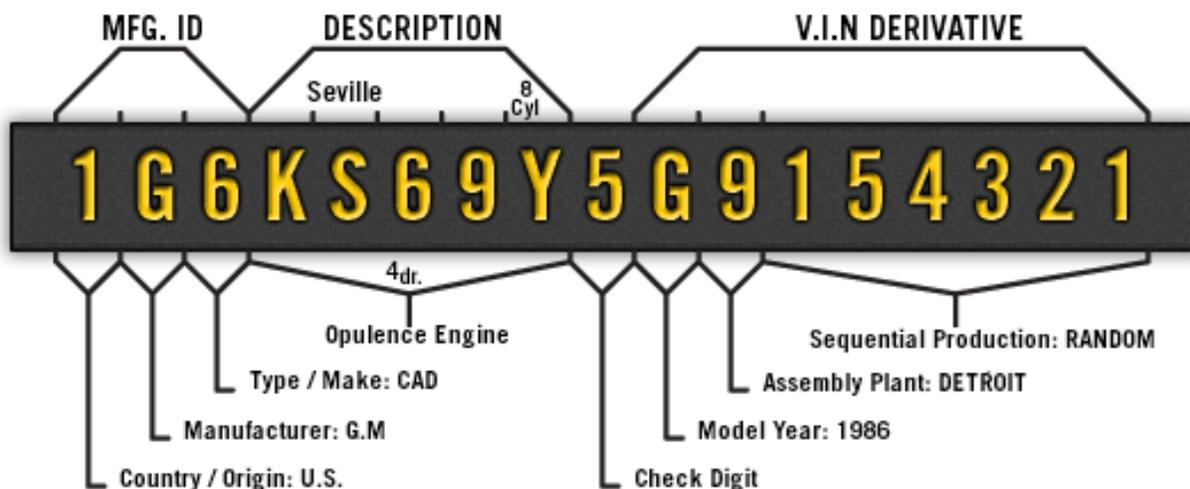


## THE VEHICLE IDENTIFICATION [VIN] NUMBER

The VIN, or Vehicle Identification Number, can be considered to be a vehicle's birth certificate, with each component of the 17-digit encrypted alphanumeric sequence representing something significant about the vehicle's origin: where and when it was made, the manufacturer, model, assembly plant, and other important authentication information. Playing a key role in validating the authenticity of a vehicle – car, truck, van, SUV, motorcycle – the VIN not only provides critical information for investigative purposes and data that an astute buyer of a used vehicle can employ to trace its history, from the assembly line to the scrap yard.



### Background

Since 1981 every vehicle manufactured for use in the U.S. was given a unique I.D. number, much like a fingerprint. The Vehicle Identification Number [VIN] is usually found on the lower right corner of the dashboard, as seen through the front windshield. In addition to this location the VIN can also be easily found on the driver side door post as part of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Certification Standard

Label, also known as the EPA Label. VINs may also appear in other less obvious locations.

Although the exact locations of vehicle identification numbers may vary between different vehicles, the following locations are most frequently used:

#### Late Model Vehicles

- Lower left corner of dashboard on driver's side
- Left side of instrument panel
- Driver's side door or door post [on EPA Label]

#### Possible Locations For Additional Vehicle Identification Numbers

- Radiator support bracket
- Engine firewall
- Inner wheel arch
- Steering column
- Owner's maintenance manual

Although U.S. auto manufacturers began the process of providing vehicle identification numbers, or chassis numbers as they were earlier called, in the mid-1950's, by stamping or casting the identifying numbers on both vehicles and certain parts, the identification process was left mostly to the initiatives of manufacturers. The program didn't become standardized and integrated into a viable national system until the early 1980's, when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, ruled that all vehicles used "on the road" must contain a standardized 17-character Vehicle Identification Number. With this action, NHTSA set in motion the VIN system that is in use today by all major vehicle manufacturers for vehicles coming off the assembly line.

As an investigative tool, the VIN opens a window to the history of any vehicle, allowing an investigator or even a party purchasing a vehicle to learn a great deal about the origin of the vehicle. Included in the information that can be decoded from the specially encrypted 17-digit VIN is information including specifications related to the vehicle such as its year and place of manufacture, model, body style, engine type, and much more.

