

Technical Notes — February '08'



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The Florida Statutes and your Corvette. As I promised in the January meeting, I will occasionally write an article that our ladies may interested to read First, think of this. Have you ever been to a car show and noticed how owners of later model Corvettes just love to load up their car with every imaginable aftermarket gadget, badge, decal and trim piece in order to distinguish it from the thousands of others on the streets? The question this month is: Are all of these gizmos legal? Now, for you Philadelphia lawyers in the crowd, I am not saying that law enforcement officers will pull you over and cite you for every item I discuss. But before you shoot back a smart-aleck remark to the guy in green, perhaps a little advance knowledge might help. Let's start with a little "review" of some pertinent Florida Statues.

Here's a little refresher quiz. The answers are at the end of the newsletter. Please don't cheat and look ahead for each answer. It will spoil my effort, as there's a bonus question at the end of the article. If you're afraid to embarrass yourself, just do it alone on your computer or printout the article and take it to the potty.

Lights: Your car must have the following lights:

1. Bright (high-beam) headlights which show objects _____ feet ahead.
2. Dimmed (low-beam) headlights which show objects _____ feet ahead.
3. Two red taillights mounted on the rear, visible from _____ feet.
4. Turn signals must be visible for a distance of _____ feet in front and to the rear of the vehicle in normal sunlight.
5. A white light that makes the license plate visible from _____ feet.
6. Two red stoplights. They must be seen from _____ feet in the daytime (normal sunlight), and must come on when the foot brake is pressed.
7. Question: Can colored bulbs, such as yellow or blue, be inserted in headlight lamp assembly (Yes / No)?
8. Your new C6 Corvette is equipped from the factory with two fog lights in front. How many additional front driving lights, spot lights, or passing lamps can you install? _____
9. How many of the above (300 candlepower or more) can be illuminated at any one time? _____

Other items:

10. Your vehicle must have a horn that can be heard from a distance of _____ feet.
11. Your tires must have a minimum of _____ inches of tread.
12. Your must have a rear view mirror that must give the driver a view of at least _____ feet to the rear of the vehicle.
13. Can you put any sign, poster, or other nontransparent material on the windshield which materially obstructs, obscures, or impairs the driver's view (Yes / No)?

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14. Is it legal to put a non-transparent (opaque) material on your Corvette's rear window to reduce heat and damage to the interior (Yes / No)?
15. The side windows may not be composed of, covered by, or treated with any material that has a highly reflective or mirrored appearance and must have a transmittance of at least _____ of the visible light on the windows adjacent to the driver or at least _____ of the visible light for side windows behind the driver.
16. You must have a horn. Can you install a whistle (Yes / No)? Or a siren (Yes / No)? Or a bell (Yes / No)?
17. Obviously, a television cannot be mounted in the vehicle so the driver can view it, but can you wear headsets to listen to your iPod (Yes / No)?

Okay, those were the easy ones. I know everyone got 100% on the first try because we all read, totally understood and will never forget any portion of the Florida Driver's handbook. But, what are the ramifications to aftermarket components?

Well, the questions pertaining to headlights, stoplights, turn signals, etc. were taken from the Florida Driver's Handbook. There is much more to the actual Florida Statutes, 316.222 – 316.237, but the gist of them can be summed up in this phrase: **“an object, material, or covering that alters the lamp's visibility [below the distance required by law] ... may not be placed, displayed, installed, affixed, or applied over a [the respective lamp].”** So, all those decals, blacked-out taillights, grilles, etc. that the aftermarket folks sell cannot reduce the light's ability to shine the required distance specified in the statutes. As I see it, most taillight grilles would probably meet the law because light emitted between the grille bars is not totally filtered or obstructed. But blacked-out lamp covers/tinting on either the front or rear lights may cause a problem. In addition, headlights must emit white light, so placing any object or material over the headlight that changes its color is also prohibited. Fog lamps are treated a bit differently. Federal DOT laws govern the maximum wattage of fog lamps, but Florida Statutes do not denote any required illumination distance. So, installing grilles or other coverings to completely impair their ability to illuminate anything in front of the vehicle is not prohibited. You can go chrome yourself to death with those lights. However, Florida law does restrict how fog lights may be selected and used by the driver. That's why manufacturers inhibit the fog lights when high beams are selected.

Window film is a big deal in this State. I know of one individual, a private investigator, who received more than one ticket for this offense. Even with the explanation that he needed heavily tinted front side windows to successfully do covert surveillance, he kept getting those expensive slips of paper. Windshields have special laws regarding tinting and items such as gated community stickers, a for-sale sign, college decals and, of course, the FCCC logo. See item 3 below.

So, the easy part is over. Here are some special items to consider when dolling up your precious toy or some laws that might affect some of us folks with 30 plus year old vehicles.

1. For you guys with the older Corvettes, let's say the parking brake on your C1, C2 or C3 is mainly to impress the judges at the NCRS meet. It looks pristine and works, but only with a block of wood on either side of the tire. Can you drive your car to Kissimmee and get it judged at the NCRS show? **NO.** The parking brake must be capable of holding the vehicle in place on **any** hill and under **any** loading conditions as long as the roadway is free of loose material. Yeah, right!
2. Again, for you guys with the older C1 Corvettes. You own a NCRS Top-Flight, “cherry” 1957 Corvette convertible that came from the factory without seat belts and the dealer never installed them as an accessory. Now, your 5-year-old grandson comes for a visit and wants to go for a ride in the 'Vette. Is it legal to take him? **No.** There are exemptions to the Florida Seat Belt laws. For example, newspaper home delivery employees are not required to wear them. And, no car manufactured prior to 1968 is even required to have seat belts. However, there are no exemptions to the seat belt law for children under the age of 6 **for any reason.**

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3. Is it legal to place your FCCC, NCRS, or American Flag sticker on your windshield? **NO.** FSS 316.2953 forbids any sign, placard or other material on the windshield that **materially obscures** the driver's view, but 316.2952 forbids any sign unless it's a certificate or paper required by law. So, if you had a sticker required by law, such as an on-base military ID sticker, you can place it on your windshield but the subsequent statute forbids you to put it where it obstructs your view. However, NCRS, FCCC or even American Flag stickers are not required by law, thus they are not permitted. FCCC club stickers should be placed on other windows of the car. Exceptions to the windshield rules also include transparent sun screening "strip" on the top portion of the windshield or a toll transponder. Unfortunately, an "American Revolution" sunscreen banner is not fully transparent, so it's technically prohibited. Likewise, non-toll transponders, such as "clickers" for garage doors and development gates are not permitted. It is interesting to note that if your 'Vette is properly equipped with mirrors; you could legally have a huge, totally opaque FCCC sticker on your back window. The logo could completely block the view through that window. Strange, huh?

4. Is it legal to tamper with, remove, or cause not to work any pollution control device on your Corvette? **NO.** Tampering is defined as the dismantling, removal, or rendering ineffective of any air pollution control device or system which has been installed on a motor vehicle by the vehicle manufacturer except to replace such device or system with a device or system equivalent in design and function to the part that was originally installed on the motor vehicle.

Therefore, some cat-back mufflers may be legal. But, Florida law prohibits you from changing or removing catalytic converters, removing PCV valves, disabling air pumps, etc. Installing a different air filter could go either way. It's probably "equivalent" since modern on-board PCM computers generally keep the air-fuel mixture stoichiometric during most driving conditions. The same applies to re-flashing the PCM or changing the engine chip. Cooling system thermostats have always caused a lot of chatter on the Internet. In the modern Corvettes, the thermostat temperature is in the 190 - 200° range. Many aftermarket folks are pushing 175° thermostats for C5s and as low at 160° for the C6. You know, a colder engine means higher horsepower. Unfortunately, the manufacturers feel hotter is better for emissions control, so watch out there.

5. Is it legal to install any muffler system on a vehicle that makes it louder than the factory original set-up? **NO.** Also, it is illegal to drive a cutout or bypass exhaust system on the street. So, Corsa and Borla folks who buy these systems for the sound should be aware of this statute requirement. For Corvettes, the specified limit in the statutes is 72 dB below 36 mph. The limit is speed based, not on RPM or throttle position. Hypothetically, let's say Chevrolet's factory exhaust emits 55 dB. If your Borlas are now 62 dB, you are technically in violation even though you are below the statute maximum value.

Florida State Statutes For Motor Vehicles, § 316.293 -- Motor vehicle noise

(5) NOISE ABATEMENT EQUIPMENT MODIFICATIONS--

No person shall modify the exhaust system of a motor vehicle or any other noise-abatement device of a motor vehicle operated or to be operated upon the highways of this state in such a manner that the noise emitted by the motor vehicle is above that emitted by the vehicle as originally manufactured.

6. Is it legal to cover any part of a Florida license plate? **NO.** Thus, **all** license plate frames are technically illegal. The actual statute quote is below. Despite the fact that a frame may allow all letters, numerals, printing, writing, etc to be legible, I can quote specific cases on file where the officer used the last sentence in writing the citation. One individual paid a \$46 fine and \$10 court costs. So, now what do you do with your new FCCC license plate frame?

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Florida State Statutes For Motor Vehicles, § 316.605, Licensing of vehicles.--

1. Every vehicle, at all times while driven, stopped, or parked upon any highways, roads, or streets of this state, ... ***[ya-dah, ya-dah, ya-dah]*** ... in such manner as to prevent the plates from swinging, and all letters, numerals, printing, writing, and other identification marks upon the plates regarding the word "Florida," the registration decal, and the alphanumeric designation shall be clear and distinct and free from defacement, mutilation, grease, and other obscuring matter, so that they will be plainly visible and legible at all times 100 feet from the rear or front. Vehicle license plates shall be affixed and displayed in such a manner that the letters and numerals shall be read from left to right parallel to the ground. No vehicle license plate may be displayed in an inverted or reversed position or in such a manner that the letters and numbers and their proper sequence are not readily identifiable. ***Nothing shall be placed upon the face of a Florida plate except as permitted by law or by rule or regulation of a governmental agency... (my emphasis)***

This statute is another example of how weird Florida law can be. Your plate must be visible and legible from 100 feet. But, when you read the answers to the questions above, you'll note that the license plate light does not have the same requirement.

Here's the bonus question: You own a C3 Corvette. You're out for the day with the club and knowing how this club is, everything event seems to end in a restaurant. In your excitement to get to the cheesecake, you accidentally leave your keys in your car. When you return, you find you're locked out. So, you spend the next 30 minutes swearing and fiddling with the door trying to get it open. Thinking you might be trying to steal this expensive sports car, a Flagler County Sheriff's Deputy comes along to investigate. Still steaming, you give him a little "attitude," but he eventually buys your story. Now, you have to spend real money and call for a locksmith. He promptly comes out, proceeds to destroy your driver's side window, and charges you a mere \$129. Question: Is that the end of your troubles? See the last page for the answer.

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Answers to Technical Questions

1. 450
2. 150
3. 1,000
4. 300
5. 50
6. 300
7. No (Remember the October 2007 Tech Article?)
8. 6 (Yep, two of each so you can have 10 total lamp fixtures on the front of your 'Vette)
9. 4 (But, at least one on each side)
10. 200
11. 2/32 (By the way, this is completely around the tire. Tires cannot have worn spots or ply showing)
12. 200
13. No
14. Yes, but only if you have side mirrors on each side of the vehicle (Forget it, C1 and C2 drivers)
15. 28%, 15%
16. No, No, No (Note: Your horn cannot emit an unreasonably loud or harsh sound or a whistle.)
17. No (Hearings aids are approved. Also, cell phone earpieces for only one ear.)

BONUS: NO. You've broken the law! So, giving the Deputy a little "attitude" was not such a good idea because he's right there and could technically cite you for a non-criminal traffic infraction under FSS 316.1975. That statute expressly forbids you to leave your vehicle unattended with the keys inside. What a day you're having! But, there is one solution: Buy a C6. It has an idiot-proof system to help you remember to take your keys with you when you go for the cheesecake.

Florida State Statute 316.1975 Unattended motor vehicle.--

(1) A person driving or in charge of any motor vehicle may not permit it to stand unattended without first stopping the engine, locking the ignition, and removing the key. A vehicle may not be permitted to stand unattended upon any perceptible grade without stopping the engine and effectively setting the brake thereon and turning the front wheels to the curb or side of the street. A violation of this section is a non-criminal traffic infraction, punishable as a nonmoving violation as provided in chapter 318.