

ODOMETER TAMPERING

[Table of Contents](#)

[Odometer Tampering Costs Millions](#)

[Tamperers face fines and jail time](#)

[Ask the seller to show you the title](#)

[Make sure mileage and wear make sense](#)

[Test drive the vehicle](#)

[Tips to avoid odometer tampering](#)

[Get a second opinion](#)

[Investigate the vehicle history](#)

[For more information](#)



ODOMETER TAMPERING

Odometer Tampering Costs Millions

Odometer tampering is a consumer fraud that costs Wisconsin citizens millions of dollars each year. It is particularly offensive because it hits those hardest who are least able to afford costly repairs. It benefits unscrupulous operators who conspire to defraud you.

This brochure is designed to alert you to the problem and to protect you from buying a tampered vehicle.

Tamperers face fines and jail time

Resetting, disconnecting, or altering a vehicle's odometer to conceal the true mileage is called "odometer tampering". It is illegal for anyone to tamper with an odometer or to sell a vehicle knowing that the odometer has been tampered with.

Whether tampering is done by a backyard mechanic who resets the odometer electronically or manually, by a person who buys a device to block miles from registering on the odometer, by a dealer who contracts with a "reconditioning" firm, or by a multi-state used car mill, odometer tampering violates state and federal laws and is punishable by fines, imprisonment, or both.

Ask the seller to show you the title

The title will tell a tale of the vehicle's history and may give you clues that your odometer has been spun. Titles show you when a vehicle was purchased, what previous odometer readings were, and where the vehicle was previously titled. Seeing the title may help expose a seller's attempt to defraud you.

- ✓ Odometer spinners will sell the vehicle without titling the vehicle in their name, or "jumping title," to avoid providing an odometer statement. This will also allow them to hide their identity. Ask for a bill of sale and ask for identification from the seller to help prevent this.
- ✓ Odometer spinners are also known to "launder" a title history by transferring vehicle ownership from state to state to hide a rollback.
- ✓ If you are buying a vehicle in Wisconsin, but the seller has a title from a non-neighboring state, you might think twice about it.
- ✓ Auction-bought vehicles with several ownership transfers may contain one or several odometer statements. Check these statements for alterations. Common alterations include changing a "1" to a "0" (e.g. 194593 to 094593) along with adding a decimal point (e.g. 194593 to 79459.3).



ODOMETER TAMPERING

- ✓ Check odometer statements on the title for consistency. If there are multiple statements provided on a reassigned title, make sure one reading isn't significantly higher or lower than the next.

Make sure mileage and wear make sense

Take a long, careful look at the vehicle. Does the condition match the miles on the odometer?

- ✓ Are the miles low, but the tires new or mismatched by size, type or brand?
- ✓ The date the tire was manufactured can be determined by coded numbers found on the tire.
- ✓ Have parts been replaced that normally would not have been replaced on a low mileage vehicle?
- ✓ Pay attention to parts such as batteries, hoses and clamps, and fan or air conditioning belts.

- ✓ Is there excessive wear in the interior, especially in the driver's seat?
- ✓ Look for maintenance stickers, warranties or other paperwork that may indicate a higher mileage. They may be found under the hood, on the air cleaner, on door jambs, in the glove box, under seats or in the trunk.

Test drive the vehicle

A thorough test drive is essential.

- ✓ Check the brakes, steering, suspension, acceleration and alignment.
- ✓ Test the vehicle when it is cold and warm, at highway and city speeds.
- ✓ Listen for any unusual noises that might suggest uncharacteristic mechanical issues.
- ✓ Check to see if the speedometer sticks while driving, or if any other instruments perform abnormally.



Tips to avoid odometer tampering

- ▶ **Examine the current odometer reading.**
 - ✓ The rule of thumb is that motor vehicles are driven an average of 12,000 miles a year.
 - ✓ A vehicle with an average far less than this mark may have had the odometer tampered with (i.e. 10 year old vehicle with 50,000 miles).
- ▶ **Examine the instrument panel.**
 - ✓ There may be evidence that the odometer was replaced recently.
 - ✓ Look to see if the instrument cluster panel is loose, does not fit, or if there are any missing screws.
- ▶ **Inspect vehicle interior**
 - ✓ If the odometer reads low miles, but the interior shows significant wear and tear, the odometer may have been tampered with.
- ▶ **Inspect vehicle exterior.**
 - ✓ Have a mechanic inspect the vehicle for wear and tear.
 - ✓ If the vehicle has low miles, but has significant wear and tear, the odometer may have been tampered with.

ODOMETER TAMPERING

Tips to avoid odometer tampering (continued)

▶ **Ask for the vehicle title.**

- ✓ The seller may alter odometer statements provided on the title to hide the true mileage of the vehicle.
- ✓ If there are signs of alteration, the odometer may have been tampered with.

▶ **Check for service stickers or repair invoices.**

- ✓ The previous owner may have kept service stickers or repair invoices that indicate an odometer reading.
- ✓ This may show the true mileage on the vehicle.

▶ **Acquire a vehicle history report before purchasing.**

- ✓ Vehicle history reports will include odometer readings that would suggest a tampered odometer.
- ✓ Always do this before purchasing.

Get a second opinion

Ask a qualified mechanic to test drive and examine the vehicle.

- ✓ Also, ask that the wheels be removed so the mechanic can inspect the brake system for excessive wear or replacement parts.
- ✓ Paying for an expert inspection before you buy may help you avoid unexpected repair costs and a lot of grief later on.

Investigate the vehicle history

Looking for information on the vehicle's past will tell you about any accidents, mechanical issues, or odometer discrepancies.

- ✓ Consider investing in a vehicle history report. There are several vendors who supply these reports on the Internet. There are often associated fees, but the information can be invaluable. It is a great tool to help verify your odometer reading.
- ✓ Talk to previous owners. Wisconsin dealers are required to provide prospective buyers with the names and address of a vehicle's former owners.
- ✓ If the title shows that the vehicle was previously titled out of state, consider checking further before you buy.

For more information

If you believe your odometer was tampered with or have other questions about odometers, please contact:

Wisconsin Department of Transportation
(WisDOT) Dealer and Agent Section
4822 Madison Yards Way
Third Floor South
Madison, WI 53705
Phone: (608) 266-1425
Email: dealers.dmv@dot.wi.gov

