



# License To Drive: A History of License Plates

While the first “everyday” automobile hit the streets in 1908, license plates have actually been around for much longer. The first country to introduce the license plate was France in 1893, with the passage of the Paris Police Ordinance. Germany followed suit in 1896 and the Netherlands became the first country to introduce a national license plate known as a driving permit in 1898. Mid America Motorworks takes a look at the history of license plates, from a simple white plate with black letters to vanity plates that add personality to your ride.

## Early US Plates

In the US, where each state issues plates, New York State has required plates since 1901, first requiring owners to make their initials clearly visible on the back of the vehicle. New York was ahead of the curve in vanity plates! Initially, plates were not government issued in most jurisdictions and motorists were obliged to make their own. The first license plates in the United States were made out of leather, rubber, iron and porcelain, and painted on the front in usually two different colors. One color was used for the background and another for the lettering.

In 1903, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts became the first state to issue plates. By 1918, virtually every state had adopted its own form of license plates. License plate formatting typically followed this method:

- Registration number in large digits
- Two- or four-digit year in smaller lettering on one side of the plate
- An abbreviated state name



Each year, citizens were usually required to obtain a new license plate from the state government, which would have a different color scheme than the previous year, making it easier for police to identify whether citizens were current with their vehicle registration.

## License Plate Law

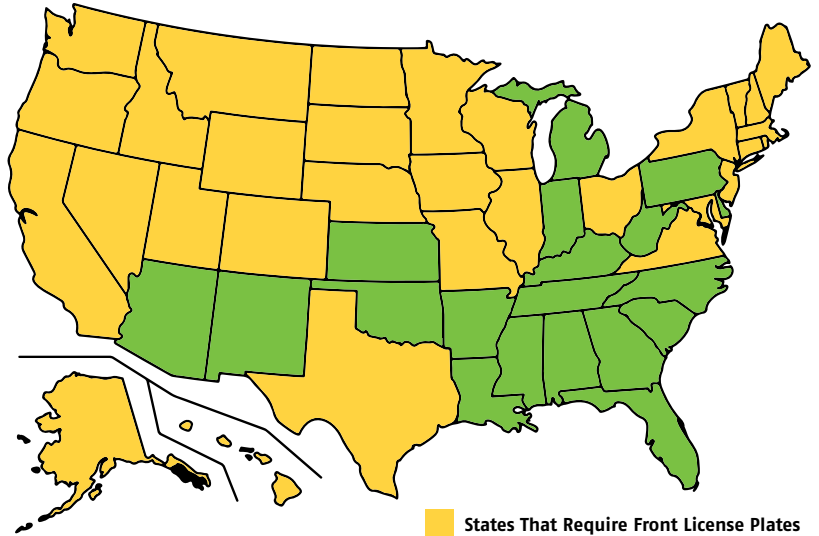
In 1960 the University of Illinois published an engineering study that recommended that the state of Illinois adopt a numbering system and plate design “composed of combinations of characters which can be perceived quickly and accurately, are legible at a distance of approximately 125 feet (38 m) under daylight conditions, and are readily adapted to filing and administrative procedures.” It also recommended that a standard plate size of 6 inches by 14 inches be adopted through the United States to replace the earlier 6 inch by 12 inch size to allow longer registration numbers to be displayed without excessively tight spacing or excessively thin or narrow characters.



Today, a standard, full size license plate is 6 inches by 12 inches. The main requirements for automobile license plates are pretty straightforward. Specifically:

- The plate should be currently valid and clearly **visible**.
- The plate should be mounted to the car in the proper place in a manner that is free of obstruction.
- All of the numbers and letters should be clearly visible, as well as any other identifying markers.

Some states require a license plate to be displayed on the front and rear of a vehicle, while other states only require rear plates. The 19 states that require only the rear license plate are:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Arizona
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Indiana
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Michigan
- Mississippi
- New Mexico
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- West Virginia



 States That Require Front License Plates  
 States That Do Not Require Front License Plates



### Add Your Own Style

Typically, if you bought your Corvette new, it left the dealership with a license plate frame that displays the dealership's company name. As we all know, one of the fun parts of owning a Corvette is personalization and the license plate frame is a great place to start! License plate frames are inexpensive and come in chrome, painted plastic, carbon fiber and stainless steel. The other factor you may consider when picking your license plate frame is the wording – or absence of wording. Some Corvette owners choose to have a plain sleek license plate frame, while others choose a saying or try to find a match to their exact model car.



### Front License Plates

If you live in a state that requires front plates, but don't love the look of a plate, there is a solution! Removable front license plate brackets keep your Corvette legal on the road, while also giving your Corvette a sleek appearance while parked. There are a few options, from Velcro to removable brackets, and even retractable brackets that keep the plate on your Corvette, but hidden while parked.

If your state doesn't require a front plate or your Corvette is a show car that travels by trailer, the front plate can be filled with a personalized plate that displays the Corvette logo, script or style of your choice.

While license plates are required in all states, and there is no longer freedom to fabricate your own, there are still many options to personalize your plates to match your Corvette style!

