MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK

How to run a **motorcycle VIN check** before you buy: decode any bike VIN, find the frame stamp, run a stolen motorcycle check and a title check, read a **motorcycle history report**, decode Harley VINs, and see what **Carfax for motorcycles** really means.

Free	3	$14.99
motorcycle VIN lookup at carcheckervin.com	real bike VINs decoded with NHTSA data	full motorcycle history report

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ABOUT THIS MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK GUIDE

A **motorcycle VIN check** takes the 17 characters stamped on a bike's frame and turns them into answers: what the motorcycle really is, whether its paperwork tells the truth, and whether anything on record says you should walk away. This guide shows you how to run one properly, from reading the frame stamp to reading the full history.

It is published by **CarCheckerVIN (carcheckervin.com)**, which runs a free VIN decoder and **motorcycle VIN lookup** and sells full vehicle history reports. The three example VINs in Chapter 4 were decoded in November 2026 with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's free vPIC database; their check digits are valid and their serial numbers are illustrative. Federal rules are quoted from the regulations themselves (49 CFR Parts 565, 567 and 580), and state rules name the state they come from.

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FREE MOTORCYCLE VIN LOOKUP

Check a bike while you read

Enter any 17-character motorcycle VIN at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup** to decode the year, make, model and engine and see a free preview of the history records on file. No card, no sign-up. The full motorcycle history report is $14.99.

How to use this guide

Buying a used bike
Read Chapters 1, 3, 6, 7 and 9, then run the free checks on every bike you're considering before you pay for a report.

Harley or brand shopper
Chapters 4 and 5 decode real VINs and explain Harley-Davidson's VIN layout and other makers' codes.

Dirt bike or project bike
Chapter 10 covers off-road VINs and California's sticker rules; Chapter 7 covers bikes with missing titles.

BUYER'S SHORTCUT

WHERE TO RUN A MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK & WHERE TO BUY THE REPORT

Some motorcycle checks are free and worth running on every bike you look at. One costs money and is worth it only on the bike you're about to buy. Here's which is which.

OUR PICK

CarCheckerVIN · www.carcheckervin.com

- **Free motorcycle VIN lookup:** year, make, model, engine and plant
- **Free history preview** for the same VIN, with no credit card
- **Full motorcycle history report: $14.99**, no subscription
- **Packs:** 3 for $35.99, 5 for $54.99, 10 for $89.99 ($9 a report)
- Title records and state title brands, plus NMVTIS title records
- Odometer readings, owner count, lien and impound records
- Insurance total-loss records and auction sales with photos
- Open recalls, service records, factory specs and market value

Run a free motorcycle VIN check at carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup →

Motorcycle VIN check options compared

Where	Cost	What it answers for a motorcycle
CarCheckerVIN	Decode & preview free; report $14.99	Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, liens, total-loss and auction records for the frame VIN
NICB VINCheck	Free; 5 searches per 24 hours	Stolen-not-recovered and insurer total-loss records from participating insurers; covers some motorcycles
NHTSA recall lookup	Free	Open safety recalls; recall repairs are free at franchised dealers
NHTSA vPIC decoder	Free	Manufacturer-reported specs and a check-digit verdict; no history
State DMV title record	Varies by state	The current title and brand in that one state
Carfax	Car report widely quoted at $44.99	Strongest on car service records; confirm a motorcycle VIN returns records before you pay

How to choose

- [ ] Run the free decode first: if the year, model or engine doesn't match the ad, you're done.
- [ ] Run NICB VINCheck and the NHTSA recall lookup on every serious candidate.
- [ ] Pick a report that shows title brands, odometer readings and total-loss records by date.
- [ ] Prefer one that shows auction photos: they show damage a seller won't mention.

Comparing several bikes? Use a pack: five reports cost $54.99. Dealers get wholesale pricing, bulk API access and white-label reports at **carcheckervin.com/dealers**.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK?

A **motorcycle VIN check** uses the bike's vehicle identification number to answer two questions before you pay: *is this motorcycle what the seller says it is*, and *has anything happened to it that the seller isn't mentioning?*

Motorcycle VIN lookup, decoder, check and history report

Term	What it does	What you learn
Motorcycle VIN decoder	Translates the 17 characters using the maker's own codes	Year, make, model, engine size, horsepower, plant
Motorcycle VIN lookup	Decodes the VIN and searches the records tied to it	Specs plus a summary of what's on file
Motorcycle VIN check	Looks for specific problems linked to the VIN	Theft flag, title brand, total loss, open recall
Motorcycle history report	A dated timeline of the records for that frame VIN	Titles, brands, odometer readings, liens, auctions

Why a used motorcycle needs a VIN check even more than a car

Bikes are easy to move

A motorcycle can be rolled into a van in minutes, and its major parts unbolt. That makes theft, parting out and "re-papering" (giving a stolen bike a new identity) easier than with cars.

Titles are less consistent

Not every state titles every motorcycle. Maine, for example, titles only motorcycles of 300 cc or more, and only model years within the last 25 years. Bikes can change hands for years on a bill of sale alone.

Frames and engines are separate

The VIN on the frame is the bike's legal identity, but engines carry their own numbers and get swapped. A VIN check plus an engine-number check tells you whether the motor in front of you is the one the bike left the factory with.

Crash damage is cheap to hide

A crashed bike can look new after fresh bodywork, levers and paint. Total-loss records and auction photos can tell the story the bodywork hides.

What you can check free, and what costs money

Free

- Decoding the VIN (CarCheckerVIN or NHTSA vPIC)
- NICB VINCheck for theft and total-loss records (some motorcycles)
- NHTSA recall lookup
- CarCheckerVIN's history preview

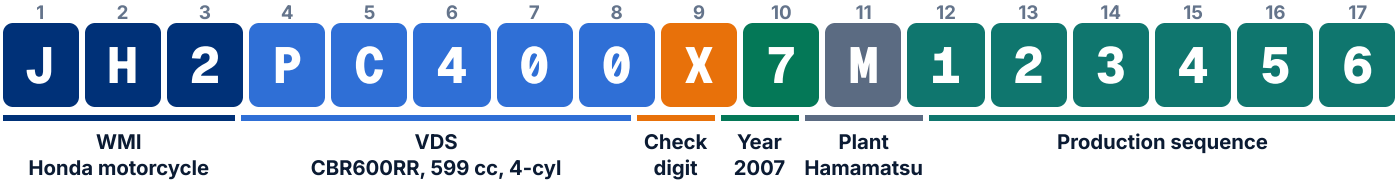
Paid

- A full motorcycle history report: title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, liens, total-loss records and auction sales with photos ($14.99 at carcheckervin.com)
- A pre-purchase inspection by a motorcycle mechanic

CHAPTER 2

HOW A MOTORCYCLE VIN IS BUILT

Motorcycles carry the same 17-character VIN as cars, under the same federal rule, 49 CFR Part 565. What differs is what the middle of the number must describe. Here is a 2007 Honda CBR600RR VIN decoded with NHTSA's vPIC database.



Position	Value	Section	Decoded meaning (NHTSA vPIC)
1–3	JH2	World manufacturer identifier	Honda Motor Co., Ltd.; vehicle type motorcycle
4–8	PC400	Vehicle descriptor (VDS)	CBR600RR, sport motorcycle, 599 cc four-cylinder, 113 hp
9	X	Check digit	Valid: “VIN decoded clean” (X means a remainder of 10)
10	7	Model year	2007
11	M	Plant	Hamamatsu Factory, Shizuoka, Japan
12–17	123456	Sequence	Production number (illustrative in this example)

What the VDS must describe on a motorcycle

Positions 4 through 8 have to identify a different set of facts for each vehicle type. The table below quotes the current rule, 49 CFR 565.15, Table I:

Vehicle type	Attributes the VDS must make decipherable
Motorcycle	Make, type of motorcycle, line, engine type, and net brake horsepower
Passenger car	Make, line, series, body type, engine type, and all restraint devices and their location
Truck	Make, model or line, series, chassis, cab type, engine type, brake system, GVWR (plus restraints at 10,000 lb or less)

Horsepower is part of the code

Cars don't encode power; motorcycles must. The rule says the net brake horsepower encoded in the VIN may differ from the actual figure by no more than 10 percent. That is why NHTSA's decoder returns a horsepower figure for many bikes: 113 hp for the CBR600RR above and 92 hp for the Harley-Davidson in Chapter 4.

The maker writes the code

The rule says *what* must be decipherable, not *how*. Each manufacturer picks its own characters for positions 4–8 and files the key with NHTSA, which is why “PC400” means a CBR600RR only to a decoder that has Honda's data. Free decoders such as **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-decoder** use that manufacturer-reported data.

POSITIONS 10–17: MODEL YEAR, PLANT & SERIAL

The last eight characters say *which* motorcycle it is. One shortcut that helps date cars does not apply to bikes, and that matters when a seller's year and the VIN's year disagree.

No 7th-character shortcut on motorcycles

Year codes repeat every 30 years: “H” in position 10 can mean 1987 or 2017. For passenger cars, SUVs and trucks of 10,000 lb or less, the rule makes position 7 a letter on 2010-and-later vehicles, so a decoder knows which cycle applies. That requirement in 49 CFR 565.15 is written for those vehicle types only. Motorcycles have no such marker, so a **motorcycle VIN decoder** has to infer the cycle, and NHTSA's decoder says so: our 2017 Harley-Davidson decode in Chapter 4 came back with the warning that the model year “may be incorrect”.

Code	1980–2009 cycle	2010–2039 cycle	Code	1980–2009 cycle	2010–2039 cycle	Code	1980–2009 cycle	2010–2039 cycle
A	1980	2010	L	1990	2020	Y	2000	2030
B	1981	2011	M	1991	2021	1	2001	2031
C	1982	2012	N	1992	2022	2	2002	2032
D	1983	2013	P	1993	2023	3	2003	2033
E	1984	2014	R	1994	2024	4	2004	2034
F	1985	2015	S	1995	2025	5	2005	2035
G	1986	2016	T	1996	2026	6	2006	2036
H	1987	2017	V	1997	2027	7	2007	2037
J	1988	2018	W	1998	2028	8	2008	2038
K	1989	2019	X	1999	2029	9	2009	2039

Never used in position 10: I, O, Q, U, Z and 0. The 17-character format applies from model year 1981, so an older road bike has a maker-specific serial number instead.

How to settle a bike’s model year

1. **Read the certification label.** Federal rules (49 CFR 567.4) require it to show the month and year of manufacture.
2. **Check the title.** The model year on the title should match one of the two candidate years.
3. **Use common sense.** A fuel-injected bike with ABS isn't a 1987 model, whatever the code allows.

Plant and serial

Position 11 is the assembly plant, in the maker's own code: “M” is Honda's Hamamatsu factory on our CBR600RR, and “B” is York, Pennsylvania on our Harley-Davidson.

Positions 12–17 are the production sequence. For motorcycles the rule makes the last four characters numeric (cars and light trucks must have five).

Small makers of fewer than 1,000 vehicles of a type a year put a “9” in position 3; positions 12–14 complete their identifier and only 15–17 count bikes. Expect that on low-volume and custom builders.

THE CHECK DIGIT ON A MOTORCYCLE VIN

Position 9 is a math check on the other 16 characters. It catches most typos and most invented VINs. Here's the full calculation on our Honda CBR600RR, JH2PC400X7M123456, which happens to end up with the letter X.

Step 1: give every character a value

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	7	9	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Digits keep their own value. The letters I, O and Q are never used in a VIN, so they have no value.

Step 2: multiply by the position weight

Pos.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
VIN	J	H	2	P	C	4	0	0	X	7	M	1	2	3	4	5	6
Value	1	8	2	7	3	4	0	0	–	7	4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Weight	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	10	0	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
Product	8	56	12	35	12	12	0	0	0	63	32	7	12	15	16	15	12

Step 3: divide by 11

The products add up to **307**. Divide by 11: 307 = 27 × 11 + **10**. A remainder of 10 is written as **X**, and position 9 of JH2PC400**X**7M123456 is indeed X. Any remainder from 0 to 9 is written as that digit.

Do it in a spreadsheet

Put the 17 values in one row and the weights 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 10, 0, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 in the next, then use `=MOD(SUMPRODUCT(row1,row2),11)`. Or let a tool do it: **carcheckervin.com/vin-check-digit-calculator**.

What the check digit tells a bike buyer

- **Typo caught:** a single wrong character almost always breaks the math, so recheck the stamp before you assume the worst.
- **Made-up VIN exposed:** a random 17 characters fails the check about 10 times in 11.
- **Clone not caught:** a VIN copied from a real bike passes perfectly, which is why the check digit is only step one.
- **Older bikes:** pre-1981 serials don't follow the standard check digit.

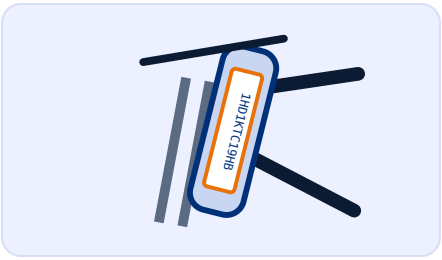
When the frame stamp fails the check

Write the stamped VIN down character by character in good light, then run it again. If the VIN *stamped on the frame* still fails, stop. On a road motorcycle built for the U.S. market since 1981, a frame VIN with a bad check digit points to a re-stamped or altered number, and Chapter 6 explains why you shouldn't buy it.

CHAPTER 3

WHERE IS THE VIN ON A MOTORCYCLE?

Unlike a car, a motorcycle has no windshield plate. The federal rule only says the VIN must be marked clearly and indelibly on a part not designed to be removed except for repair, or on a permanently attached plate or label (49 CFR 565.13). In practice, look in these places.



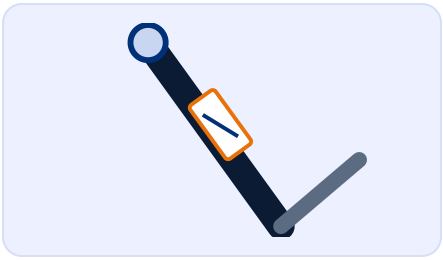
Steering head stamp

The frame stamp at the steering head is the first place to look. Harley-Davidson documents the right side of the frame near the steering head.



Certification label

Federal rules put it close to where the steering post meets the handlebars. It lists the VIN and build month and year.



Frame downtube label

Some bikes add a printed VIN label on the front downtube; Harley-Davidson does in some markets.



Engine cases

The engine number, not the VIN. Harley stamps an abbreviated VIN on the left crankcase between the cylinders.



Certificate of title

The VIN is printed near the top with the year and make. It must match the frame stamp exactly.



Registration & insurance

Registration cards and insurance documents repeat the VIN. Useful, but they only copy what was typed in.

Frame VIN, label and paperwork: which one wins?

Where	What it is	How much to trust it
Frame stamp	The VIN marked into the frame itself	The legal identity of the bike; everything else must match it
Certification label	The maker's federal label, with VIN and build date	Strong evidence; a missing label isn't proof of theft but needs explaining
Title & registration	State documents that copy the VIN	Only as good as the person who typed them; compare character by character
Ad or seller's message	Whatever the seller wrote	Never decode from the ad alone; read the frame yourself

Find brand-by-brand locations and run the number at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup**.

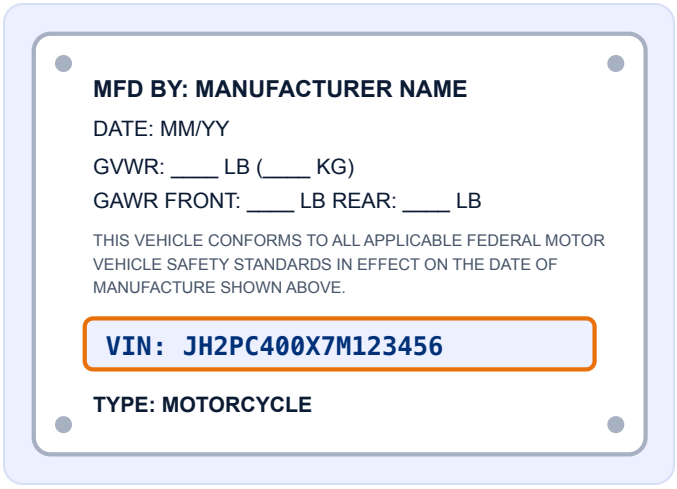
THE LABEL, THE STAMP & THE ENGINE NUMBER

Three numbers on a motorcycle tell you whether its identity hangs together: the frame VIN, the VIN on the certification label, and the engine number. Learn to read all three.

What the certification label shows

Every motorcycle sold in the U.S. gets a manufacturer's certification label under 49 CFR 567.4, attached so it can't be removed without destroying or defacing it, on a permanent part as close as practicable to where the steering post meets the handlebars. It must show, in this order:

- The manufacturer's name (“Manufactured by” or “Mfd by”)
- Month and year of manufacture
- Gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR)
- Gross axle weight rating (GAWR) for each axle
- A federal safety-standards compliance statement
- The vehicle identification number
- The type classification (for example, motorcycle)



Illustrative label layout; real labels add tire and rim details where required.

How to read a stamped frame VIN

1. Turn the bars to full lock to reach the steering head; wipe the area with a rag, never a wire brush.
2. Shine a flashlight across the stamp at a low angle so the characters cast shadows.
3. Photograph it, zoom in, and compare it character by character with the title.
4. Look for even depth, even spacing and one consistent font across all 17 characters.
5. Be wary of fresh paint, filler, grinding marks or a smooth patch around the stamp.

VIN vs engine number

	Frame VIN	Engine number
Identifies	The motorcycle, legally	The engine, which can be replaced
Where	Frame and certification label	Engine cases; Harley: left crankcase between the cylinders
On the title?	Always	Some states record it; California's vehicle verification form for a motorcycle must include both engine and frame numbers

California also requires a vehicle verification to record an engine change or a motorcycle engine case change, and uses the electric motor's serial number as the engine number on an electric motorcycle.

CHAPTER 4

THREE REAL MOTORCYCLE VINS, DECODED

Each VIN below was decoded in November 2026 with NHTSA's vPIC decoder and came back "VIN decoded clean". Serial numbers (positions 12–17) are illustrative; patterns and check digits are real.

VIN	Year, make, model	Engine	Class & plant
1HD1KTC19HB612345	2017 Harley-Davidson Road Glide Special (FLTRXS)	1,750 cc, 2-cylinder, 92 hp	Touring · York, PA
JH2PC400X7M123456	2007 Honda CBR600RR	599 cc, 4-cylinder, 113 hp	Sport · Hamamatsu, Japan
JKAKLEE129DA12345	2009 Kawasaki KLR650 (KL650EF)	651 cc, 1-cylinder, 32 kW	Dual-sport · Rayong, Thailand

HARLEY VIN DECODER · CRUISER / TOURING

1HD1KTC19HB612345 · 2017 Road Glide Special

What vPIC returned: maker Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Inc.; model Road Glide Special, series FLTRXS; body class "Motorcycle – Touring/Sport Touring"; 1,750 cc, two cylinders, four-stroke, 92 hp, gasoline; destination market "49 States (Except California)"; plant York, Pennsylvania. It also warned that the decoded model year "may be incorrect" and invited a re-decode with the known year, the motorcycle year-code issue from Chapter 2.

Why it matters: confirm the exact series before you compare prices; Harley decoding is in Chapter 5.

SPORT BIKE VIN DECODER

JH2PC400X7M123456 · 2007 Honda CBR600RR

What vPIC returned: maker Honda Motor Co., Ltd.; model CBR600RR; body class "Motorcycle – Sport"; 599 cc, four cylinders, 113 hp; an engine model code beginning PC40E; destination market 49 states (except California); built at Honda's Hamamatsu Factory in Shizuoka, Japan.

Why it matters: a decode can't show whether a sport bike was raced or dropped, but it confirms the model and year, and the engine code gives you something to compare with the engine stamping.

DUAL-SPORT VIN DECODER

JKAKLEE129DA12345 · 2009 Kawasaki KLR650

What vPIC returned: maker Kawasaki Motors, Ltd.; model KLR650, series KL650EF; body class "Motorcycle – Dual-Sport/Adventure/Supermoto/On-Off Road"; 651 cc single cylinder, four-stroke; engine output 32 kW (about 43 hp); destination market "Worldwide"; plant in Amphur Pluak Daeng, Rayong, Thailand.

Why it matters: dual-sports are titled road bikes that also go off-road (Chapter 10), and a Japanese-coded VIN (JKA) can belong to a bike built in Thailand.

YOUR TURN

Decode your own bike the same way at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-decoder**, then preview its history records free at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup**.

WHAT THE THREE DECODES TEACH

Three bikes from three makers are enough to show how motorcycle VIN decoding really behaves: what it gets exactly right, where it hedges, and what you still have to check with your own eyes.

1. The year can come with a warning

The Harley decoded as a 2017 model but carried NHTSA's note that the year may be wrong. That's the missing 7th-character rule at work: “H” is 1987 or 2017, and the decoder can only infer which. For a 2017 touring bike the answer is obvious; for a bike whose styling barely changed across decades, check the certification label's build date and the title.

2. The country code isn’t always the build country

The Kawasaki's VIN starts with “J”, the code range for Japan, but NHTSA's data places its assembly in Rayong, Thailand. The first three characters identify the manufacturer that registered them; position 11 and the decoder's plant field tell you where the bike was actually built. If origin matters to you, for parts or resale, read the plant.

3. Horsepower really is in the VIN

All three decodes returned an engine output: 92 hp, 113 hp and 32 kW. That's the federal requirement from Chapter 2 showing up in real data. It's useful for insurance quotes, for license rules in places that restrict power, and for spotting a listing that claims a bigger engine than the VIN allows.

4. Destination market shows up too

The Harley and the Honda both decoded as “49 States (Except California)”, the Kawasaki as “Worldwide”. Harley-Davidson's own VIN key has a separate introduction code for California models (Chapter 5). If you live in California, check a bike's emission certification before you buy one from out of state.

5. A decode can’t tell you about the engine in the frame

The decoder describes the engine the bike was built with; a swap won't show. Compare the engine stamping with the decoded engine, and ask about any mismatch: a replacement engine isn't automatically bad, but it should come with a receipt and matching paperwork.

Read the body class

NHTSA's motorcycle body classes include Touring/Sport Touring, Sport and Dual-Sport/Adventure/Supermoto/On-Off Road. If a “touring bike” decodes as something else, find out why.

Blank fields are normal

The Kawasaki returned kilowatts instead of horsepower and no fuel type; the Honda returned no series. A blank field means the maker didn't encode that detail, not that the bike is suspect.

DECODE + PREVIEW

A decode tells you what the bike is. The free preview at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup** tells you whether title brands, odometer readings, liens or auction records exist for it, before you pay $14.99 for the details.

CHAPTER 5

HARLEY VIN DECODER: READING A 1HD VIN

Harley-Davidson publishes its VIN layout in its service documentation, so a **Harley VIN decoder** can split the middle of the number more finely than the generic WMI/VDS/VIS sections. Here is our 2017 Road Glide Special read the Harley way.



Position	Value	Harley field	Meaning
1–3	1HD	World manufacturer ID	Built in the U.S. (Harley lists 5HD for U.S.-built bikes sold outside the U.S., 932 for Brazil and MEG for India)
4	1	Motorcycle type	Heavyweight motorcycle, 901 cc or larger
5–6	KT	Model	FLTRXS Road Glide Special (per NHTSA vPIC for this 2017 VIN)
7	C	Engine type	vPIC: 1,750 cc, two cylinders, 92 hp
8	1	Introduction / calibration	"1" is the U.S. domestic normal introduction in Harley's key
9	9	Check digit	Valid
10	H	Model year	2017 (vPIC flagged the year as inferred)
11	B	Assembly plant	York, Pennsylvania
12–17	612345	Sequential number	Illustrative in this example

Introduction codes

Harley's 2018 service key lists normal-introduction codes 1 (U.S. domestic), 3 (California), A (Canada), C (HDI), E (Japan), G (Australia), J (Brazil), L (Asia Pacific) and N (India); mid-year or special introductions use 2 or 4 (domestic), 5 or 6 (California) and other letters.

Plant codes

The same key lists B for York, Pennsylvania, D for Manaus, Brazil (assembled from kits) and N for Bawal, Haryana, India. Codes change over time: a 2007 Street Glide VIN we checked decodes in vPIC with plant code Y, also York.

Harley's own example

Harley's documentation decodes a 2018 FLHXSE CVO Street Glide: model code PX, engine code L for the air-cooled Milwaukee-Eight 117 (1,917 cc), and J for 2018.

Match the crankcase

Harley stamps an **abbreviated VIN** (model, engine type, model year and sequential number) on the left side of the crankcase between the cylinders, and the full VIN on the right side of the frame near the steering head. They should agree. Give the full VIN when ordering parts.

HARLEY VIN DECODER

Decode any 1HD VIN free at **carcheckervin.com/vin-decoder/harley-davidson**. Model guides: **Street Glide** and **Road Glide**.

HONDA, YAMAHA, KAWASAKI, SUZUKI & MORE

Every motorcycle maker writes its own positions 4–8, but the first three characters tell you immediately whose code you're reading. These are common motorcycle WMIs and where to decode each make.

Make	Common WMIs	Notes	Decode free
Harley-Davidson	`1HD`, `5HD`, `932`, `MEG`	U.S., U.S. for export, Brazil, India (Harley's key)	**/vin-decoder/harley-davidson**
Honda	`JH2`	Our CBR600RR: Hamamatsu, Japan	**/motorcycle-vin-decoder**
Yamaha	`JYA`	Yamaha motorcycles	**/yamaha-motorcycle-vin-decoder**
Kawasaki	`JKA`	Our KLR650 was built in Thailand	**/vin-decoder/kawasaki**
Suzuki	`JS1`	Motorcycles; Suzuki cars use JS2/JS3	**/vin-decoder/suzuki**
Triumph	`SMT`	Hinckley, England	**/vin-decoder/triumph**
Ducati	`ZDM`	Bologna, Italy	**/vin-decoder/ducati**
Aprilia / MV Agusta	`ZD4` / `ZCG`	Italian makers; same 17-character format	**/motorcycle-vin-decoder**
KTM	Decode to see	Street and off-road ranges; check the frame stamp	**/vin-decoder/ktm**

WMIs listed are common examples, not complete lists. Makers hold several WMIs and add more as plants open.

Brand quirks worth knowing

Japanese makers often build outside Japan, as the Thai-built Kawasaki shows, so the plant field matters more than the "J". **Harley-Davidson** splits the VDS into type, model, engine and introduction codes (Chapter 5). **European makers** use the same 17-character structure and check digit on U.S.-market bikes.

Whatever the brand, the method is the same: decode, compare with the bike, then check the history. Brand pages explain each maker's codes; the history comes from title, insurer and auction records, which are brand-blind.

Custom, kit & low-volume bikes

A builder making fewer than 1,000 motorcycles a year puts a "9" in position 3 and uses positions 12–14 to complete its manufacturer code. That's normal on boutique and custom builders.

Homebuilt and heavily rebuilt bikes are a different case: states handle them under their own procedures (California's handbook, for example, treats specially constructed vehicles separately). Buy one only with the state's paperwork in hand, because a homemade frame with a homemade number is very hard to verify.

ANY MAKE

One lookup covers every brand: **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup**. Brand lookups: **Yamaha**, **Kawasaki**, **Suzuki**.

CHAPTER 6

STOLEN MOTORCYCLE CHECK

Buy a stolen motorcycle and you usually lose both the bike and the money once it's identified. A **stolen motorcycle check** takes ten minutes and is the cheapest protection in this guide.

The free check: NICB VINCheck

The National Insurance Crime Bureau's **VINCheck** (nicb.org/vincheck) is free, allows 5 searches per 24 hours per IP address, and searches participating insurers, which write 92.49% of U.S. earned premium. It shows whether a VIN is reported **stolen and not recovered**, or was declared a **salvage or flood total loss**. NICB says it covers some motorcycles and is not a full history report.

What a clear result means

No participating insurer has an open theft or total-loss record for that VIN. A bike stolen from an uninsured owner won't appear.

What a hit means

Don't buy and don't pay a deposit: the bike may still belong to an owner or insurer. Walk away and contact the police.

How stolen motorcycles get new identities

Trick	How it works	How to catch it
VIN cloning	The VIN of a legitimate bike of the same model is copied onto a stolen one	The clone decodes perfectly; look for stamp tampering and a history that shows the VIN titled elsewhere
Re-stamped frame	The original stamp is ground off and a new number punched in	Uneven characters, odd font, grinding marks, fresh paint
Salvage switch	The title and VIN of a wrecked bike are moved onto a stolen one	Total-loss or salvage auction records, with photos of a wreck, for a perfect-looking bike
Frame or engine swap	A stolen engine goes into a legitimate frame, or the reverse	Engine number doesn't match the paperwork; Harley crankcase VIN doesn't match the frame
Paper-only sale	No title, or a title in someone else's name	Insist on a title in the seller's name (Chapter 7)

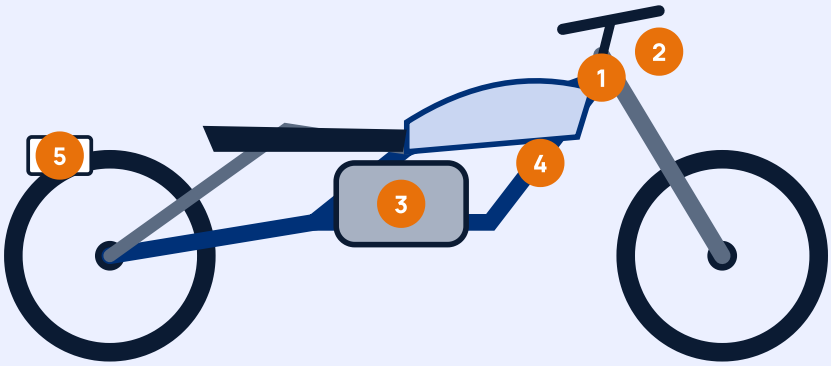
Altering a VIN is a federal crime

Under 18 U.S.C. § 511, knowingly removing, obliterating, tampering with or altering a motor vehicle identification number is punishable by a fine, up to 5 years in prison, or both. The federal definition of a motor vehicle used there covers vehicles made primarily for public roads, which includes road motorcycles. A seller who shrugs off a damaged stamp is asking you to own their problem.

A history report adds title brands, total-loss records and auction photos, which is what exposes a salvage switch. Start at **carcheckervin.com/stolen-vehicle-check**.

RE-PAPERED MOTORCYCLES: THE RED FLAGS

A re-papered bike looks legitimate on paper by design. The giveaways are in the details: numbers that almost match, a seller who can't explain them, and a price that's too good.



1 Frame VIN stamp
2 Certification label
3 Engine number
4 Frame downtube label
5 Plate & registration

All must tell one story, and match the title.

Red flags on the bike

- [ ] Frame stamp scratched, painted over, ground smooth or re-punched
- [ ] Certification label missing, loose, re-glued or newer-looking than the bike
- [ ] Engine number doesn't match the title or the Harley crankcase VIN doesn't match the frame
- [ ] Ignition replaced or no original keys; scratches around the steering lock

Red flags in the deal

- [ ] No title, a title in someone else's name, or a seller who won't show ID
- [ ] A duplicate title issued very recently
- [ ] Price far below similar bikes, with pressure to pay cash today
- [ ] History shows a total loss or salvage auction the seller didn't mention

If you suspect the bike is stolen

- Don't confront the seller; walk away politely
- Keep the ad, messages, phone number and photos of the VIN
- Report it to local police and your state motor vehicle agency
- Report insurance-related fraud to the NICB through its website

California: some bikes need a state inspection

California's DMV handbook says licensed vehicle verifiers cannot do VIN inspections on motorcycles with an unavailable California record (last registered in California, but no longer on the DMV database), or on revived salvage and revived junk vehicles. If you're buying such a bike there, expect a longer route to registration, and don't pay until you know it can be registered.

CHAPTER 7

MOTORCYCLE TITLE CHECK

The **motorcycle title** is the state's record of who owns the bike and what has happened to it. A title check answers three questions: is the title real, is it in the seller's name, and does it carry a brand?

Title brands that matter on a motorcycle

Brand	What it usually means	What to do
Salvage	An insurer or the state treated the bike as a total loss	Price it as a damaged bike; it may not be road-legal until rebuilt and inspected
Rebuilt	A salvage bike repaired and inspected under state rules	Get the rebuild receipts and a mechanic's inspection; expect lower resale and insurance limits
Junk / parts only	Not to be titled for road use again in that state	Don't buy it as a road bike
Flood	Water damage was declared	Electrics and bearings suffer; inspect closely or pass
Not actual mileage	The odometer reading isn't reliable	Value the bike on condition, not the dial

Brand names, damage thresholds and inspections vary by state; read the title, not the seller's description of it.

Titles vary by state: three examples

Maine

Requires a title for motorcycles with engines of 300 cc or more, and only for vehicles with a model year within the last 25 years: 2001 or newer as of January 1, 2026, and 2002 or newer from January 1, 2027.

Texas

The title application fee is $33 in counties covered by the clean-air rules and $28 elsewhere (Transportation Code § 501.138). Motorcycle or moped registration is $30 a year plus the county's local fee (TxDMV Fee Chart, 2026).

California

Off-highway motorcycles get a DMV ID plate instead of street registration, and titles for non-complying off-highway motorcycles are branded “NC M/C”. Chapter 10 has the details.

Where the title history lives: NMVTIS

The National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, run by the U.S. Department of Justice, collects title, brand, odometer, junk and salvage data from states, insurers and salvage yards. For motorcycles there's a catch worth knowing: the DOJ's own consumer page says reporting is required on common automobiles, while several states report all motor vehicles, **including motorcycles**. So a bike's NMVTIS file is only as complete as its titling states' reporting, and the DOJ warns that gaps can produce a false “clean” result.

TITLE CHECK

See a bike's title brands and NMVTIS title records in the $14.99 report at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-history-report**, or check the federal file at **carcheckervin.com/nmvtis-vin-check**.

TITLE PAPERWORK, LIENS & THE ODOMETER

Most bad motorcycle purchases go wrong on paper, not on the road. Line up these documents and check every VIN on them against the frame.

The paperwork you should leave with

Document	Why it matters	Check
Certificate of title	Proves ownership and shows any brand	Seller's name matches their ID; VIN matches the frame; signed in the right places
Lien release	A lender listed on the title still has a claim	A signed release or a title showing the lien satisfied
Bill of sale	Records price, date, parties and VIN	Required in some states, useful everywhere; template at **/motorcycle-bill-of-sale**
Odometer disclosure	Federal rule for most transfers (see below)	Mileage written matches the dial; see **/odometer-disclosure-statement**

The odometer rule applies to motorcycles

The federal odometer rule (49 CFR Part 580) lists its exemptions in § 580.17: vehicles over 16,000 lb GVWR, vehicles that aren't self-propelled, older vehicles and a few special cases. Motorcycles aren't on the list. For transfers in 2026, bikes of model year **2011 or newer** need a disclosure; model year 2010 and older are exempt, and newer ones become exempt at 20 years old.

Why mileage fraud matters

NHTSA says more than 450,000 vehicles a year are sold with false odometer readings. Under 49 U.S.C. Chapter 327, proven intent to defraud lets a buyer claim 3x actual damages or $10,000, whichever is greater, plus attorney's fees.

Bike-specific mileage clues

Instrument clusters get replaced after crashes, sometimes honestly. Ask for the receipt, and compare the dial with service records, wear items and the report's odometer readings.

Title situations that need care

“No title, just a bill of sale”

Legitimate where a state doesn't title small or old bikes (see Maine, previous page), but you must still prove ownership when you register. Check what *your* state requires before you pay.

Title in someone else’s name

An “open” title signed by a previous owner lets a seller skip registering the bike: **title jumping**. You lose the chain of ownership.

Out-of-state title

Normal, but look for brands from earlier states: moving a branded bike is the classic route to **title washing**.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT A MOTORCYCLE HISTORY REPORT SHOWS

A **motorcycle history report** gathers the records tied to one frame VIN into a dated timeline: titles, brands, mileage, liens, insurer total losses and auction sales. It's the paid step, so know exactly what you're buying.

Inside a CarCheckerVIN report

Section	What it tells a motorcycle buyer
Title records & brands	Every title event on record and state brands such as salvage, junk, rebuilt, flood and lemon buyback
NMVTIS title records	The federal title file: current state, brand history, last reported odometer at titling
Odometer readings	Mileage by date, so you can see whether it only ever goes up
Owner count	How many owners are on record (never names)
Insurance total-loss records	Whether an insurer declared the bike a total loss
Lien & impound records	Lien history and impound information
Auction sales with photos	Salvage or dealer auction listings, often with photos of the bike's condition at the time
Service records	Maintenance entries where reported
Open recalls	Unrepaired safety recalls for the VIN
Factory specs & market value	The decoded specification and an estimate of value

Records depend on what states, insurers, auctions and shops have reported for that VIN; coverage varies by vehicle, and motorcycle files can be thinner than car files.

How it works

1. **Enter the frame VIN** at carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-history-report.
2. **See the free preview:** the decode and which record types exist.
3. **Unlock the full report for $14.99** if the bike is worth it. It's ready in under a minute and print-ready, so you can take it to the seller.

What no history report can tell you

- Mechanical condition today: engine, clutch, suspension, brakes
- Drops and crashes nobody reported to an insurer or the state
- Modifications, tuning or track use
- Whether the stamp on the frame is genuine (that's your job, Chapter 3)

That's why the report comes *after* the free checks and *before* the inspection, not instead of them.

PRICING

One report $14.99, no subscription. Shopping for several bikes? 3 reports for $35.99, 5 for $54.99 or 10 for $89.99 at **carcheckervin.com/pricing**. Refer a friend and get a free report: **carcheckervin.com/refer**.

HOW TO READ A MOTORCYCLE HISTORY REPORT

A report is a timeline. Read it top to bottom with the seller's story in mind, and look for the places where the two stop agreeing.

Eight patterns to look for

What you see	What it can mean	Ask or do
A brand that disappears	Salvage in one state, clean title in the next: possible title washing	Treat the bike as branded; price accordingly
Mileage that drops	Odometer rollback or a replaced cluster	Ask for the cluster receipt; otherwise walk
Total loss, but a clean title	An insurer paid out, but the brand never reached the title	Get the damage story and an inspection
Auction photos of damage	The bike was sold wrecked and rebuilt	Compare the photos with the bike; ask who rebuilt it
Several owners in a short time	A problem bike passed on quickly	Ask why each owner sold
An open lien	A lender may still have a claim	Require a lien release before paying
Years with no records	Stored, unregistered or off the books	Ask where it was; check fuel system, tires and seals
Open recalls	Safety repairs never done	Get them fixed free at a franchised dealer

A clean report isn’t a clean bike

Most drops in a garage, a parking lot or on a trail are never reported to anyone. A clean report means nothing *serious enough to be recorded* was recorded. Read the bike, too: bent levers, scraped bar ends, cracked fairing mounts and a crooked headlight tell the stories that reports can't.

Match the report to the seller’s story

Ask how long they've owned it, where it was registered and whether it's been down, then compare the answers with the timeline.

Free checks to pair with the report

FREE · NICB.ORG/VINCHECK

NICB VINCheck

Stolen-not-recovered and insurer total-loss records; covers some motorcycles.

FREE · NHTSA.GOV/RECALLS

NHTSA recall lookup

Search by VIN; also at **carcheckervin.com/recall-check**. It omits recalls over 15 years old (unless the maker offers more), some small makers and very new recalls.

SEE THE TIMELINE

Mileage, brands and auction photos in one place: **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-history-report**. More on mileage fraud at **carcheckervin.com/odometer-check**.

CHAPTER 9

USED MOTORCYCLE BUYING CHECKLIST

Print this **used motorcycle buying checklist** and take it with you. Ask the seller not to warm the bike up before you arrive: a cold start tells you more than a warm one.

Identity & paperwork

- [ ] Frame VIN read in person, matches title, label and registration
- [ ] Check digit passes; decode matches year, model and engine
- [ ] NICB VINCheck clear; NHTSA recalls checked
- [ ] Title in the seller's name; seller's ID matches
- [ ] Lien release if a lender is on the title
- [ ] Engine number matches paperwork (where recorded)

Engine & drivetrain

- [ ] Starts cleanly from cold; idles steadily
- [ ] No knocking, ticking that worsens, or blue or white smoke
- [ ] No oil weeping from gaskets, fork seals or the shock
- [ ] Clutch engages smoothly and doesn't slip under throttle
- [ ] Chain and sprockets: no hooked teeth, tight spots or rust; belt: no cracks or missing teeth

Brakes & wheels

- [ ] Pads have material left; discs aren't scored or warped
- [ ] Brake fluid isn't dark; levers firm, not spongy
- [ ] Wheels spin true; no cracked rims or loose spokes

Frame, steering & suspension

- [ ] Steering turns lock to lock smoothly, no notch in the center
- [ ] No cracks, kinks, welds or fresh paint on the frame or swingarm
- [ ] Forks compress smoothly; tubes free of pitting
- [ ] Rear shock doesn't bounce more than once

Crash damage

- [ ] Bar ends, levers, footpegs and mirrors not scraped or bent
- [ ] Fairings and tank: no cracks, filler or mismatched paint
- [ ] Handlebars sit straight with the front wheel pointed ahead

Tires

- [ ] Enough tread; no flat spot down the middle or squared edges
- [ ] No cracks in the sidewalls
- [ ] Read the DOT date code: the last four digits are the week and year made, so “2321” means the 23rd week of 2021

Electrics

- [ ] Headlight, high beam, brake light (both controls), turn signals, horn
- [ ] Dash warning lights come on at key-on and go out after start
- [ ] No taped or spliced wiring under the seat

BEFORE YOU GO

Run the VIN first at **carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup** so you know which questions to ask, and check the asking price against **motorcycle value by VIN**.

TEST RIDE, PAYMENT & THE BUYING SEQUENCE

The order you do things in protects you as much as the checks themselves. Spend nothing until the free checks pass, and hand over nothing until the paperwork is in your hand.

A buyer's sequence that saves money

1. **Get the VIN before you travel.** Ask for a photo of the frame stamp and the title. A seller who refuses to share the VIN is telling you something.
2. **Run the free checks.** Decode it, run NICB VINCheck and the recall lookup, and preview the records at carcheckervin.com. Drop any bike whose decode doesn't match the ad.
3. **Buy the report on your favorite.** $14.99 for the timeline: brands, mileage, liens, total losses and auction photos.
4. **Inspect in person.** Read the frame VIN yourself and work through the checklist on the previous page.
5. **Test ride, then a mechanic.** For an expensive bike, pay a motorcycle mechanic for a pre-purchase inspection.
6. **Pay and transfer properly.** Signed title, bill of sale, lien release and odometer disclosure where required, then register it promptly.

The test ride

- Bring your license, helmet and gear; a seller may ask to hold your ID or the payment while you ride
- Listen for clunks over bumps and whines under load
- Check that the bike tracks straight with a light grip on the bars
- Brake firmly from moderate speed: no pulsing, pulling or noises
- Afterwards, look under the bike for fresh drips

If you aren't licensed or comfortable on that bike, ask the seller to ride it while you watch, or bring a riding friend.

Private seller vs dealer

	Private seller	Dealer
Price	Often lower	Higher, may include prep
Paperwork	You check everything	Dealer handles transfer
Recourse	Usually as-is	Depends on state law and contract
VIN check	Essential	Still essential

Paying safely

Meet at the seller's home or a public, well-lit place; avoid carrying large amounts of cash where you can; and never pay a deposit for a bike you haven't seen in person.

After you buy

Transfer the title and registration within your state's deadline, add the bike to your insurance before you ride it home, and get any open recalls repaired: recall repairs are free at franchised dealers of the brand. Makers that sell 5,000 or more motorcycles a year must offer a free recall search by VIN on their U.S. website (49 CFR 573.15).

CHAPTER 10

DIRT BIKE & OFF-ROAD MOTORCYCLE VINS

A **dirt bike VIN check** works like any motorcycle VIN check, but off-road bikes sit partly outside the federal rules and the title system.

Street-legal, dual-sport or competition?

The VIN rule (49 CFR Part 565) covers motorcycles, which federal rules define as *motor vehicles*: vehicles "manufactured primarily for use on public streets, roads, and highways" (49 U.S.C. 30102). A **dual-sport** such as our KLR650 carries a federal 17-character VIN and is titled like any motorcycle. A **competition-only** dirt bike isn't made primarily for public roads, so the federal VIN rule doesn't govern its number: read what the maker stamped on the frame and check your state's rules.

California: the 8th character decides the sticker

In California, off-highway vehicles such as trail bikes, racing motorcycles and eMotos don't need regular registration, but must display a DMV-issued ID plate, renewed every two years. The DMV says off-highway vehicles not certified to California emission standards have a **"3" or "C" in the eighth position** of the VIN.

Off-highway vehicle	California ID	Notes from the DMV handbook
2002 or older model year	**Green** sticker	Also snowmobiles, amphibians, dune buggies and golf carts
2003–2021 with "3" or "C" in position 8	**Red** sticker	Non-complying OHV; can be registered for off-highway use
2022 and newer with "3" or "C" in position 8	**Tan** sticker	Non-complying OHV; applications finalized at DMV headquarters

What a non-complying title means

Titles for non-complying off-highway motorcycles are branded "NC M/C" (ATVs "NC ATV"). They can't get on-highway or dual registration, though ownership can be transferred. Street-legal motorcycles with a 3 or C in position 8 may be registered with the correct on-road license code.

Converting an off-road bike

California allows only an authorized DMV employee to complete the vehicle verification for off-highway motorcycles converting to on-highway or dual registration, so the emission label can be checked, and that form must list the engine and frame numbers. Don't pay extra on a promise that it "can be plated".

Checking a used dirt bike

- [ ] Read the frame number at the steering head and decode it
- [ ] Ask for the title, or the manufacturer's certificate or statement of origin, plus a bill of sale
- [ ] Expect a thinner record: off-road coverage in title databases varies by state
- [ ] In California, check position 8 before you assume green-sticker use

OFF-ROAD

Dirt bike and ATV checks: **carcheckervin.com/vin-check/type/dirt-bike** and **carcheckervin.com/atv-vin-check**.

CHAPTER 11

CARFAX FOR MOTORCYCLES: WHAT TO KNOW

"Is there a **Carfax for motorcycles**?" is really two questions: where does a bike's history live, and who can sell it to you? Here's an honest comparison.

What we know about Carfax

Carfax, Inc. was founded in 1984 in Virginia and is part of S&P Global Mobility. Its single vehicle history report is widely quoted at **$44.99**. Its best-known strength is service and maintenance records, and many car dealers include a free Carfax on their listings because the dealer pays. Carfax also offers a license-plate search. Its **Buyback Guarantee** pays when a report missed a DMV-issued title brand; it doesn't cover accidents, it has deadlines, and the payout is capped.

Where motorcycle title history actually lives

A motorcycle's title brands come from state records, and the federal file is NMVTIS. The U.S. Department of Justice says consumers cannot get NMVTIS reports from Carfax (or from DMVDesk or Experian, which serve dealers). If you want the federal title record for a bike, you need an NMVTIS data provider, and the DOJ lists approved providers at vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov. Whatever report you choose, **enter the bike's VIN and confirm it actually returns motorcycle records before you pay.**

	Carfax	CarCheckerVIN	NICB VINCheck	NHTSA recalls
Price	$44.99 (widely quoted)	Preview free; $14.99	Free	Free
Title brands	Yes, for vehicles it covers	Yes, plus NMVTIS title records	Salvage/flood total loss only	No
Odometer history	Yes, for vehicles it covers	Yes	No	No
Theft flag	—	No (use NICB)	Stolen-not-recovered	No
Auction photos	—	Yes, where recorded	No	No
Service records	Main strength	Where reported	No	No
Recalls	—	Open recalls	No	Yes

"—" = not verified for this guide. Check each provider's site for current coverage.

Motorcycle VIN check vs Carfax: the practical answer

Run the free checks first (NICB, recalls, CarCheckerVIN preview), then buy one full report on the bike you're serious about. On a motorcycle the best service record is usually the owner's own receipts, so ask for them.

A Carfax alternative for bikes

Decode and preview any motorcycle VIN free, then get title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, total-loss records and auction photos for $14.99 at **carcheckervin.com/carfax-for-motorcycles**.

More: **alternatives to Carfax**, **how much a Carfax report costs**, **Carfax VIN check**.

REFERENCE

MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK GLOSSARY

Abbreviated VIN
A shortened VIN stamped on an engine; Harley-Davidson puts one on the left crankcase.

Certification label
The maker's federal label with the VIN, build month and year, GVWR and GAWR; on a motorcycle, near the steering post and handlebars.

Check digit
VIN position 9; calculated from the other 16 characters to catch errors. X means 10.

Dual-sport
A road-legal motorcycle built for both pavement and dirt, such as the KLR650.

Engine number
The serial number on the engine cases; separate from the frame VIN.

Frame stamp
The VIN marked into the frame, usually at the steering head; the bike's legal identity.

GVWR / GAWR
Gross vehicle weight rating and gross axle weight rating, shown on the certification label.

Introduction code
Harley-Davidson's VIN position 8: normal or mid-year introduction and market, such as 1 for U.S. domestic.

Lien
A lender's legal claim on the bike until a loan is paid.

Low-volume manufacturer
A maker of fewer than 1,000 vehicles of a type a year; uses 9 in VIN position 3.

Motor-driven cycle
NHTSA's term for a motorcycle with a motor producing 5 brake horsepower or less.

Motorcycle
Federally, a motor vehicle with a seat or saddle for the rider, designed to travel on no more than three wheels.

Net brake horsepower
Engine output; motorcycle VINs must encode it to within 10 percent.

NC M/C
California's brand for non-complying off-highway motorcycles.

NICB VINCheck
The National Insurance Crime Bureau's free theft and total-loss lookup.

NMVTIS
National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, run by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Odometer disclosure
The federal mileage statement required on most transfers (49 CFR Part 580).

OHV
Off-highway vehicle, including trail bikes and racing motorcycles.

Re-papering
Giving a stolen bike a false identity with a cloned VIN, re-stamped frame or swapped title.

Salvage switch
Moving a wrecked bike's title and VIN onto a stolen one.

Steering head
The frame tube the forks pivot in; the usual home of the frame VIN.

Title brand
A permanent note on a title such as salvage, rebuilt, junk or flood.

Title jumping
Reselling a bike on a title signed by a previous owner, without registering it.

VDS
Vehicle descriptor section, positions 4–8 (plus 9): make, type, line, engine and horsepower on a motorcycle.

VIN cloning
Copying a legitimate VIN onto a stolen bike of the same model.

vPIC
NHTSA's Product Information Catalog, the official VIN decoding database.

WMI
World manufacturer identifier, positions 1–3, such as 1HD, JH2, JYA or JKA.

ANSWERS

MOTORCYCLE VIN CHECK FAQ

How do I run a motorcycle VIN check?

Read the 17-character VIN from the frame, enter it at carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup to decode it and preview the records, run NICB VINCheck, then buy the full report on the bike you choose.

Is a motorcycle VIN check free?

Decoding, NICB VINCheck, the NHTSA recall lookup and CarCheckerVIN's preview are free. A full motorcycle history report is $14.99.

Where is the VIN on a motorcycle?

Stamped on the frame, usually at the steering head, and on the certification label near where the steering post meets the handlebars. The engine number is different.

Is the engine number the same as the VIN?

No. The engine has its own number; Harley stamps an abbreviated VIN on the crankcase. The frame VIN is the legal identity.

How can I tell if a motorcycle is stolen?

Run NICB VINCheck, check the frame stamp for tampering, match every number to the title, and make sure the title is in the seller's name.

Can I do a motorcycle VIN lookup by plate?

Get the VIN from the frame or title instead; it's the number that identifies the bike itself, and plates move between vehicles.

Can I find the owner of a motorcycle by VIN?

No. The Driver's Privacy Protection Act (18 U.S.C. § 2721 et seq.) limits owner information from DMV records to permitted uses.

Can I buy a motorcycle without a title?

Only if your state allows it for that bike; Maine, for example, titles motorcycles of 300 cc or more. Check before you pay.

How do I find the year from a motorcycle VIN?

Read position 10 and use the chart on page 6. Motorcycle codes can mean two years 30 years apart, so confirm with the certification label's build date.

What is a Harley VIN decoder?

A decoder that reads Harley-Davidson's layout: 1HD maker code, motorcycle type, model, engine, introduction code, year, plant and serial.

Is there a Carfax for motorcycles?

Confirm with any provider that your bike's VIN returns records before paying. CarCheckerVIN previews any motorcycle VIN free; the full report is $14.99.

Does NICB VINCheck work on motorcycles?

NICB says it covers some motorcycles. It shows theft and total-loss records from participating insurers, not a full history.

Does a motorcycle need an odometer disclosure?

Usually. Federal exemptions don't include motorcycles; in 2026 bikes of model year 2011 and newer need one.

Do dirt bikes have VINs?

Road-legal and dual-sport bikes carry a 17-character VIN. Competition-only bikes are outside the federal VIN rule, so check the frame and your state's rules.

What does a motorcycle history report show?

Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, owner count, liens, total-loss records, auction photos, recalls and value.

Can two motorcycles have the same VIN?

Not legitimately: no two VINs may be identical within 60 years of the 1980 model year (49 CFR 565.13).

Do motorcycle recalls show up by VIN?

Yes. Makers selling 5,000+ motorcycles a year must offer a free VIN recall search (49 CFR 573.15); repairs are free at franchised dealers.

FREE MOTORCYCLE VIN LOOKUP

Check the bike before you ride it home.

Decode any motorcycle VIN and preview its history free. Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, total-loss records and auction photos in the full report: $14.99.

carcheckervin.com/motorcycle-vin-lookup →

Scan to check a motorcycle VIN

Sources

- 49 CFR Part 565, VIN requirements (§§ 565.13, 565.15) (ecfr.gov)
- 49 CFR 567.4, certification labels (ecfr.gov)
- 49 CFR 571.3, motorcycle definitions (ecfr.gov)
- 49 CFR 580.17, odometer disclosure exemptions (ecfr.gov)
- 49 CFR 573.15 recall search; 574.5 tire date codes (ecfr.gov)
- 49 U.S.C. 30102 and 32101; 18 U.S.C. § 511 (law.cornell.edu)
- NHTSA vPIC VIN decoder (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov); VINs decoded Nov 2026
- Harley-Davidson service information, VIN breakdown (serviceinfo.harley-davidson.com)
- U.S. DOJ / BJA, NMVTIS consumer information (vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov)
- NICB VINCheck (nicb.org/vincheck)
- California DMV, Vehicle Industry Registration Procedures Manual §§ 1.165, 15.100, 15.120; OHV registration (dmv.ca.gov)
- Maine BMV, Titles (maine.gov/sos/bmv)
- Texas Transp. Code § 501.138; TxDMV Fee Chart 1C, 2026 (txdmv.gov)
- NHTSA odometer fraud and recall information (nhtsa.gov)
- Carfax price: independent pricing listings, 2026
- CarCheckerVIN prices: carcheckervin.com/pricing, Nov 2026

How we made this guide: written by CarCheckerVIN with AI assistance, from the public sources listed above; figures, prices and links checked November 2026.

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Motorcycle VIN decoder
Motorcycle history report
Harley VIN decoder
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Motorcycle bill of sale
Carfax for motorcycles
NMVTIS VIN check
Vehicle history report

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