

## DRIVERS' LICENSES

The 1913 Idaho Legislature defined speeding by stating "A rate of speed in excess of 30 mph for over one-fourth of a mile shall be presumed evidence of driving at a rate of speed which is deemed not careful or prudent."

Prior to the *Driver's License Law*, the fifteen officers in the State Traffic Patrol warned approximately two thousand motorists each month and arrested the more flagrant violators. After the *Driver's License Law* was enacted, the Department of Law Enforcement developed a system for reporting traffic violations.

In 1935, Idaho Governor C. Ben Ross asked the 23rd Idaho Legislature to enact a law requiring all persons operating a motor vehicle in Idaho to be licensed. Ada County Senator Harry L. Yost introduced the bill. There were many opposed to the bill, and chief among them was the *Idaho Statesman*. The *Idaho Statesman* claimed that creating a licensing program for drivers would create a costly bureaucracy, take perhaps four or five people to administer, create additional work for the sheriffs, cost too much (\$1.00 for three years), and would not help save lives. Despite one of the longest Senate floor debates of the session, the *Driver's License Law* became effective on July 1, 1935.



In 1947 the "Motor Vehicle Safety Responsibility Act" referred to as the Financial Responsibility Law was enacted and the Financial Responsibility Section was created. The law required driving privileges to be suspended for non-compliance of the Act, and in 1953 also required proof of financial responsibility under certain convictions.

In 1967, several new programs were added to the Driver Improvement Section in an effort to place the responsibility for all driving privilege withdrawals under one section.

In 1969, Driver Services was formed under the Motor Vehicle Bureau. Driver Services was a consolidation of three sections: Safety Responsibility, Driver Improvement, and Driver License.

In 1982, the Motor Vehicle Bureau (now the Division of Motor Vehicles) became part of the Idaho Transportation Department. Driver records are now stored electronically on computers, which allows Driver Services to quickly issue drivers' licenses, and to provide immediate information on its database of over one million driver records to Law Enforcement Agencies nationwide.

## COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

During the early 1920s, the few trucks being operated in Idaho were licensed, along with other vehicles, by the Department of Law Enforcement, Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

In 1923, Idaho law defined a motor truck as "any motor vehicle designed ... for the transportation of commodities, merchandise ..." Because of that definition, nearly 2,000 owners of roadsters with small boxes on the rear paid the additional \$7.50 "truck" fee. Others evaded the fee by merely declaring they owned a roadster.

In 1927, the *Auto Transportation Companies Law* required stages to pay a quarterly \$3 tax per seat and trucks to pay a \$25 to \$75 tax, depending on their carrying capacity.

Approximately one year later, a makeshift rig devised by Boisean Carl Holst around 1928 or 1929 became what was probably one of the first cab-over trucks in existence. Mr. Holst used the unit (powered by a Ford Model A motor) to haul siphon pipe—a load about 20 feet long, weighing 4,100 pounds.

The 1956 *Uniform Registration Law* modified registration fees for vehicles over 16,000 lbs. and changed to a "power-unit-only" mileage tax. Idaho became a member of the *Uniform Registration Proration and Reciprocity Agreement* (Uniform Agreement) which simplified licensing and allowed proration of registration fees to interstate vehicles.

Idaho joined the International Registration Plan (IRP) in 1976. The IRP allows recognition of fleets of vehicles proportionally registered in other jurisdictions, and follows the basic principles of the Uniform Agreement. Prior to the Uniform Agreement, many companies detoured through other states and bypassed Idaho. The Uniform Agreement and the IRP induced the trucking industry to operate in and through Idaho in greater and greater numbers.

A recent change took Idaho apportioned (IRP) vehicles from a calendar-year registration to a monthly "staggered" registration. This change evenly distributed the workload, resulting in better service to the trucking industry.

In 1994, Commercial Vehicles issued 60,169 vehicle identifications. The following year, Commercial Vehicles was reorganized and received a new name: "Motor Carrier Services." True to their commitment to provide better service to the trucking industry, Motor Carrier Services developed a "One Stop Shop" in 1995, where in one easy step, carriers can process all of their registration requirements.

# IDAHO'S MOTOR VEHICLE HISTORY



COMMERCIAL VEHICLES  
TITLES  
DRIVERS' LICENSES  
LICENSE PLATES  
DEALER LICENSING

IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT  
DIVISION OF MOTOR VEHICLES  
HISTORY COMMITTEE  
4-96

## LICENSE PLATES

The state of Idaho issued its first plates in 1913, with the price determined by the value of the vehicle. There were only 2,083 plates issued that year (each vehicle receiving a single plate). Motorcycles were not issued an actual license plate. Instead, the owners simply painted their registry number, state, and year of manufacture on the rear mud guard. In 1917, motorcyclists received their first actual motorcycle plates.

Back then, if a license plate was lost, the motorist could purchase a blank replacement plate that was flat where the numbers would typically be embossed. The owner could then hand paint the license plate number in the flat area. Perhaps that is where Idaho's creative license plate designs first began.



Idaho has a long history of creative plate designs, in fact, it pioneered the concept. In 1928, Idaho became the first state in the nation to feature a graphic on a license plate by proudly displaying an impressive Idaho potato that filled the entire plate.

The 1940 plate commemorated *50 YEARS OF STATEHOOD*, and from 1941 to 1946 the words *SCENIC IDAHO* appeared on Idaho plates. 1947 plates proclaimed the state a *VACATION WONDERLAND!* The 1948 plate highlighted our most famous product as *WORLD FAMOUS POTATOES*. In 1953 and 1956, the slogan was modified to read *WORLD FAMOUS POTATO*, but was shortened to *FAMOUS POTATOES* in 1957.



Displaying Idaho's passion for the outdoors, and skiing in particular, the 1947 plate featured a ski jumper. But in 1948 and 1949, the famous potato returned, this time in the form of a decal, complete with a pat of butter.



From 1958 through 1968 the plates alternated between a green background with white letters to a white background with green letters. From 1968 through 1990, the standard plate format had a white background with green lettering.



The award-winning 1991 issue (a modification of the optional Centennial plate) really showed the capabilities of modern vinyl graphic technique, featuring a panoramic scene of pine trees and mountains under a blazing red Idaho sky.

## DEALER LICENSING

The distribution and sale of vehicles in Idaho affects the state's general economy and has a significant impact on the public. To protect these interests, the 1913 Idaho Legislature passed the first law requiring dealers (of new motor vehicles) and automobile manufacturers to be licensed.

In 1913, many different makes of vehicles could be purchased in the city of Boise, including Fords, Saxons, Overlands, Oldsmobiles, Stanley Steamers, Buicks, Knights, Metz's, and even Marion Bobcats. Some are familiar vehicle names and others are long forgotten, but the licensing of dealers has continued through the years.

Used vehicle dealers were first required to be licensed in 1927. The law requiring this addition in dealer licensing was called the "*Uniform Motor Vehicle Anti-theft Act*" and required each vehicle being sold to be titled and have a vehicle identification number (VIN). On many of the older vehicles the motor had one number and the frame/body had a different number. Sometimes both numbers were recorded on the title, other times only the motor number would be shown. Since a motor can be changed, Idaho now records only the VIN shown on the body of each vehicle.

From the beginning, dealer licensing has been a learning experience for both the dealers and the state. Over time, motor vehicle dealer laws have evolved, changed, stopped, and started. In 1965, the Dealer Advisory Board was established to assist and advise in the administration of these laws.

One of the laws that evolved required dealers to have surety bonds. To begin with, the vehicle dealers were required to have a \$10,000.00 bond and the salespeople were required to have a \$2,000.00 bond. Today, dealers have a \$20,000.00 bond that covers their dealership and their salespeople. Dealer license fees have also increased from the original \$35.00 to the current fee of \$125.00.

The 1986 federally-mandated *Truth in Mileage Act* has provided the consumer with added protection by strengthening odometer requirements and increasing the criminal penalties for odometer violations.

The Dealer Licensing Unit currently has eight Motor Vehicle Investigators throughout the state to help solve problems and enforce the provisions of the laws regulating the licensing of manufacturers, dealers, distributors, and factory representatives doing business in the state of Idaho.



## TITLES

Although the state of Idaho had been licensing vehicles since 1913, vehicle titles weren't required until the 1927 Idaho Legislature passed the *Anti-theft Act* with the intention of halting the licensing of stolen vehicles. The Motor Vehicle Bureau (which was already established with Registrations and Dealer Services under the Department of Law Enforcement) was given the responsibility of implementing the title requirements of the new law.

At that time, the Department of Law Enforcement operated in conjunction with the Secretary of State's Office, since Fred Lukens was both the Secretary of State and the Commissioner of Law Enforcement. The Motor Vehicle Bureau remained with Law Enforcement until 1982 when the bureau was reorganized under the Transportation Department.

It's interesting to note that automobile theft has always been a problem, but in his 1930 biannual report, Mr. Lukens stated that the new title requirements met with universal approval on the part of the public and that the number of thefts had undoubtedly decreased in Idaho because of this new law's existence. Because stolen vehicles and ownership discrepancies still exist today, the eight Motor Vehicle Investigators also assist the public with title discrepancies.

The *Uniform Motor Vehicle Anti-theft Act* became effective on January 1, 1928. During that first year the Motor Vehicle Bureau issued over 107,000 titles for cars, trucks, motorcycles, and trailers. Each title was hand-typed on an 8" x 10" form for a fee of 50¢. The title was later reduced to a 3" x 4" size that was used until 1988 when it was enlarged to accommodate the federal odometer requirements.

The color of the titles has also varied through the years. The original large titles were white with a gold background and gold border. The smaller titles were originally printed in various shades of green, and then gold. When the title was enlarged in 1988, the color was changed to the blue that is in use today.

The number of Idaho titles has fluctuated from year to year, but has steadily increased from the original 107,000 issued in 1928 to the 450,317 titles issued in 1995. The department experienced record title volumes in 1994, when it issued 457,808 titles. Over the years this growth has been accompanied by new problems that have required new laws and procedures to manage vehicles that have been wrecked, salvaged, or abandoned, and vehicles being transferred through court judgments such as divorces, bankruptcies, and inheritances.