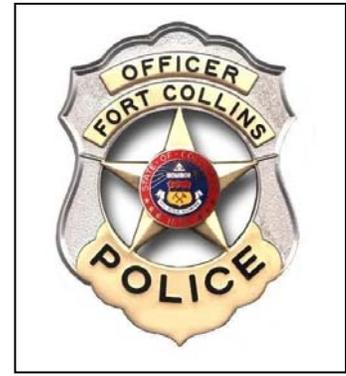


Who Pulled You Over?

Is It a Cop -- or a Fake With a Badge?



That blue or black or white sedan behind you with the flashing blue or red lights on the dash or built into the front grill is probably a cop -- but it could be a imposter using police equipment to get you to pull over.

How to tell the difference? And what should you do if you're not sure?

In the United States, *most* traffic enforcement work is done by police driving one of the following vehicles:

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|  Ford Crown Victoria sedan |  Dodge Durango |
|  Ford F150 Truck or Explorer |  Dodge Intrepid |
|  Chevy Impala sedan |  Dodge Charger |
|  Chevy Tahoe SUV |  Chevy Van or Lumina |

And of course, the problem is that these vehicles are also sold to civilians -- and it's pretty easy to dress one up so that it looks very much like an undercover police car. Police supply stores sell everything a person needs to make themselves look like the real deal -- right down to the uniform and badge. I.D. cards can be made on just about any computer and laminated. And don't settle for just a business card because anyone can have one. Cops give those to everyone, including people they arrest.

Some departments also use unconventional cars for pursuit work. For example, the Ford Mustang LX 5.0 and Camaro Z28s -- and even Corvettes -- for the same purpose (Larimer County Sheriff and Colorado State Patrol).

This can be pretty scary, since we're all taught to obey the commands of law enforcement officers, and when a police-looking car is trying to get us to pull over, every instinct tells us to comply. But not every stop is going to be an assault on you. The bottom line is that it's important to use your head.

What should you do?

 **First:** Have you done something to deserve being pulled over? If you've been driving within 5-mph of the posted speed limit and haven't broken any traffic laws that you're aware of, your guard should be up if all of a sudden there's an unmarked car on your tail with its lights flashing, especially if it's out in the middle of nowhere and late at night. While radar traps are a reality, most of the time, we get pulled over for a reason, and we know perfectly well what it is. So if you honestly haven't done anything wrong that you're aware of, and the "officer" just appeared out of nowhere, you are right to be suspicious, especially if you are female and traveling alone. But men, you too could be at risk, so don't get complacent.

 **Second:** If the vehicle attempting to pull you over is not a clearly marked police cruiser, or a car or truck that isn't routinely used for police work (especially if it's an older/broken down-looking vehicle) and your "gut feeling" is telling you something's just not right, you should slow down. Indicate you are not trying to get away, in case it is a real police officer by signalling your intent to pull over, but only do so when you can find a well-lit, public place with other people around, such as a shopping mall parking lot. Or, you can pull over immediately, but keep your doors locked and only crack the window enough to pass your driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance through. And remember, a real officer will ask you for ALL THREE of these papers.

 **Third:** Get a good look at the "officer" and his credentials. If the "officer" is not in uniform, refuses to show you their badge, or just flashes it briefly so you can't get a good look, keep that window rolled up and those doors locked tightly. Ask once more to see their credentials. If he/she won't let you, tell the "officer" that you'd like for them to call another officer to the scene. This is your right -- and while it may aggravate the officer if he/she is in fact the real deal, it could save your life if they are not. And real officer will understand your concern and have no problem with calling a fellow officer (or supervisor) to the scene. All law enforcement in the Larimer County area are on the same page with this procedure, and they will understand and not give you any grief. We all know that there have been several case of women being abducted by thugs impersonating police -- and most departments are very sensitive to people's legitimate concerns on this topic.

 **Fourth:** If the "officer" starts acting oddly when you ask to see their ID -- becomes threatening to you, behaving in a non-professional manner, pounding on your door, orders you out of the vehicle, etc. -- seriously consider putting the car in gear and getting out of there. Use good discretion on what speed you use in a situation that clearly doesn't feel right as you risk an "attempt to elude" charge if it is a real police officer but tell the "officer" you are uncomfortable and that you will gladly follow them (or be escorted to) to the nearest police station. If you have a cell phone, immediately dial 911 -- and tell the operator that you have been pulled over by someone who claims to be a police officer but that you think they might not be a real cop. Tell the operator exactly where you are, what type of vehicle you are driving, and give the vehicle type/color/license of the "officer's" car -- and stay on the line. If it's a real officer, you'll know very soon. If it's not, they will almost certainly take off at this point.

These precautions -- and some common sense -- should keep you from getting anything worse than a traffic ticket.

