

# Interpreting your VIN

**Q: I purchased a new 2012 Ford F-150 in October. The door sticker says it was made in September, yet there were 2013s on the lot. Is there an overlap production of 2012s and 2013s?**

**The VIN ends 03459. Seems like a low number for a 2012, unless I'm missing something.**

— B.P., Nazareth, Pa.

**A:** You are missing something. You provide only the last five, not six, characters and do not provide the assembly plant character.

Here is how you read a VIN (vehicle identification number). The first three characters are the world manufacturer identifier. In your case, it is probably IFT, since the one digit represents America, the F is Ford and the T is truck.

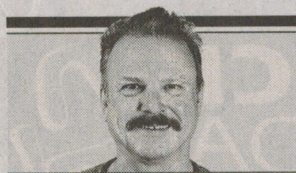
The fourth character indicates the type of passenger restraint system. The fifth through seventh characters indicate the line, series and body type, or weight rating in the case of trucks.

The eighth character indicates the engine type. The ninth character is a check digit that uses a formula to verify the rest of the characters to prevent fraud.

The 10th character (a letter) is the model year. The eleventh character indicates the assembly plant and the last six characters indicate the production sequence.

For a little fun, copy your number into the VIN decoder found at [fordvin.decoder.com](http://fordvin.decoder.com).

**Q: I read with interest the comments regarding premature shut-off of a gas-line pump to possibly promote additional business at chain gas stations. Each year, I rent many automobiles. I find that the gas gauge shows full in the vast majority of cases. However, all too frequently the needle moves off the full mark after 10 or so miles of driving.**



**BOB WEBER**  
Motormouth

**When I fill up the car during the course of the rental, the gauge invariably goes past the full mark and it takes many more miles than 10 to get below that mark. I feel quite sure that at least some rental locations have figured out how to**

**“fill” the tank without actually filling it completely. In this case, they have a direct financial interest in shorting the fill-up.**

— L.K., Darien, Ill.

**A:** The rental agencies may be adding only sufficient fuel for the gauge to show full. But it may also be caused by the previous renter's behavior.

We typically fill the rental car on our way to the airport, and in some cases it may be some distance between the two. When we turn the car in, the gauge still reads full and the person checking us in generally checks the gauge.

**Q: I have a 2004 Honda Civic EX with 120,000 miles on it and just found out that I have a blown head gasket. Full damage is still unknown.**

**It's the first problem I've had with this car. Should I sell it after the repair? Is this a sign of problems to come?**

— S.K., Wheaton, Ill.

**A:** We have replaced many head gaskets in our career and never had a customer return with a problem related to the failure. Of course, we always had the cylinder heads straightened and machined flat. And we always used the best head gaskets available.

If you turn around and sell your car, you may not recoup your investment. Hang on to your Honda.

Send questions to *Motormouth, Rides, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., 5th Floor, Chicago, IL 60611, or with name and town to [motormouth.trib@verizon.net](mailto:motormouth.trib@verizon.net).*

## Breaking down a vehicle identification number

A vehicle identification number (VIN) uses 17 characters.

The first three characters identify the world manufacturer by, in order, country, manufacturer and division; “1” denotes a vehicle made in the U.S.

Characters 4-8 describe vehicle attributes, including braking and restraint systems, line, series and body type, and engine size.

Character 9 is used to prevent fraud, and 10 denotes the production year.

Character 11 denotes the assembly plant.

The remaining six characters, typically bookended with “1s,” are production line numbers.

