



Department of Justice

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2008
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**BUFORD, GEORGIA, MAN SENTENCED TO 18 MONTHS IN PRISON
FOR ROLLING BACK ODOMETERS IN SCHEME
THAT DEFRAUDED LOCAL CAR BUYERS**

WASHINGTON – A Buford, Ga., man has been sentenced to 18 months in federal prison, followed by a year of supervised release, the first six months of which will include home detention, the Justice Department announced today. The defendant rolled back odometers on used cars and trucks to make the vehicles more valuable.

Ronald Dale Cole, 55, pleaded guilty on May 30, 2008, in U.S. District Court in Atlanta, to two counts of odometer tampering. Cole was sentenced on Oct.14, 2008, by U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story, who also ordered the defendant to pay \$191,395 in restitution, reflecting the amount the court found Cole had defrauded victims through his odometer fraud scheme.

Cole purchased high-mileage cars, sport-utility vehicles and trucks, at wholesale auto auctions in Georgia and South Carolina, rolled back the odometers by an average of 97,742 miles and resold the vehicles at auto auctions. At sentencing, Judge Story found that Cole had sold 56 vehicles with altered odometers with an average loss per victim of \$3,418. Most of the vehicles Cole sold were more than 10 years old when he sold them.

Because of the age of the cars, Cole was not required to sign a disclosure certifying the mileage on these 10-year old vehicles as accurate. But each time he altered an odometer with intent to change the mileage on the odometer, he violated federal law.

“Just because a car dealer does not have to certify the mileage on so-called ‘exempt’ cars, that does not give him a license to roll back odometers,” said Gregory G. Katsas, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division. “We are vigilant in enforcing this important consumer protection law and will prosecute anyone who tries to skirt the law by rolling back odometers on vehicles of any age. This is especially important as cars last longer and longer and as people rely on older cars for reliable transportation.”

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Office of Odometer Fraud Investigation (NHTSA) investigated this case. NHTSA estimates that odometer fraud in the U.S. results in consumer losses of more than \$1 billion annually and has established a special hotline to handle odometer fraud complaints. Individuals having information relating to odometer tampering should call (800) 424-9393 or (202) 366-4761.

The case was prosecuted by Justice Department trial attorney Josh Burke with the Civil Division's Office of Consumer Litigation.

SUGGESTED METHODS TO GUARD AGAINST ODOMETER TAMPERING

- ✓ Look for loose screws or scratch marks around the dashboard.
- ✓ Check to make sure that the digits in the odometer are lined up straight --particularly the 10,000 digit. On General Motors cars, look for silver between the digits -- it should not be there. The area between the numbers should be black.
- ✓ Test drive the car and see if the speedometer sticks.
- ✓ Check for service stickers inside the door or under the hood that may give the actual mileage.
- ✓ Look in the owner's manual to see if maintenance was listed, or if pages that might have shown high mileage were removed.
- ✓ Ask the dealer whether a computer warranty check has been run on the car.
- ✓ Use a commercially available computer search program.
- ✓ Ask to see the title documents and look to see if the mileage reading on the documents has been altered.
- ✓ When buying from an individual, look at the date the car's title was issued by the state. Be wary if the car is being sold immediately after the title was issued -- the new title could have been obtained to hide a mileage alteration on the old title.
- ✓ Look to see if the steering wheel was worn smooth. Look for other signs of excessive wear on the arm-rest, the floor mats, the pedals for the brakes and gas, and the area around the ignition. If these items were recently replaced, that could also indicate efforts to hide the car's true use and mileage.
- ✓ Have a mechanic check out the car.
- ✓ Insist that the seller fill out and sign the odometer information on the back of the title. This may help you in the future if there is a problem.

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