

*Laws
are like sausages:*

it's best not to see how they're made

Otto von Bismarck

*And, as Alwyn Sambrook discovers,
many weird laws are still in force...*

The minute horseless carriages were born, legislators concocted restrictions on their use.

We all know early cars required a man with a red flag to walk ahead – but similar laws still persist. Even today, in Pennsylvania, night-time motorists on country roads are supposed to fire a rocket every mile to warn of their approach. The courts must be stuffed with offenders...

Everywhere, it seems, the motorist is a target. It's illegal in China to stop at pedestrian crossings; in Romania to own a dirty car; in Montreal to park so as to block your own driveway; in Denmark to fail to check under your car for sleeping children; and in Luxembourg to drive without windscreen wipers (but you don't, by law, need a windscreen).

In general, though, we just hope we won't get caught. Introduce animals into the equation, however – especially in the US – and things get awkward. It's unlawful, for instance, to have an uncaged bear in your car in Missouri (but gorillas are permitted in Massachusetts, provided they sit in the front); to hunt whales from your car in California; and, in sunny Florida, to tie an elephant to a parking meter without paying the relevant parking fee.

You might, of course, avoid such issues by taking a cab, but beware: it's unlawful in Ohio to ride on a taxi roof; in Finland expect to pay extra for royalties on any music played during your journey; and in the City of London be prepared (in theory, at least) to share your taxi with a still-prescribed-by-ancient-horse-law bale of hay. And don't be surprised if your cheery cabbie checks whether you're dead or your dog has rabies. Yes there's legislation against carrying such passengers, too. Old they may be, but such statutes can still drive us all to distraction...

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» Strange Laws

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