CHAPTER 2

THE VEHICLE

REVISED SEPTEMBER 2025

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1. GENERAL. The California Highway Patrol provides its officers with patrol vehicles which meet or exceed performance standards and bid specifications set forth by Administrative Services Division, Fleet Operations Section (FOS), and the California Department of General Services. The vehicles submitted for consideration are thoroughly evaluated by the Departmental Training Division, Academy, Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC) Unit. The results of the evaluation are recorded on a vehicle test document and submitted to FOS for consideration.

2. POLICY. Departmental regulations provide for maintenance and inspection of patrol vehicles at regular intervals. Nonuniformed personnel normally coordinate and are responsible for ensuring lubrication and other maintenance work are performed at the prescribed intervals. Administrative Services Division, FOS, in cooperation with the vehicle manufacturer and through input from field commands, issues bulletins outlining new maintenance procedures, modifications, and anticipated mechanical problems with current patrol vehicles. All of this is intended to provide officers with a safe, efficient, and reliable law enforcement tool.

a. The mechanical safety of a patrol vehicle rests with the driver. The operator, as well as the public, must be protected from the hazards of an unsafe vehicle.

3. PREOPERATIONAL CHECK.

a. Highway Patrol Manual 31.1, Fleet Operations Manual, Chapter 2, Reporting Requirements, states a driver is responsible for inspecting a unit of automotive equipment upon assuming control. This directive not only requires an action on the part of the officer to make a preoperational inspection, but offers relief from driving a vehicle that could be unsafe. A preoperational inspection need not be a long, time-consuming project. A preoperational check should include, but is not limited to, the following items:

(1) Vehicle. A visual inspection of the vehicle when it is parked next to other cars can reveal a mechanical issue.

(2) Tires. Regularly check tire pressure, condition, tread depth, and maintain manufacturer's recommendations.

(3) Wheels. While checking the tires, visually inspect each wheel, and the lug nuts if visible. Hairline cracks would normally develop adjacent to center as this is the weakest point of the wheel. Breakage in the area of the rim is rare but still warrants a check.

(4) Vehicle Attitude. Check to see if the vehicle is sitting at a normal attitude, not leaning to one side.

(5) Lights. Walk around the vehicle or have another officer assist you while checking high and low beams, turn signals, stop lamps, and emergency equipment.

(6) Body Damage. Look for noticeable dents or scratches and report them.

(7) Trunk. Inspect to see if the spare tire is inflated. Ensure the jack is complete, and there is a lug wrench, flares, and a first aid kit. Verify the fire extinguisher is full. Check for any other equipment your Area normally keeps in the vehicle. All items should be safely secured.

b. Entering the Vehicle.

(1) Check for dirt and trash on the floor that could blow into your face when driving at high speed.

(2) Adjust the seat and both mirrors.

(3) Start the engine and check the instrument panel. Ensure the fuel level is full.

(4) Check the brake pedal height by stepping on the brake. Ensure the parking brake works.

(5) Examine the windows for cleanliness. Dirty windows can cause eyestrain.

(6) Place your citation book, clipboard, and other personal items where they will not interfere with your driving. Accidents have occurred when loose articles slid across the dash and became lodged in the steering wheel as the officer was rounding a curve. **Never** place such items on the dashboard.

(7) Make sure all of the seat belts in the vehicle are accessible.

(8) While seated, fasten the lap-shoulder belt. Sit up straight when adjusting the lap-shoulder belt. The shoulder belt should go over the shoulder and across the chest. Be sure the seat belt is not twisted as this will bind the

retractor mechanism and could interfere with exiting the vehicle quickly when making an enforcement stop.

c. Placing the Vehicle in Motion.

(1) Listen for unusual sounds in the vehicle as you leave the Area parking lot. A worn-out disc brake pad can make a metallic scraping sound as the wheels turn. A rhythmic clicking sound can signal loose lug nuts or a cracked wheel.

(2) Check the steering for excessive play, vehicle wandering, or pulling to one side.

d. The preoperational check described in paragraphs 3.a., 3.b., and 3.c. could be accomplished in a few minutes once the officer has developed a routine. A set pattern is also beneficial to ensure critical items are not overlooked at the start of each shift.

e. Awareness of the mechanical condition of the vehicle should not end with the preoperational check. Alertness to signals indicating potential mechanical failure could ultimately save an officer's life.

f. Peace officers have an ethical responsibility to treat all vehicles with care. A professional attitude leads to a higher standard of care of vehicles and other equipment.

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