

# Buying Secondhand A Racer's Guide



What to look for on engine & frame numbers



*Compiled with the assistance of:*

**Metropolitan Police:  
Stolen Vehicle Unit**



**Motorcycle News**



# A Buyer's Guide

NOTE: The full colour version is on [bemsee.net](http://bemsee.net) in the "Info Center"

Once you've checked the basics below, the key thing to examine is the chassis and engine numbers – especially the engine number. The chassis number is on the headstock, but prepare to grub about on your hands and knees to examine the engine number. It could be the only thing standing between you and a very large hole in your bank account.

By checking the shape of the letters and numbers and the background surface finish, you can tell if the bike has had its identity changed - a sure sign of theft. Each manufacturer has used the same font for the vast majority of its machines made over the last decade (see later).

This guide gives you a good idea of what to look for, but it is not comprehensive. None of the manufacturers could supply us with full details of the font alphabets they use for engine and chassis numbers, so we can't show you the correct form of every letter and number.

This guide is relevant for bikes bought to be ridden on the road. Remember that pretty well all bikes started life that way, even if you are now looking at a second-hand "race" bike, the same principles apply. If the bike was stolen and later acquired by the seller standing before you – it's still stolen property and you risk losing it and your money if picked up on a spot check by the police.

## How not to buy a stolen bike - Checklist

Trust your instincts. If in doubt, don't buy it, no matter how good the deal appears to be. If you think it's odd that the seller asks you to meet in his works car park but doesn't know where the nearest petrol station is, for instance, it probably is. And if you're in a pub car park or a lay-by be on high alert.

Check the logbook against a genuine one. Study the engine and chassis numbers for signs of meddling. Check there is a 'DVLA' watermark. Obviously, if the seller says the logbook is still at Swansea – the excuse given by cloners, run away.

Check the seller. Don't buy from car parks or pubs. Check the seller's ID matches the log book. Do not accept ANY excuses. Note that even some reputable dealers have

inadvertently sold stolen bikes, so don't let your guard down there.

Check the chassis and engine numbers. These should both match the log book. Do your homework on the font the bike uses (see below) and the surface finish the numbers are on. Take a torch and overalls so you can manage to see the engine number.

Ask for all documentation – the more MOTs, tax discs, service receipts, parts receipts etc, the less likely it is to be stolen. If there aren't any, there needs to be a good reason (eg unofficial import). But even then there should be a paper trail.

Get it checked by a company such as MCN Bikecheck or HPI. This will provide a history of the machine to see if it's been stolen, written off or has finance owing on it. If it is marked (eg Datatag), check with them to find the registered owner. It's hassle, but worth it.

Contact the Club. If you see a bike you are interested in but are worried, take a note of the Engine and/or Frame numbers and drop them in an email to [mikedommett@hotmail.com](mailto:mikedommett@hotmail.com)

We have established an informal arrangement with the Stolen Vehicle Unit to enable you to have those numbers checked through the Police National Computer. You need to be a Bemsee Member and also be prepared to advise the details of the seller if any number comes back as "stolen".

### **What ringers do:**

1. Thief buys genuine frame and logbook from legitimate source – breaker, race team etc.
2. Steals the same model bike.
3. Rebuilds bike around his legitimately bought frame.
4. Changes engine number to match that on genuine logbook.
5. Either sells bike direct, or trades it into dealer for brand new bike (then sells the brand new bike too).

### **How cloning works:**

1. Thief steals bike.
2. Finds a legit similar model and copies its chassis number.
3. Grinds off number on stolen bike, replaces it with copied number.
4. Get a new numberplate made up of legit bike's registration.
5. Sells bike saying the V5 logbook is still with the DVLA.

## Yamaha – Frame Numbers



### What to look for (Yamaha):

- Tuning forks symbol at start and finish
- Bottom of the nine is short
- Bottom of the 8 is bigger than the top
- Top of 6 is short
- Hook on the top of the 1 but no foot
- Square 0
- Closed 4

### What to look for (All Bikes):

- Frame plate should be the same as the frame
- Frame colour - etching should be silver, if oversprayed writing will be black
- Flat spots on frame or engine case
- If there is paint coming off the frame plate then it's a ringer as it has been ground off and painted. What the factories use will not come off.

## Yamaha – Engine Numbers



### What to look for:

Tuning forks symbol at start and finish  
Bottom of the nine is short  
Bottom of the 8 is bigger than the top  
Top of 6 is short  
Hook on the top of the 1 but no foot  
Square 0  
Closed 4

## Yamaha – Fake Examples



The 0 are not square

There's a foot on the 1

4 is not closed

6 is not short



# Suzuki – Frame Numbers



## What to look for (Suzuki):

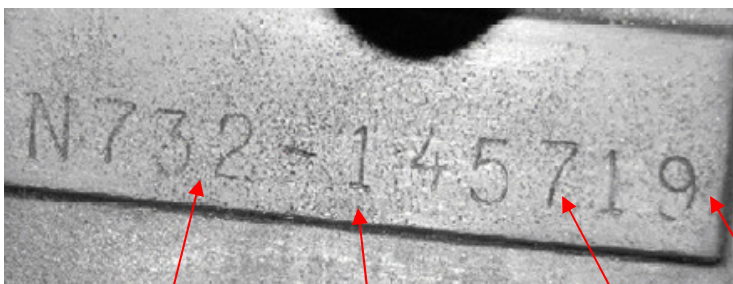
- S logo in a box start and finish
- Round 0
- hook on 1 but no foot
- Straight 7
- 8 fatter at the bottom
- Closed 4
- 2 like this...not this 2



## What to look for (All Bikes):

- Frame plate should be the same as the frame
- Frame colour - etching should be silver, if oversprayed writing will be black
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# Suzuki – Fake Examples



Wrong shape 2 and 3      There's a foot on the 1      No S Logos      7 should be straight



## Honda – Frame Numbers



### What to look for (Honda):

- 9 looks like teardrop on a stick
- Hook on the 7
- Broken font like a stencil
- Box with a cross start and finish
- Open top 4
- Bottom part of 5 almost a circle

### What to look for (All Bikes):

- Frame plate should be the same as the frame
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## Honda – Engine Number



## Honda – Fake Example



A good try this one, but –

Overall it looks scratchy

The 5's look different to each other  
and the circles are not close enough

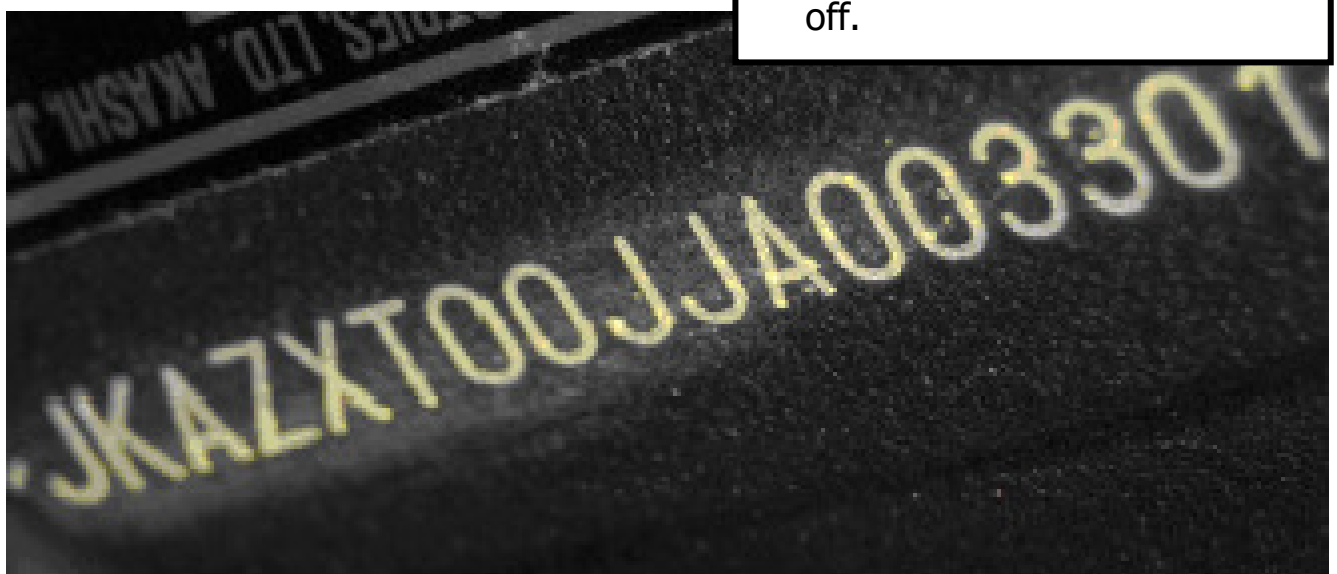
7 is missing a hook

There's no stencil effect on the 0





## Kawasaki – Frame Numbers



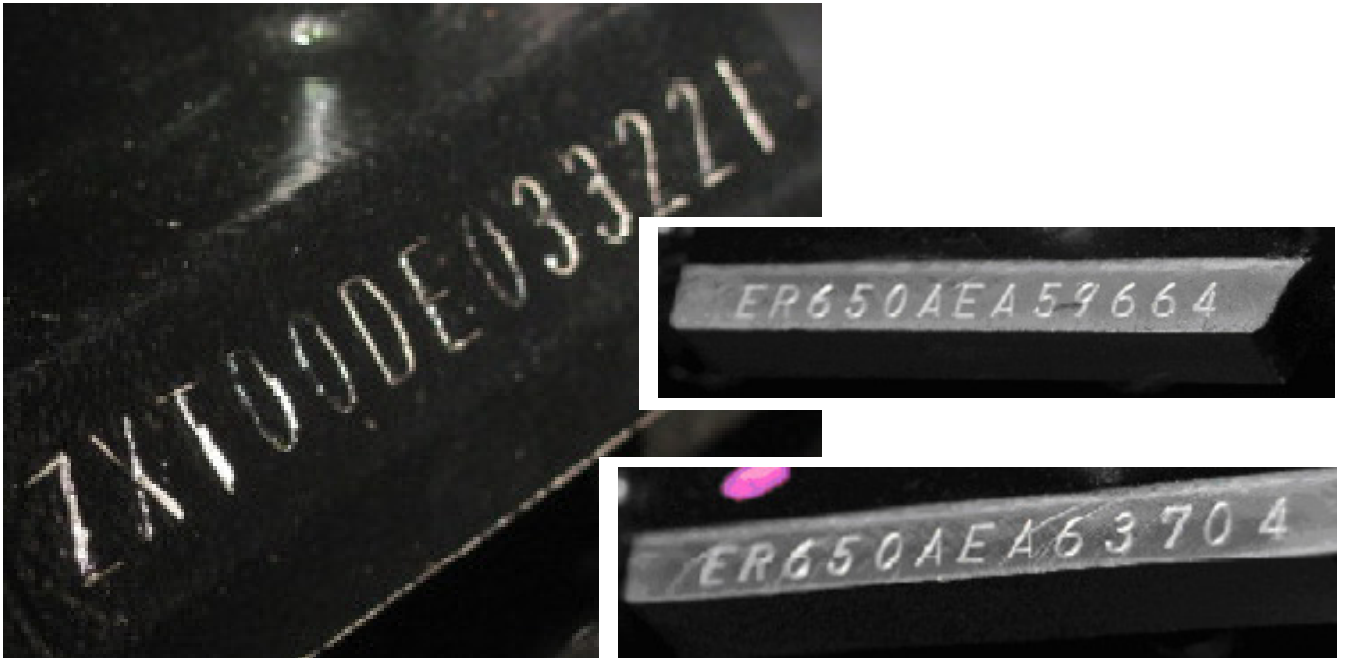
### What to look for (Kawasaki):

- High quality laser etching
- Two upward strokes start and end
- Symbols have no end-tags except for no 1
- 4 is closed
- 0 is the shape of a running track
- 8 is the same sized circle top and bottom
- Numbers run from bottom to top of headstock, other manufacturers go the other way

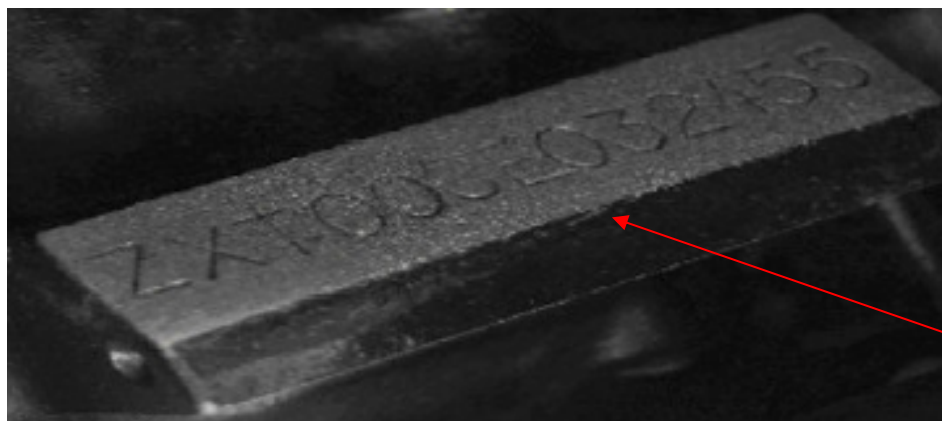
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## Kawasaki – Engine Numbers



## Kawasaki – Fake Examples



Above, a shockingly bad example, but someone still bought the bike!

Here, almost every character is the wrong shape

## Ducati – Frame Numbers



### What to look for (Ducati):

- Much easier as all characters are laser etched in a dot matrix format

### What to look for (All Bikes):

- Frame plate should be the same as the frame
- Frame colour - etching should be silver, if oversprayed writing will be black
- Flat spots on frame or engine case
- If there is paint coming off the frame plate then it's a ringer as it has been ground off and painted. What the factories use will not come off.

## Ducati – Engine Numbers



## The ACU Rules

This extract from the ACU Handbook is your reminder of the ACU rules relating to competing on a bike that is stolen. It's your responsibility to check and be sure that your bike is in order. The Technical Officials at each meeting have no option but report suspect frame and engine numbers to the Clerk of the Course. The Clerks have no option but exclude suspect bikes.

### **THIEVING STOPS HERE**

**If the engine or frame number on your bike has been tampered with, don't bother taking it to an ACU event.**

**There's a bike stolen every seven minutes, 120,000 are still missing. The value of these is in excess of £70m. Result: sky-high insurance premiums, many existing riders forced off the road and newcomers who cannot afford the insurance.**

**Anyone found in possession of a machine with tampered or defaced engine or frame numbers will not be allowed to race.**

**THERE IS NO PLACE IN OUR SPORT FOR DISHONESTY**

## **Anti-theft screw tightens**

The ACU is determined to ensure that all motorcycle sport is conducted in a fair, honest, and sporting manner, so that every competitor has an even chance of success. Competitors using stolen engines, frames and components, which they disguise by altering or erasing the identification numbers are seeking unfair advantage. Whether they actually steal bikes themselves, or simply buy bits cheaply, "no questions asked", the effect is the same; they seek an unfair advantage over the honest competitor, and contribute to the motorcycle theft epidemic, which affects all motorcyclists in the long run, racers or not.

The ACU is a partner in the Anti-Theft Initiative (ATI) piloted jointly by the Auto-Cycle Union, British Motorcyclists Federation and the Motorcycle Action Group and is also Secretariat to the Motorcycle Crime Reduction Group (MCRG). Scrutineers and specially trained ATI marshals will specifically check the authenticity of engine and frame numbers. Where "dodgy" numbers are found, the facts will be reported to the Clerk of the Course who will exclude suspect machines from competing. No ifs or buts.

The ATI marshals are fully briefed on how to conduct their examinations at the scrutineering point without interfering with the normal running of the meeting.

Good Motorcycle Sport depends on the trust of competitors and the support of the general motorcycling public. Using stolen bike parts is like any other form of cheating. The monstrous theft rate of motorcycles significantly deters people from buying and using them. Fewer riders means fewer race fans; fewer fans means less income for organising clubs; less income means fewer events; fewer purchases of motorcycles means that sales volumes decrease, and the cost of legitimate bikes and parts increases.

Everybody in the motorcycle world is affected by the scourge of theft, and the ACU will do everything possible to keep that scourge away from competitive sport.

**If your machine has an erased or altered frame or engine number, you will be prevented from racing.**

## A Final Word on “Stolen - Recovered” Bikes

There are a few examples of bikes that have been seized by the Police after an initial check. These have then been found to be stolen. Most commonly the Insurance Company involved will have paid out to the original owner, so in such cases title and ownership of the bike remains with the Insurance Company.

Be careful at this point...the Insurance Company will most often propose a settlement figure for you to actually acquire title of the bike, remember even though it was in your possession, it was still not your property.

If the engine or frame number was originally defaced, the ACU rule will mean that the bike cannot be accepted to race at any meeting. Even if you are in possession of documents to support the bike's history, the rule will still apply.

Therefore, be careful about making any decision on spending more money with the Insurance Company to get the bike back, if you already know that there's a problem with the engine or frame numbers.