



## Tinted car windows

They may look nice or seem convenient, but by having your front side windows tinted too darkly you will not be able to see as well in the dark, overcast or other similar conditions which is illegal and dangerous.

### Representation of a view through the passenger window in low light conditions with tinted windows:



### How much tint is allowed?

The Road Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regs specify the minimum levels of Visible Light Transfer (VLT) which must be attained by vehicle windows. **75%** of light must pass through the front windscreen (70% if reg before 1/4/85) and **70%** through the front side windows (any forward of the B pillar).

Many people don't realise that car windows are tinted in the factory and aren't completely clear – i.e. don't let 100% of light through. The majority of front side car windows will allow 80-85% of light through when they leave the factory and will be marked with the safety information explained on this sheet.

Most people driving around with illegal tints don't realise they are doing anything wrong or the potential dangers involved – they stop noticing the limited view at night time and often put the window down in order to see properly before pulling off a driveway or out of a junction without really thinking about it.

In simple terms, having darkly tinted windows is like driving around with sunglasses on – lovely on a bright sunny day, but not so good at night or in dimly lit or overcast conditions as you won't be able to see other road users clearly, particularly pedestrians and cyclists and this could cause an accident. **You wouldn't drive with sunglasses on at night, yet illegal tints is exactly that.**

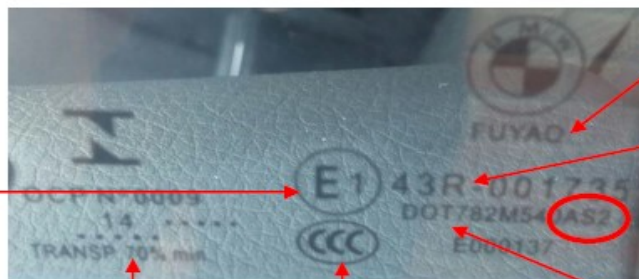
**i** Anything behind the B pillar (rear sides) can be as darkly tinted as you like, however you must have two independent clear views behind you so in the rare event you only have one wing mirror, you would not be allowed to have a tinted rear window.

### Window markings

All car windows have information markings added to one of the lower corners which contains lots of information, including the place and company of manufacture, compliance with standards and other information as shown below. Many windows will now also have a marking to show they allow at least 70% of VLT as this one does in the example below.

The AS number is the most important for tints (circled in red below) – this relates to an American Standard which indicates the position on the car it can be used based on its optical qualities. **AS1** is the clearest glass with at least 75% VLT, is laminated and can be used anywhere on a vehicle (typically windscreen). **AS2** is tempered with at least 70% VLT and can be used anywhere except the windscreen and **AS3** is less than 70% VLT so can be used in all other locations within motor vehicles. *Continues...*

Country code - there are many codes, some examples include:  
1 = Germany,  
2 = France,  
3 = Italy,  
11 = UK,



Many manufacturers will now add a certification that the glass lets in at least 70% VLT to comply with the law in the UK, much of the ECC and many US states.

Conformity with a specific Chinese standard of safety

Glass manufacturer

43R = UN regulation and European standard for safety glazing materials and their installation on vehicles. The UK and over 30 other countries have agreed to comply.

The DOT (Department Of Transportation) number relates to the manufacturer and model of glass, with the first numbers relating to a specific company (e.g DOT17 =Triplex, UK)

## The law, Police action and other consequences

If your front side windows allow less than 70% VLT then you will usually be issued with a £50 Traffic Offence Report (ticket). This does not result in points on your license, however if your windows are so dark they allow **less than 25%** VLT then this is viewed as being in a dangerous condition and will result in a fixed penalty or conditional offer of £100 fine and 3 points on your license. In both cases you retain the right to elect to have the case heard at magistrates court.

Police have calibrated and approved devices to test how much light passes through window glass by shining light through the glass into a special sensor which will then tell the officer the exact VLT amount to the nearest 0.1%. Although this device is commonly carried, **it isn't required** to prosecute for this offence as a suitably trained and experienced officer can carry out what is called a 'subjective' test which involves examining the window, observing the presence of any window film and window markings and potentially even seizing a small piece of the film as evidence to retain and produce in court if required. A subjective test can only ever result in the lower level of prosecution (£50 fine, no points), an accurate test result would be needed for the higher level ticket with points and a fine.



Vehicles deemed to be in a **dangerous condition** (less than 25% VLT on the front side windows) can be subject to an immediate prohibition – this means the vehicle cannot be driven (or towed) on a road and will need to be recovered, the defect repaired and a new MOT obtained before you can then get the prohibition removed and drive again.

As an example, one driver in Essex who had very dark front side windows (15% VLT) was driving at night on an unlit section of motorway. He collided with another car and caused serious injuries to the elderly occupants. He was prosecuted for Dangerous Driving, found guilty at Crown Court and received a 9 month custodial sentence.

## Insurance

If your vehicle did not have tinted windows as standard then adding film (even to the rear windows) could invalidate your insurance if they consider it an undeclared modification – you may only find this out when you come to claim for an accident or other loss and the loss adjuster notices this and voids your policy as a result or reduces the settlement leaving you out of pocket.

## Rectifying the defect

It would be very unusual for front side windows to have actual tinted glass (i.e. where the glass itself is dyed during the manufacture process – often referred to as

'smoked glass') and therefore it is likely tinted film has been applied. This is very simple to remove and usually comes off in one piece in a matter of seconds. The hard part is to get hold of enough to grip onto so you can peel it off – often you can use your finger nails or a coin to peel the top edge away from the window however a razor blade or similar fine point can be used to slide between the glass and film to get it started. Sometimes warming the glass with either a hair dryer or the heating system within the vehicle can assist.

As you peel the film off you should start at the top, working your way down the glass, raising the window a few inches at a time until you reach the bottom with the window fully up at which point you can usually pull off the last part within the rubber seal in a sideways pull.

Once you have peeled the film off, the glass will be a little tacky to touch – this is residue from the adhesive and will easily clean off however you should ensure you don't lower the window until it has been cleaned as to do so could cause the glue to catch the rubber seal at the bottom and/or gather dirt and dust.

**The responsibility to remove the film lies with the driver** - an officer may assist you with this at their discretion if you request them to however **Essex Police accept no responsibility** for any actual or perceived damage or marks to the glass as a result of this assistance.

*"I only have 30% tint so it's legal"*

This is a common mistake by people who are trying to stay within the law – they know windows must allow 70% VLT but make the incorrect assumption they have completely clear glass to start with (i.e. 100% VLT). When you consider the majority are around 85% VLT this then takes it to around 55% VLT, i.e. below 70%.

*"But it came from the factory like that"*

No, it didn't. It may well have come from a dealer but it wouldn't have left the factory with illegally tinted front windows as they adhere to very strict controls and specifications in order to comply with the law. Some car sellers (not usually main dealers) will add tints to the windows in order to make the car look more attractive (especially black cars) however in doing so they are breaking the law by supplying a vehicle in a dangerous condition if they allow you to drive on public roads.

*"It's just had an MOT"*

Excessively tinted glass is seen as a serious issue but one which currently affects only a small number of the 24 million vehicles tested annually. To include this item in the MOT test would require all 18,000 garages to incur expenditure on special test equipment and the time taken to carry out an MOT would increase. The MOT fee would have to be increased and this would affect all motorists - all for a small number of vehicles.