

Motor Vehicle Division Policy Memo # 16-02

Autocycles

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TO: All Motor Vehicle Division staff, Iowa County Treasurers and County Treasurers' staff that issue driver's licenses or perform vehicle title and registration functions.

SUBJECT

This policy memo explains legislation passed in 2016 (Division I of House File 2437) that established a new type of three-wheeled motor vehicle called an autocycle. This memo explains what autocycles are; how they are titled, registered and plated; and what kind of driver's licenses are required to operate them; and answers a variety of questions that customers may have about the vehicles and their operation.

EXPLANATION

In 2016, state legislation (Division I of House File 2437) amended and added various new subsections to Iowa Code chapters 321, Motor Vehicles and Law of the Road; 322, Motor Vehicle Manufacturers, Distributors, Wholesalers and Dealers; 322D, Farm Implement, Motorcycle, Snowmobile, and All-Terrain Vehicle Franchises and 322G, Defective Motor Vehicles (Lemon Law) designating certain three-wheeled motor vehicles as autocycles and defining the title and registration, driver's license, and equipment requirements that apply to the owners and operators of these vehicles. **This legislation is effective July 1, 2016.**

Currently, there is no provision in the code relating to autocycles. Beginning July 1, 2016, to facilitate autocycle registrations and to avoid unnecessary driver's licensing requirements, the legislation does the following:

- Defines an autocycle as described below, and provides that an autocycle is not a motorcycle.
- Confirms that an autocycle will be registered for the same flat registration fee as a motorcycle (\$20 per year).
- Allows drivers to operate an autocycle under any license valid for the operation of noncommercial passenger vehicles, without a motorcycle license or endorsement.
- Allows motorcycle dealers to display and sell autocycles.

LINK TO LEGISLATION

Iowa Acts, 2016, House File 2437, Division I:

https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/86/Attachments/HF2437_GovLetter.pdf

HELPFUL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following questions and answers provide additional information that will be helpful to you and to customers.

WHAT'S AN AUTOCYCLE?

The legislation added a new subsection to Iowa Code section 321.1, "Definitions of words and phrases," defining an autocycle as a three-wheeled motor vehicle that is originally designed with the following:

- Two front wheels and one rear wheel;
- A steering wheel rather than handlebars;
- No more than two permanent seats that do not require the operator or a passenger to straddle or sit astride the vehicle; and
- Foot pedals that control the brakes, acceleration, and clutch, where applicable.

The following are examples of vehicles that meet the definition of an autocycle:



The Polaris Slingshot



The Elio Motors two-seater

HOW CAN I TELL IF A VEHICLE IS AN AUTOCYCLE?

This part can feel confusing, because vehicles of this type have been constructed to meet the federal motor vehicle safety regulations that apply to motorcycles and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has approved for them for highway operation as motorcycles. However, these vehicles don't fit the traditional legal definition of motorcycle and don't require motorcycle skills to drive because of they are constructed to drive like passenger vehicles and don't require the dynamic riding skills that come with handlebars and saddle-style seats. That's why the legislation defines them as a separate vehicle type. When trying to decide whether a motor vehicle is an autocycle, keep the following in mind:

- Because NHTSA classifies these vehicles as motorcycles, they will have a manufacturer's certificate of origin and vehicle identification number (VIN) that correspond to a motorcycle. However, this doesn't preclude their registration as an autocycle – what matters is whether they were originally designed as described above.
- The Office of Vehicle & Motor Carrier Services will designate those vehicles that meet Iowa's legal definition of autocycle, and only vehicles that have been designated as autocycles will be issued a vehicle title and registration that lists the vehicle as an autocycle.

- Currently, the only vehicles being registered in Iowa that meet the requirements to be registered as an autocycle are the Polaris Slingshot and the Elio Motors two-seater (both pictured above).

**HAVE VEHICLES THAT MEET THE DEFINITION OF AUTOCYCLE BEEN REGISTERED AS MOTORCYCLES?
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE VEHICLES?**

Yes, vehicles that meet the new definition of autocycle that were registered before July 1, 2016, have been registered as motorcycles.

- We are not contacting the owners of these vehicles to require them to change the registration.
- Instead, the county treasurer will amend the registration from motorcycle to autocycle at the next annual registration renewal.

WHAT KIND OF LICENSE PLATE WILL BE ISSUED FOR AN AUTOCYCLE?

An autocycle will be issued one small plate that will be displayed on the rear of the vehicle, the same as a motorcycle.

DO AUTOCYCLES HAVE SEAT BELTS AND ARE OCCUPANTS REQUIRED TO WEAR SEAT BELTS WHILE RIDING IN AN AUTOCYCLE?

Yes. Autocycles have seat belts, and under the legislation an autocycle is not excepted from Iowa's seat belt laws, which require the front seat passengers to be belted at all times and require all minors to be belted in any position. The requirements for child restraints also apply to children transported in autocycles.

DOES AN OPERATOR OR PASSENGER IN AN AUTOCYCLE HAVE TO WEAR A HELMET WHILE RIDING IN AN AUTOCYCLE?

No. Iowa law does not require the operator of any vehicle, whether a motorcycle or autocycle, to wear a helmet while operating the vehicle. However, we recommend operators and passengers wear helmets for their own protection. Additionally, a helmet may be required when the autocycle is operated in a state that has mandatory helmet laws. Operators and their passengers should check the helmet laws of the states in which they intend to travel.

WHAT KIND OF LICENSE IS VALID FOR THE OPERATION OF AN AUTOCYCLE?

Any license that is valid for the operation of a noncommercial passenger vehicle, including a Class C noncommercial license, may be used to operate an autocycle. A motorcycle license or endorsement is not required.

MAY A MINOR (A PERSON UNDER 18) OPERATE AN AUTOCYCLE?

Yes. A minor can operate an autocycle as long as the minor has a license valid for the operation of a noncommercial passenger vehicle and is otherwise operating within the restrictions of the license. This includes a minor driving under an instruction permit, minor school license, intermediate license or full license.

MAY A CUSTOMER TAKE THE MOTORCYCLE SKILLS TEST USING AN AUTOCYCLE?

No, a customer applying for a motorcycle license or endorsement may not take the motorcycle skills test using an autocycle, whether applying for a standard motorcycle license or a motorcycle license limited to operation of a three-wheeled motorcycle.

- An autocycle does not require motorcycle skills to operate and a person riding one will not demonstrate motorcycle riding skills or abilities in a skills tests environment, either for a two-wheeled or three-wheeled motorcycle.
- Additionally, because the legislation states that an autocycle is not a motorcycle, an autocycle may not be considered either a motorcycle or three-wheeled motorcycle for testing purposes.

MAY A CUSTOMER TAKE A NONCOMMERCIAL, PASSENGER VEHICLE DRIVE TEST USING AN AUTOCYCLE?

No. An autocycle is designed to the safety standards of a motorcycle; therefore, we take the position that riders should wear safety helmets during operation. To avoid exposing our examiners to the risk of riding in an autocycle without a helmet, we will not conduct drive tests in an autocycle.