

Non-Traditional Motor Vehicles and DC Law

Most Motor Vehicle Laws Apply

In the D.C. Code, motor vehicles are defined as vehicles propelled by an internal-combustion engine, electricity, or steam.[1] This definition encompasses non-traditional motor vehicles. Therefore, the four main requirements for the operation of motor vehicles all apply: registration, driver's license, inspection, and insurance. [2] All traffic laws, such as reckless driving, also apply,[3] except as discussed below.

Two or Three Wheeled Non-Traditional Motor Vehicles

If the non-traditional vehicle has two or three wheels, it falls under one of two subcategories of motor vehicle: motorcycle or motorized bicycle.




Vehicle Type	Definition	Inspection Required?	License Required?	Insurance Required?	Registration Required?	Helmet Required?	Ride on Sidewalk?	Ride on Trails/Bike Lanes	Parking
Motorcycle	A motorcycle is a two or three wheeled vehicle that has one or more of the following characteristics: 1) piston displacement of more than fifty (50) cubic centimeters, 2) capable of traveling over 35 miles per hour on level ground, 3) more than one and one-half (1.5) brake horsepower (S.A.E. rating), 4) wheels under 16 inches in diameter, or 5) manual transmission.[4],[5]	Yes, must be inspected for safety and emissions every two (2) years. [7],[8]	Yes, motorcycle demonstration test in DC or motorcycle demonstration course in VA or MD, and have corresponding "M" endorsement on their license.	Yes, must meet the Compulsory No-Fault Motor Vehicle Insurance Act limits. [11]	Yes; \$52	Yes. [12]	No	No	Motor vehicles rules apply, except that some areas are reserved for motorcycles only.
Motorized Bicycle (also includes most mopeds)	A motorized bicycle is a two or three wheeled vehicle with all of the following characteristics: 1) wheels more than 16 inches in diameter, 2) automatic transmission, 3) piston displacement of not more than fifty (50) cubic centimeters, 4) incapable of maximum speed of over 35 miles per hour on level ground, and 5) not more than one-half (1.5) brake horsepower (S.A.E. rating). If the two or three wheeled motor vehicle does not meet one or more of these characteristics, it is a motorcycle.	Yes, must be inspected for safety and emissions every two (2) years. [7],[8]	Yes, cannot operator with a learner's permit and cannot obtain a motorcycle endorsement until 18. [10]	Yes, must meet the Compulsory No-Fault Motor Vehicle Insurance Act limits. [11]	Yes; \$10 [9]	No	No	Not on trails but allowed in bike lanes. [15]	May be parked on sidewalks only if they are in a bike rack.



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Additional Information

Non-traditional motor vehicles designed for off-road use are not eligible for an inspection sticker. One indication of the vehicle's design is whether it displays a manufacturer's sticker indicating that it meets the federal standards for on-road use. If there is no such sticker, it cannot be operated on DC streets, except that mopeds, which are motorcycles or motorized bicycles equipped with functional pedals, may be operated on DC streets if they pass all other inspection requirements.

Vehicle Type	Definition	Inspection Required?	License Required?	Insurance Required?	Registration Required?	Helmet Required?	Ride on Sidewalk?	Ride on Trails/Bike Lanes	Parking
All -Terrain Vehicles and Dirt Bikes	"ATV" is defined as any motor vehicle with not less than three low pressure tires, but not more than six low pressure tires, designed primarily for off-road use and which has a seat or saddle designed to be straddled by the operator. "Dirt Bike" is defined as any motorcycle designed primarily for off-road use.	Regardless, of their category above, it is a criminal offense to operate ATVs and Dirt bikes on public streets. [6]			Not eligible for registration. [6]	Not Applicable	No	No	No parking on public property.
									
Segway 	Segway, or Personal Mobility Device (PMD), means a motorized propulsion device designed to transport one person or a self-balancing, two non-tandem wheeled device, designed to transport only one person with an electric propulsion system, but excluding a battery-operated wheelchair. [13]	No [14]	No	No	No	No	Yes, except in the Central Business District (CBD).	Allowed in bike lanes, not on National Park Service Trails.	Rules for bicycles apply. [16]

Citations:

- [1] Not included in this definition are traction engines, road rollers, vehicles propelled only upon rails or tracks, personal mobility devices (a.k.a. segways), and battery-operated wheelchairs when operated by a person with a disability; D.C. Official Code § 50-2201.02.
- [2] D.C. Official Code §§ 50-1501.02, 50-1401.01 et seq., 50-1101; and 31-2403, respectively. Even when the vehicle is operated without turning on the engine, as can be done with some mopeds, the vehicle nevertheless is regulated as a motor vehicle.
- [3] See, e.g., United States v. Stancil 422 A.2d 1285 (D.C. 1980).
- [4] 18 DCMR § 9901.
- [5] For example, a moped can be regulated as a motorcycle. United States v. Stancil, 422 A.2d 1285 (D.C. 1980); 18 DCMR 9901.
- [6] D.C. Law 15-289.
- [7] 18 DCMR § 601.
- [8] Some of the requirements include: 1 or 2 headlamps, at least 1 tail lamp, at least 1 brake lamp, rear view mirrors, and a horn. Motorcycles and motorized bicycles are not required to have turn signals; 18 DCMR, Ch.6.
- [9] D.C. Official Code § 50-1501.03.
- [10] See D.C. Official Code § 50-1401.01.
- [11] See D.C. Official Code 31-2401 et seq.
- [12] 18 DCMR § 2215.
- [13] D.C. Official Code § 50-1401.01(f) excludes personal mobility devices from the classification as a "motor vehicle."
- [14] D.C. Official Code § 50-1108.
- [15] 18 DCMR §§ 1201.18 , 1201.19
- [16] 18 DCMR § 1209.