

How to fill out a California title

California Certificate of Title · 8 of 11 boxes are the seller's · rules as of 2026-08-23

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/forms/california/certificate-of-title/

This sheet is not the title. It is the checklist to keep beside one. California does not void a title somebody has written on. It asks for an explanation instead. A Vehicle/Vessel Transfer and Reassignment Form (REG 262) is accepted in place of the registered owner's signature on line 1 - and so is a REG 227. That matters when the certificate is lost, or when somebody has already signed the wrong line.

Who has to sign

Co-owners joined by “and”	Shown as a slash between the names. The signature of each owner is required - and that slash is what people misread as OR.
Co-owners joined by “or” or “and/or”	The signature of only one owner.
Co-owners with a JTRS designation	Joint tenants with right of survivorship. The signature of each owner.
A business entity	The name of the business entity and an authorised representative's countersignature. The DMV does not require proof that the person is authorised.
An individual doing business as (dba)	The signature of the individual. John Jones, or John Jones dba Jones Cooler Service, are both accepted.
A sole owner with no lienholder	The signature of the sole owner. The DMV will accept a sole owner's signature on line 2 instead of line 1.
A trust	The signature of the trustee. Where no trustee is listed on the title, a Statement of Facts (REG 256) certifying their appointment goes with it.
Somebody who cannot write	A witnessed signature by mark. The witness prints the applicant's name and signs beside the mark - and for a release of ownership, two witnesses are required.

Every box, in the order you meet it

#	WHO	BOX	WHAT GOES IN IT
1	YOU	1a. Signature of registered owner	The line that sells the car, with the date beside it. Sign exactly as your name is printed in the REGISTERED OWNER(S) block above. Watch out: The certification printed above these lines is worth reading once: you are certifying under penalty of perjury that the signatures below release interest in the vehicle.
2	YOU	1b. Signature of registered owner	The second owner's line, directly beneath 1a. Watch out: Whether it has to be used comes down to one mark. California prints AND as a forward slash, so a title reading SMITH / JONES needs both 1a and 1b. OR and AND/OR need only one.
3	YOU	The odometer now reads ____ (no tenths) miles	The mileage at the moment of sale, written into the comb boxes in whole miles. Watch out: Go by the federal rule, not the DMV's private-sale page, which still says ten years. A 2011-or-newer vehicle needs the mileage until it is twenty years old. The line above it warns that failure to complete it, or a false statement, may result in fines and/or imprisonment.
4	YOU	The two warning tick boxes	One reads “Odometer reading is not the actual mileage” and the other “Mileage exceeds the odometer mechanical limits”. Watch out: Leave both empty unless one is genuinely true. The printed sentence above them says the reading reflects the actual mileage unless one of these is checked - so ticking one is a brand on the car, and not ticking one when it applies is the false statement the warning is about.
5	YOU	Transferor / seller signature(s), with the date	A second signature, separate from 1a, under its own certification that the foregoing is true and correct. Watch out: This is the mark people miss, and it is federal rather than Californian: 49 CFR 580.5(c) says the disclosure “must be signed by the transferor and must contain the transferor's printed name”.
6	LENDER	2. Signature releases interest in vehicle	The lienholder's line near the foot of the certificate, with a release date. Watch out: Company names must be countersigned. And on a vehicle two model years old or newer this is the only place a lien can be released - not a REG 227, not a REG 166.
7	BUYER	Transferee / buyer signatures	The buyer signs the same odometer disclosure, in the column beside yours. Watch out: Required by 49 CFR 580.5(f), which also asks for their printed name. An unsigned buyer column is an incomplete disclosure, and it is your disclosure.

#	WHO	BOX	WHAT GOES IN IT
8	YOU	Printed name of agent signing for a company	One line under each signature column, used only when a company is on either side of the sale. Watch out: A private individual leaves it alone. A company signature needs the business name and an authorised representative's countersignature - the DMV gives the format as ABC CO., by JOHN SMITH.
9	YOU	Smog certification	A valid smog certification, or evidence of exemption, goes with the title. Watch out: This lands on the seller in California, which catches out anyone who has sold a car in almost any other state. It reaches the DMV electronically and is good for 90 days.
10	BUYER	The transfer fee, other fees and use tax	Fifteen dollars for the transfer under VC 9255, plus any other fees due and use tax or evidence of exemption. Watch out: Two clocks. Ownership has to be reported within 10 days, but the manual allows 30 days from the date of transfer to pay the transfer fee without penalty - and 20 days for renewal fees if the registration lapses in the meantime.
11	YOU	If somebody has already written on it	A Statement of Error or Erasure (REG 101) is required for any erasure or lined-out information on a California Certificate of Title, completed by whoever made the mark. Watch out: The bottom band of the certificate reads KEEP IN A SAFE PLACE - VOID IF ALTERED. California will still look at a marked title, which is not true everywhere, but it is a request rather than a right.

Before you pick up the pen

- **Black or blue ink, capitals on the REG 138** — The release of liability asks for CAPITAL LETTERS in black or blue ink in its own instruction line. The rest of the paperwork wants the same ink and no pencil anywhere.
- **Your true full name as it reads on your licence** — Not a nickname, not an initial where the licence spells it out. The DMV matches the two.
- **Watch the slash** — A slash between two owners' names means AND, and AND means everybody signs. It is the most expensive punctuation mark in California vehicle paperwork.
- **Whole dollars, whole miles** — The REG 138 says selling price with no cents and odometer reading with no tenths, in so many words.
- **Highlight sparingly, if at all** — The manual allows highlighters but tells its own staff to mark the X beside a signature line, or the space just above or below it - not the entire field. A block of colour across a box is not a help.
- **The buyer block is the buyer's** — The DMV's first helpful tip on the REG 138 is to write the new owner's information in the new owner section and the seller's in the seller's section. It is listed first because it is the mistake it sees most.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA																	
CERTIFICATE OF TITLE							VEHICLE HISTORY										
VEHICLE ID NUMBER			YR MODEL		MAKE		PLATE NUMBER										
BODY TYPE MODEL		AX	UNLADEN WEIGHT	FUEL	TRANSFER DATE	FEES PAID		REGISTRATION EXPIRATION DATE									
		YR 1ST SOLD	CLASS	YR	MO	EQUIPMT/TRUST NUMBER		ISSUE DATE									
MOTORCYCLE ENGINE NUMBER					ODOMETER DATE		ODOMETER READING										
REGISTERED OWNER(S)																	
I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California, that THE SIGNATURE(S) BELOW RELEASES INTEREST IN THE VEHICLE. 1a. <u>08/19/2026</u> <u>X</u> <u>Priya Raman</u> SIGNATURE OF REGISTERED OWNER 1b. _____ <u>X</u> _____ SIGNATURE OF REGISTERED OWNER Federal and State law requires that you state the mileage upon transfer of ownership. Failure to complete or providing a false statement may result in fines and/or imprisonment. The odometer now reads <u>142306</u> (no tenths), miles and to the best of my knowledge reflects the actual mileage unless one of the following statements is checked. WARNING ☐ Odometer reading is not the actual mileage. ☐ Mileage exceeds the odometer mechanical limits. I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;">DATE 08/19/2026</td> <td style="width: 40%;">TRANSFEROR/SELLER SIGNATURE(S) <u>X</u> <u>Priya Raman</u></td> <td style="width: 20%;">DATE 08/19/2026</td> <td style="width: 40%;">TRANSFeree/BUYER SIGNATURE(S) <u>X</u> <u>Marcus Okafor</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">PRINTED NAME OF AGENT SIGNING FOR A COMPANY</td> <td colspan="2">PRINTED NAME OF AGENT SIGNING FOR A COMPANY</td> </tr> </table> IMPORTANT READ CAREFULLY Any change of Lienholder (holder of security interest) must be reported to the Department of Motor Vehicles within 10 days. LIENHOLDER(S) 2. <u>X</u> Signature releases interest in vehicle. (Company names must be countersigned) Release Date _____ CA										DATE 08/19/2026	TRANSFEROR/SELLER SIGNATURE(S) <u>X</u> <u>Priya Raman</u>	DATE 08/19/2026	TRANSFeree/BUYER SIGNATURE(S) <u>X</u> <u>Marcus Okafor</u>	PRINTED NAME OF AGENT SIGNING FOR A COMPANY		PRINTED NAME OF AGENT SIGNING FOR A COMPANY	
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REG. 17.30 (REV.10/02)