Counterfeit Vehicle Labeling … Is There Really a Difference ?

Several years ago I attended NACE and walked by a trade show booth which displayed, ECS Automotive Concepts. I didn't know the guy I was talking with from Adam, but what had caused me to stop was that he had all the automotive labels we have struggled to properly replace being displayed, and that he said, "We will have them to you in two days !"

This was just something I couldn't believe since I was one who had tried all the options and never had good results. I had also cut them off the B-Pillar and/or Door, taped the edges, and put them in the glove box. I had ordered them from the manufacturers, waited months to received them (if ever), and also had many just laying around since even after contacting the Customer several times, months later, they never came back to get them installed.

After spending at least an hour getting to know just about anything there was about labels, I also noticed they were advertising that they were licensed by Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler to do this, and there are others that are not, but still producing labels. When I asked about that, I could tell this gentleman's passion ignited, and possibly his blood pressure. After another educational session, I took a stroll to see the other providers, and sure enough there were others, not licensed, but also providing replacement labels.

This experience has always reminded me of our struggles with, the consistency with aftermarket crash parts, and how so many we receive have issues. But as we know, we do find those out there that are of much better quality than others. however, we have never had a way to "know" which are good or which are bad, before buying them. This label issue is certainly much of the same, but I am sure the vast majority of the industry is not aware of first that they are even available, so we can return that vehicle back like it was dropped off to us, and the critical safety and vehicle information that is contained on the labels is there when it is needed.

If you have ever been involved in a diminished value claim, especially when it implies Repair DV, or Insurer DV, having the proper labeling in place certainly makes the repair that much more unnoticeable. In addition, the information listed on many of these labels is of critical nature. Proper tire pressures, vehicle load weight, production dates, paint codes, and more… all can be very critical data when needed.

For all these reasons, I decided to embark on a project to test the three main aftermarket label providers for accuracy, quality of design, and how close do they replicate the originals. I selected VIN Certification labels for late model General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford, even though I am sure the same quality control and accuracy would be the same if I tested any make of VIN Certification Label.

I challenge you to review this report in detail. There are many concerns I am sure it will raise with you, as it did with me. What was also disturbing was after attempting to get invalid VIN's past ECS Automotive Concepts several time unsuccessfully, David Walden, President of ECS, let me know that they actually receive on the average of three "altered" attempts or partial photos of VIN Certification labels weekly. That was pretty shocking to me.

I plan to be at NACE and SEMA this year. I have asked if I could be in the ECS booth at NACE, and they have agreed. I will be at Booth N-957 so you can see the actual labels I have included in this report, and to get additional copies of this report, or to discuss my findings.

Monday	2:00pm	-	3:00pm
Tuesday	1:00pm	-	3:00pm
Wednesday	1:00pm	-	3:00pm

The following tests were performed with the assistance of other collision repair friends that I thank them for their time and commitment to the truth.

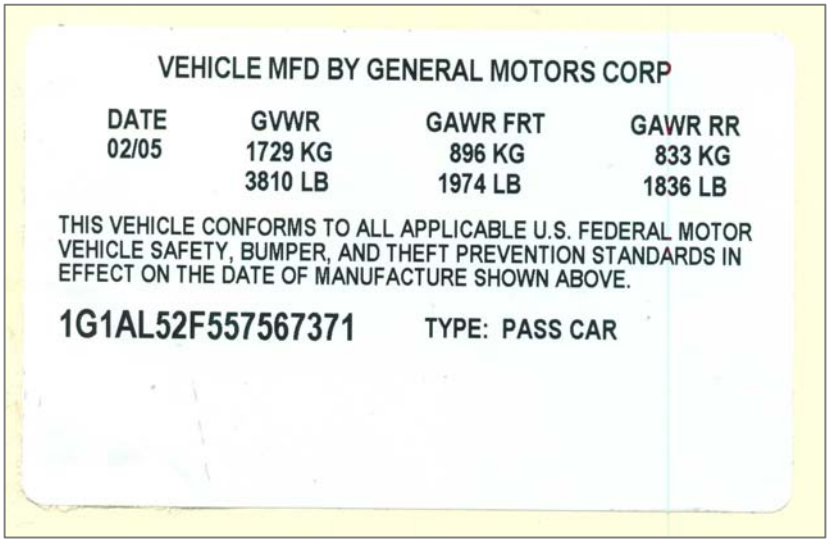
General Motors Order Test 1:
The first orders were placed in mid September 2010 for a 2005 General Motors VIN Certification Label. The labels were received between 2 – 4 days from the date of order. The labels were received as pictured below and identified as to the provider.

ECSVIN.com

The label dimensions, fonts, placement of information and text is a complete replication of the original VIN Certification Label. The logo is also the proper size and location.

These labels also are made on an anti-tamper proof paper as specified by the NITSA standard.

AutomotiveID.com

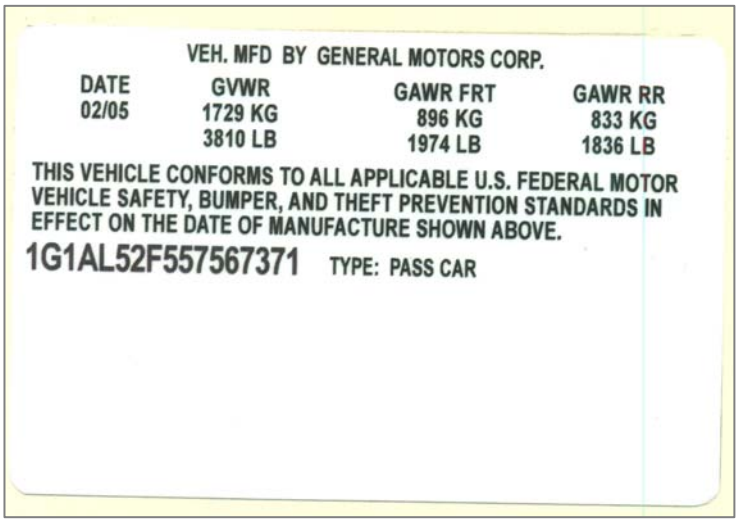


The label dimensions are larger than the original. The fonts, placement of information and text is not as per the original VIN Certification Label.

The logo is also missing and the paper used does not appear to be the anti-tamper proof paper. The wording has been changed to “Vehicle MFD By General Motors”.

During the ordering process, or on the website, there was no indication that the label being produced would not be a true replication.

AutoDataLabels.com



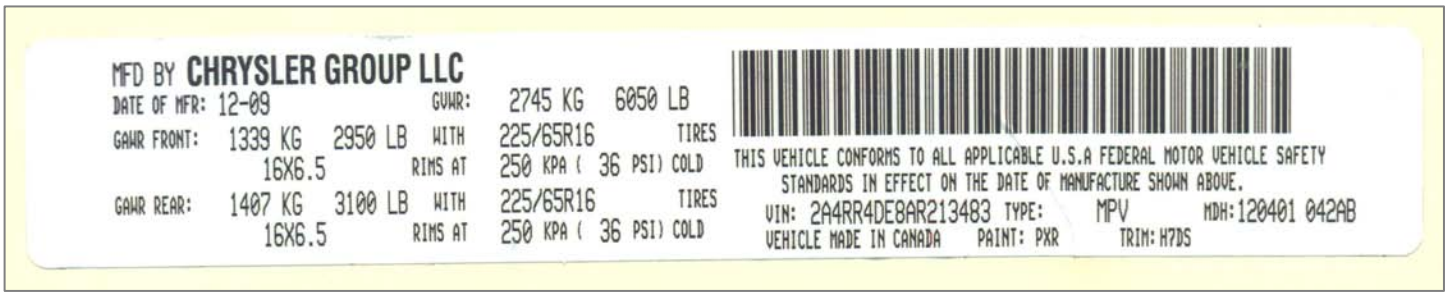
The label dimensions are smaller than the original. The fonts, placement of information and text is not as per the original VIN Certification Label.

The logo is also missing and the paper used does not appear to be the anti-tamper proof paper. The wording has been changed to “VEH MFD By General Motors”.

During the ordering process, or on the website, there was no indication that the label being produced would not be a true replication.

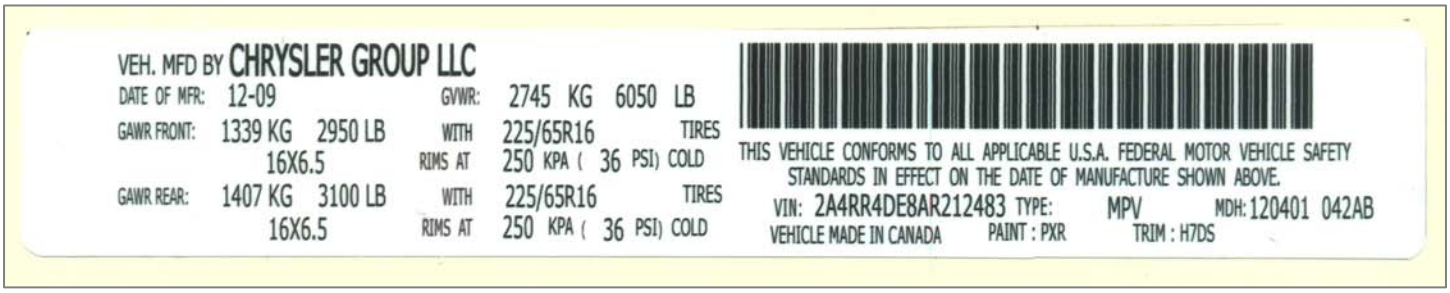
Chrysler Test Order 1:
The second set of test orders were placed in late September 2010. They arrived in the typical 2 – 3 business days. Since all providers agree that the information contained on the labels are critical, I decided to see what type of “checks and balances” were in place with the providers in validating the information provided by the collision shop. To do this first test, I “PhotoShopped” the VIN number to make it an invalid VIN.

ECSVIN.com



ECSVin.com immediately identified that the VIN that was provided was invalid. The above label is the original VIN reproduction before “altered” the “3” into a “2”. They also verified that the options listed on the label were also correct such as tire sizes, rims, and tire pressures through the manufacturer’s software they test each order with. The above label is a complete replication of the original label including fonts, all text. and placements. I also tested the bar code, and it scans properly with my handheld scanner. The label also was printed on the anti-tamper proof paper as specified in the NITSA standard.

AutoDataLabels.com

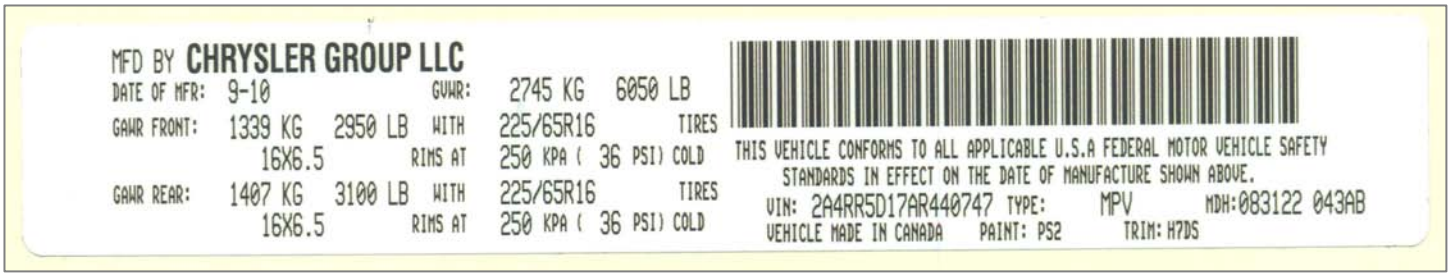


AutoDataLabels.com printed and sent the label as it was “altered”. The VIN Number will not validate using even the most rudimentary VIN validation check. The Check Digit is used to ensure the VIN numbers are valid with a basic algorithm that is available for free on the internet. Many font type and sizes do not match the original label, and the word “VEH.” was added. I also tested the bar code and I could not get it to scan anything. Looking at the darkness and detail of the bar code it is not like the original. The label does not appear to be printed on the ant-tamper proof paper as per the NITSA standard. The label size is the correct dimensions as per the original.

AutomotiveID.com
Automotive ID did identify that the VIN Number was invalid. They commented that they test the VIN on the CarFax website which is a free VIN validation any one can use. For this reason we did not send the original label back to them for printing for this test.

Chrysler Test Order 2:
The third set of test orders were placed also in late September 2010. Since all providers agree that the information contained on the labels are critical, I decided to see what type other types of “checks and balances” were in place with the providers in validating the critical information provided by the collision shop. To do this additional test, I “Photo Shopped” the rim, tires, and tire pressures to be a mismatch for the valid VIN provided.

ECSVIN.com



ECSVin.com immediately identified that the VIN was valid but the critical information such as rim sizes, tire sizes, and tire pressures were not a valid option for the VIN provided. They explained that through the manufacturer’s software they test each order, they can identify invalid critical information such as this. The above label is a complete replication of the correct optioned vehicle based on the VIN. The label utilizes the correct matching fonts, all text. and their placements. I also tested the bar code, and it scans properly with my handheld scanner. The label also was printed on the anti-tamper proof paper as specified in the NITSA standard.

AutoDataLabels.com

AutoDataLabels.com printed and sent the label as it was “altered”. The VIN provided was valid on this test, but obviously the critical information options were changed. Many font types and sizes do not match the original label, and the word “VEH.” was added. I also tested the bar code and I again could not get it to scan anything. The darkness and detail of the bar code it is also not like the original. The label again does not appear to be printed on the ant-tamper proof paper as per the NITSA standard. The label size is the correct dimensions as per the original.

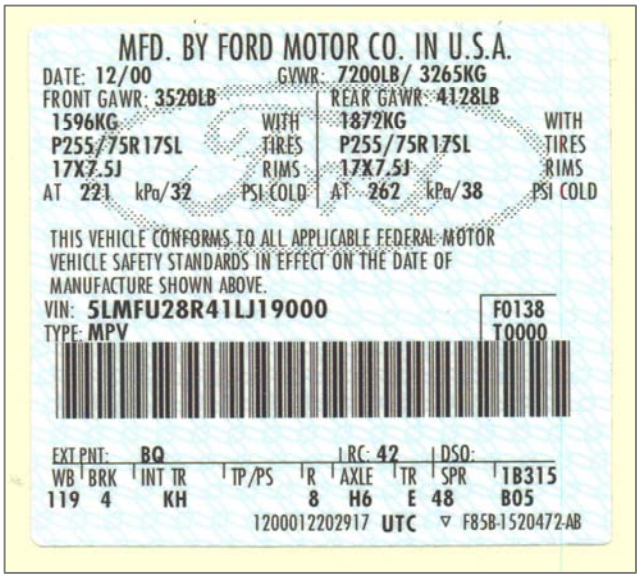
AutomotiveID.com

AutomotiveID.com printed and sent the label as it was “altered”. The VIN provided was valid on this test, but obviously the critical information options were changed. The font types and sizes do not match the original label, and the word “VEHICLE.” was added. I also tested the bar code and the code does scan the listed VIN. It however does not provide the same leading characters as did the original which may or may not affect any automotive related software .The label again does not appear to be printed on the ant-tamper proof paper as per the NITSA standard. The label size is not same dimensions as per the original.

Ford Test Order 1:

The fourth set of test orders were placed also in late September 2010. Since all providers have repeatedly agree that the information contained on the labels are very critical, I decided to see if completely mismatched information could be detected. To do this test, I “Photo Shopped” the VIN to become a standard Lincoln Continental, but all information on the label was listed for a SUV Lincoln Navigator.

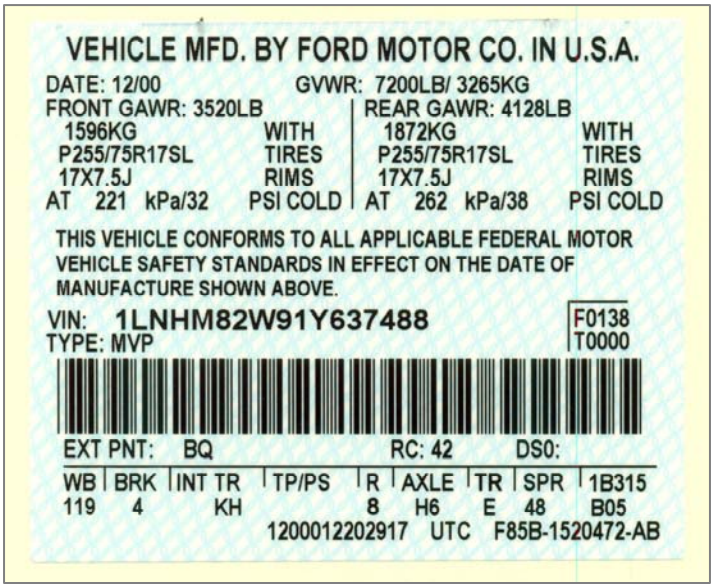
ECSVIN.com



ECSVin.com immediately identified that the VIN was valid but the critical information such as rim sizes, tire sizes, and tire pressures were not a valid option for the VIN provided. They explained that through the manufacturer’s software they test each order, they can identify invalid critical information such as this, the VIN was for a Lincoln Continental and not a “MPV”.

The label reproduced with the unaltered VIN is a complete replication of the correct optioned vehicle based on the VIN. The label utilizes the correct matching fonts, all text. and their placements. The “Ford” watermark appears in the background. I also tested the bar code, and it scans properly with my handheld scanner. The label also was printed on the anti-tamper proof paper as specified in the NITSA standard.

AutomotiveID.com



AutomotiveID.com printed and sent the label as it was “altered”. The VIN provided was valid on this test, but for a standard Lincoln Continental and not a MVP as listed. All the critical information options were based on a Lincoln Navigator, so gross weights, rim sizes, tire sizes, and tire pressures are incorrect for the VIN. .

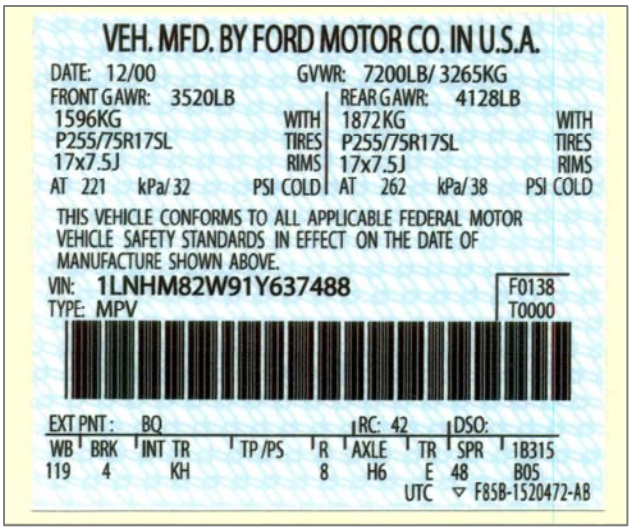
The font types and sizes do not match the original label, and the word “VEHICLE.” was added. The label again does not appear to be printed on the ant-tamper proof paper as per the NITSA standard.

The label size is larger than the original, the label does not have the same type rounded corners, the background color is darker than the original, and it does not have the “Ford” watermark background image.

I also tested the bar code it does scan the listed VIN. It however does not provide the same leading characters as did the original which may or may not affect any automotive related software .

The label does still have the Ford part number listed.

AutoDataLabels.com



AutoDataLabels.com also printed and sent the label as it was “altered”. The VIN provided was valid on this test, but again for a standard Lincoln Continental, and not a MVP as listed. All the critical information options were based on a Lincoln Navigator, so weights, rim sizes, tire sizes, and tire pressures are incorrect for the VIN. .

The font types and sizes do not match the original label, and the word “VEH.” was added. The label again does not appear to be printed on the ant-tamper proof paper as per the NITSA standard.

The label size is smaller than the original, the label does not have rounded corners, the background color is darker than the original, and it does not have the “Ford” watermark background image.

I also tested the bar code the code and it does not scan anything. The bottom of the label is also missing a series of numbers at the bottom which correlates to the information listed at the top of the label.

The label does still have the Ford part number listed.

Pricing and Ordering Experience:

Another important purpose of these tests were to determine pricing and the ordering experience.

AutomotiveID.com

AutomotiveID.com’s website was fairly easy to navigate. It however did not indicate that the VIN Certification labels being reproduced do not replicate the originals. In fact some samples shown on the website do not indicate the changed wording that the ones we received did, There were also some labels on the website which indicated on the bottom of the label that they were not manufactured by the vehicle manufacturer, but none of our received replacement labels so indicated.

We had an issue when faced with providing multiple pictures for the same order (in case you needed to ensure all information was readable). The system was not designed as such. Our attempt to e-mail the listed customer service representative then failed the first time to be received, and as a result, almost delayed our completion of this report.

An advertising I had received also states that they provide labels only for “Body Shops with Ins. Claims Only”, even though we listed “Customer Pay”, “None”, and N/A when prompted on the order form and received them.

The pricing for the VIN Certification Labels were by far the highest of the three compared. Their pricing model includes a “cost plus markup” model. The label price was $125.00 cost plus additional shipping of $19.25, if USPS Express Mail Overnight is selected.

On this website there is a video (Also YouTube.com) which emphasizes the importance of the replacement of the labels on the vehicle especially as it relates to the tire pressures. I am concerned that without the proper software to validate the information provided, that this critical information may be very dangerously displaying misinformation, and the customer (vehicle owner) may never know.

AutoDataLabels.com
AutoDataLabels.com's website was also fairly easy to navigate. The site also did not indicate that the VIN Certification labels that would be reproduced do not replicate the originals. The ordering process is basically a two step process that payment is made through PayPal, but the ordering must be reproduced through e-mail to an AOL account that you can attach multiple photos. When calling the provided telephone number, we were never able to make direct contact without leaving a message with some type of answering service.

The pricing for the VIN Certification Labels were slightly the lowest net cost of the three compared. Their pricing model includes a "cost plus markup" model. The label price listed on the website was $75.95 with no additional shipping options. The receiving of the labels were slightly the longest of the three tested. The received invoice indicates a list price of $99.95 which translates to a 24% gross margin.

ECSVIN.com
ECSVIN.com's website was also easy to navigate. The ordering process was the easiest of the three and allows multiple methods based on the customer's preference. I found that the online ordering was the easiest and fastest as well of the three. For your first order, you will be required to complete a form to validate your are a valid collision related business and to establish a business account. All future orders are very quick and easy. The site does allow uploading multiple pictures and provide special instructions with the order. A confirmation email is also generated when ordering that lets you know your order is being processed.

When a new customer establishes their account, ECS validates that the business is a valid collision account, and establishes discount rate, stores their credit card on file for future orders, and notifies the customer they will be bound to notify the NICB when tampered or altered photos are submitted.

The website also clearly displays the position statements of the three domestic vehicle manufacturers in regards to replacement labels, and their approval of one licensed provider to the aftermarket other than themselves, ECS.

ECS uses a list pricing model on the website as does any other vehicle manufactured part. The price of the VIN Certification label is list priced at $124.95. There is no additional costs for shipping which is through a tracked FedEx two day delivery. All orders were received promptly in two business days.

The standard discount of 25% is used for validated collision customers. Additional pricing discounts are available based on your industry affiliation which is indicated and validated on the "New Customer" form.

Conclusion:

I have had David Walden, President of ECS Automotive Concepts, provide presentations to our State association meetings, and the details in which they follow when reproducing any label certainly is remarkable. I also have had the opportunity to introduce many other association directors, its members, and industry leaders, to ECS, and have had many questions directed to me as to why is this important. There was certainly a lack of awareness of how different each provider's product is designed, validated, reproduced, and delivered. I hope this project showed you that !

Some I have talked with state that it is most important to have the correct information, and not that it is licensed, or looks the same. Few think about validation of the information and what deterrents are in place for those such as "chop shops" and thieves that continue to degrade our industry even more.

The motivation to complete this project was to expose the truth about vehicle labels, how different they are, and if it wasn't for Toby Chess's work with aftermarket parts, I probably would not have thought of doing this. Thanks Toby for all you do for the industry, and I hope all now know the difference and why this is too important. I hope I will see you all at NACE and then again at SEMA,

Tony Passwater