

## Assessment Limit on Antique Vehicles

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### Issue

Explain the antique vehicle property tax assessment law, including its legislative history.

This report updates OLR Report [2011-R-0410](#).

### Summary

For property tax purposes, state law caps the assessed value of qualifying antique vehicles at \$500. To qualify, the vehicle must be (1) at least 20 years old, (2) preserved because of historical interest, and (3) unaltered from the original manufacturer's specifications ([CGS §§ 12-71\(b\)](#) and [14-1\(3\)](#)).

Beginning with the 2024 assessment year, a separate law requires vehicles that are at least 20 years old be assessed at not less than \$500 ([CGS § 12-63\(b\)\(7\)](#)), as amended by [PA 23-204](#), § 212). Thus, after October 1, 2024, antique vehicles likely must be assessed at exactly \$500, rather than up to that amount.

The assessment limit law was first enacted in 1973. It originally applied only to automobiles that were (1) at least 25 years old, (2) not used for general transportation, and (3) issued special Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) antique license plates. Later changes (1) reduced the qualifying age, (2) allowed vehicles, including vehicles other than cars, used for general transportation to qualify, and (3) removed antique license plate requirement. The last change to the antique vehicle assessment cap was made in 2009.

## Definition of Antique Vehicle for Property Tax Purposes

By law, the value of an “antique, rare, or special interest motor vehicle” for property tax purposes is limited to \$500 ([CGS §§ 12-71\(b\)](#)). To qualify, a vehicle must meet the statutory criteria for an antique, rare, or special interest vehicle license plate issued by the DMV, which requires that the vehicle (1) be at least 20 years old, (2) be preserved because of historical interest, and (3) not be modified from the original manufacturer’s specifications ([CGS § 14-1\(3\)](#)).

A vehicle does not need the special plate to qualify for the \$500 limit. But an assessor can require the owner of an antique vehicle that does not have a special plate to provide reasonable documentation that it meets the statutory criteria for an antique vehicle.

## Legislative History of the Assessment Limit

### *Original Enactment*

The law setting the \$500 property tax assessment limit on antique vehicles was enacted in 1973 (PA 73-531). It allowed the special tax treatment only for vehicles with DMV- issued antique license plates. At that time, DMV could issue antique plates only to automobiles that were (1) manufactured at least 25 years ago; (2) restored and maintained for exhibitions, club activities, parades, and other public functions; and (3) not used for general transportation.

The legislative history of the original bill (sHB 9133 (1973)) shows no testimony on the bill in the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee public hearing. The only discussion of the assessment limit occurred in the House floor debate. During that debate, proponents made the following arguments for the bill:

1. An antique automobile is the only collector’s item subject to the local property tax. Stamps, art, and other collectibles, which can be very valuable, are not subject to the tax.
2. Antique automobiles represent a cultural and technological history worth preserving.
3. There are no standards for assessing the value of antique automobiles.
4. The people who restore antique cars are primarily middle class, not rich.
5. The requirement that the cars be registered antiques and not used for general transportation provided a fair check and balance against abuse.

Opponents argued that the state’s economic situation did not warrant preferential tax treatment for antique cars and that the assessment limit set a bad precedent. The bill passed the House by a

vote of 124-12 (*House Transcript*, May 14, 1973). It passed the Senate on the consent calendar (*Senate Transcript*, May 16, 1973).

### ***Subsequent Changes***

- 1979** The legislature expanded the types of vehicles eligible for the special antique vehicle plates, and thus for the \$500 assessment limit, to (1) motor vehicles other than automobiles and (2) vehicles used for general transportation and not just for shows, clubs, and parades (PA 79-25).
- 2005** The legislature reduced the age of antique vehicles eligible for the special plate from 25 to 20 years, thereby also extending the assessment limit to the newer vehicles ([PA 05-218](#), § 43). In the Transportation Committee public hearing on the issue, Senator Fasano, a proponent of the change, stated that the National Auto Dealers Association (NADA) values cars as “classic” after 20 years, thus increasing their book value. Because assessors used the NADA book to value cars for property tax purposes, owners were subject to increased property taxes until the vehicle reached the 25-year threshold and fell under the \$500 statutory limit (*Transportation Committee Public Hearing*, February 28, 2005).
- 2008** The legislature eliminated the requirement that vehicles have a special antique vehicle plate to qualify for the assessment cap ([PA 08-150](#), § 56).
- 2009** The legislature allowed assessors to require owners of unregistered antique vehicles to provide reasonable documentation that the vehicle is an antique, rare, or special interest vehicle ([PA 09-187](#), § 29)
- 2022  
&  
2023** The legislature replaced NADA as the method for valuing vehicles for property tax purposes, instead requiring assessors (beginning October 1, 2024) to use the manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP) reduced according to a depreciation schedule. The depreciation schedule sets the minimum value of vehicles 20 years or older at \$500 ([PA 22-118](#), §§ 499 & 500, as amended by [PA 23-204](#), §§ 211 & 212);

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