

Just for Fun ...

Your Old Car Paper Tax Disc could be worth more than £1,000



Earlier this year I highlighted in my article "Investments of Passion" just how valuable things you may still have from earlier in life may have become.

Things like sneakers, and first editions of now famous video games, or now-iconic toys. It seems that the next fad to blow up the market in the UK is old car tax discs.

Yes, old paper car tax discs!

As you can imagine, many old tax discs, which were valid for three months or one year, have been thrown away, but those that have survived are worth serious money to velologists, who are on the look-out for interesting examples.

A Velologist is a car tax disc collector. This word comes from the first letters of Vehicle Excise Licence plus "ology" meaning the study of. I am, I suppose, an accidental velologist because I stuffed each year's disc into the windscreen holder, and saved the old one in the glove box- just in case!...For years!

Paper tax discs may have been scrapped years ago, but drivers who, for whatever reason, hung onto an old one could now be able to sell it for hundreds of pounds.

This style of tax disc was introduced in the UK exactly 100 years ago in 1921 and became commonplace in all car windscreens in the UK until October 2014, when paper tax discs were phased out in favour of an electronic register.



Motorists would display them on the inside lower left of their windscreens to prove vehicle tax (or vehicle excise duty) had been paid (and they frequently fell off the front window to rest in the passenger footwell, due to the condensation of cold, wet autumn mornings).

During their 94-year existence, around 1.7 billion tax discs were issued, with almost all of them being destroyed. This means that even basic, slightly dog-eared ones can sell for larger amounts of money than you would think, according to LeaseCar.co.uk.

And if you look on eBay some discs are being advertised for anything up to £1,250.

The pricey tax disc in question dates back to 1970, is both complete in its surround, and pre-decimalisation.



These rare quirks of being complete and being issued in pounds, shillings, and pence (£9/3/- to be precise!) make it more valuable to avid Velologists.

Another example of a highly valued version is one from August or September 2014, just before the change to the electronic register.

The DVLA ran out of the usual perforated paper on which the discs were printed. It meant for the next two months, until they ceased production entirely, people would receive non-perforated tax discs, which they'd have to cut out themselves.

Today these 'limited edition' discs are considered rare, and experts reckon they'll accrue the most in value in the long term. Likewise, those with typos and printing errors are also seen as more valuable.

If you happen to have a tax disc dating back to the Second World War, it could also sell for a huge amount. Vehicles used for the war effort had tax discs with 'War Service' marked on them and are rare.

Regardless of the year, tax discs which have their selvaqe intact (the paper that surrounds the disc) are also more collectable.

But as I mentioned earlier, these old discs do not need to be particularly rare to have some value. Even fairly average tax discs from as recently as 2009 are trading for up to £200-300 on eBay.



A LeaseCar.co.uk spokesperson said:
"Many people find it fascinating to explore buying and selling websites to look at the variety of used car tax discs that are available today."
(Must be a 'bored during lockdown' thing)!

"These small round pieces of paper are an important part of the UK's motoring heritage and it is particularly poignant that on the 100th anniversary of their introduction, car tax discs from as early as the 1920s are actively available to buy."

Once again, going back to my previous article. As with my now valuable, much used 1980's Nike Air Jordan basketball boots, all my old paper tax discs are long gone into the rubbish bin. C'est la vie!

For those that are interested, below you will find a little further, interesting information on Velologists and their history...

They are round, the size of a drinks coaster with perforations around the edge, and they have different colours depending on the year of their issue.

Those from 2007 are a dull purple; 2008 was a rich reddy-pink but the 2009 ones are a bright Manchester City blue.

The last discs were issued in 2014, in a crimson-pink colour, but the end came on 1st October that year, after almost 94 years (from 1st January 2021). They became obsolete, with number plate recognition cameras now checking that your vehicle is taxed.

A true velologist would not have removed the tax disc's "selvage", an old weaving term for the edges of a cloth, which is applied by velologists to the square edges that are torn off the circular tax disc. Removing the selvage lowers the disc's value.



One of the most expensive tax discs cost a velologist £810.30.

It was from 1921, the year it became compulsory to display a disc on your windscreen, although Vehicle Excise Duty had been introduced on all "mechanically propelled vehicles" in 1889.

Early discs were issued either annually or quarterly. The quarterly ones ran out on June 30, September 30 and December 30, as you would expect, but also on March 24. This, apparently, was because in the old days, motorists laid up their cars over winter until Easter when they dusted them off for a holiday run.

It is said that by setting 25th March as the start of the second quarter, the taxman ensured that a motorist always had to buy a new disc before embarking on his Easter run.

In those early days, the revenue from the disc was specifically earmarked for road maintenance. As all other taxes went into the general pot, Winston Churchill called it "all nonsense...an outrage upon the sovereignty of Parliament and upon common sense" and in 1937 it was diverted to the Treasury.

In 1921, people used scissors to cut out their black-and-white discs, but colour (green, actually), was introduced in 1923, and perforations in 1938. However, the story goes that a German bomb hit the perforating equipment in 1942 and so they went back to cut-outs until 1952.



A careful inspection of more recent discs shows they are almost as well printed as a banknote, but this was not always the case.

In 1962, many motorists passed off Guinness bottle labels as discs so anti-counterfeit techniques were introduced.



This sounds like an urban legend, but is, apparently true. I assume most of these errant motorists were caught- I certainly recognise a Guinness bottle label when I see one!

With the benefit of all of today's technology, it is amazing to think that every year for 94 years, every single motorist in the UK went through the ridiculously fiddly process of tearing a poorly perforated circle out of an unwilling square of paper.

How times have changed!