

Traffic Stops

What do you feel is the proper thing to do when a patrol officer stops you? My neighbor said to get out of the car, and I thought it would be best to sit in the car.

We must realize that the traffic officer working our streets and highways have a dual purpose when they stop you and have you pull over to the side of the roadway. First they must look out for your safety while you are temporarily detained. Second they must care for their safety while they are approaching the vehicle and while talking to you. Most patrol officers have their set pattern that they feel comfortable with. This is either through their training or experience in violator contact.



When a traffic officer puts on his emergency lights to pull you over, he then becomes focused on you and immediately starts making mental decisions to fit the circumstances. If it is a routine traffic stop (very few traffic stops are routine in law enforcement), he has to see how many people are in the vehicle. What are they doing? Are they moving around or trying to hide something, or even in some cases trying to change drivers? Are they attempting to throw anything out the window, etc.? Is the vehicle safe to approach? Does the license plate come back to that particular type vehicle? Are there bugs and debris on the rear license plate that could indicate the plate was taken off the front of another vehicle and put on this vehicle to throw off law enforcement. Maybe the vehicle has just been used in the commission of a crime. Is the trunk shut all the way? These are a few of the things a patrol officer has to mentally reflect on in a very short period of time. Some officers park their vehicle in such a manner as to afford some protection from other passing vehicles, and to avoid being struck if a passing motorist should run into the back of his patrol car while he has you stopped, and to give the officer some protection while standing beside your vehicle on a busy roadway. These are but a few of the safety precautions on the officer's mind, plus the reason he stopped you in the first place.

I feel the best thing to do when you are stopped by a traffic officer is to immediately look for a safe place to pull over when you see the emergency lights on the patrol car come on. Turn on your turn signal to pull over and immediately take your foot off the gas and start slowing down. This will signal to the officer that you see his emergency lights and you are responding to his order to pull over. Don't immediately hit your brakes. Slow down and safely pull over to the side of the roadway out of traffic. While you are responding to his commands to pull over, the officer will be busily checking your license plates for stolen plates and calling in his location and description of your vehicle to the dispatcher. Once you are stopped, sit in your vehicle with your hands in plain view preferably on the steering wheel of your vehicle and wait for the officer to approach you or give you directions from his public address system. (If the patrol officer is looking for a vehicle fitting the description of yours that has been used in the commission of a crime, he may

use his public address system to give you directions on what to do. If this is the case, carefully follow the officer's instructions until the matter is resolved.)

While you are waiting for the officer to approach your vehicle, do not start looking for your insurance or driver's license in the console or glove box of your vehicle. Wait until he tells you to show your driver's license or insurance papers. It's at this time the officer may ask you to step out of your vehicle and walk off to the side of the roadway where he or she can safely talk with you.

So you and your neighbor are both right. Always remember that the traffic officer will make a determination at the time of the traffic stop whether to have you sit in the vehicle or have you get out. Just sit there and wait, be calm and still. Always remember that we in law enforcement are there for your protection and the protection of others. One other note: If you receive a traffic citation, be sure and sign it. By signing the ticket, you are not admitting to anything. It is not an admission of guilt, just your promise to appear in court and the alleged violation. It is up to the judge or jury to decide if you are guilty, not us.

Thank you,

Constable Ken Jones