

STORING YOUR *POV* ON UNCLE SAM'S DIME

Uncle Sam is willing to pay the bill for service members to have one privately owned vehicle (POV) stored, but service members need to adhere to strict regulations to qualify.

BY TOM GRAVES

"A lot of people try to get by with storing a couple of bags of clothes inside the car, or get by with storing something else in the car," said Michelle Lieberman, terminal manager for the Los Angeles area Vehicle Processing Center in Carson, Calif. "We have to tell them they can't. They either take it back with them or throw it out."

By following some basic guidelines, service members can easily follow the process of having the government take care of their car while they are deployed for 30 days or more.

STORING YOUR POV FOR FREE

The Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC) has 42 Vehicle Processing Centers for handling vehicle storage worldwide, including 12 in CONUS.

"Once the POV goes into storage, it will remain in storage during the service member's tour of duty," states the MTMC guidebook "Storing Your POV" dated Sept. 13, 2002. "When the vehicle is removed from storage it cannot be returned to storage at government expense using the same orders."

Service members are eligible to store a POV if they are on PCS orders to an OCONUS destination where the POV cannot be shipped, or extensive vehicle modifications would have to be made. The installation transportation office will provide guidance for contingency/deployment operations.

Service members can store only one self-propelled, wheeled motor vehicles — not trailers, boats or snowmobiles.

"Something along the lines of an ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle) would not be allowed," Lieberman said. "It has to be operable on public roads."

Some of the requirements differ somewhat for CONUS and OCONUS Vehicle Processing Centers. At both CONUS and OCONUS VPCs, service members need to bring seven copies of their orders and any amendments. At CONUS origins, the vehicle needs to have a full tank of gas. At OCONUS origins, the fuel level must not exceed one-fourth of a tank. In both cases, the vehicle must be cleaned, the glove compartment emptied except for required items, the battery needs to be capable of holding a charge between 11.5 and 13.2 volts, and alarms need to be turned off or disconnected.

All household items and camping equipment must be removed. Service members may store items in the vehicle such as jacks, tire irons, tire chains, fire extinguishers, nonflammable tire inflators, first aid kits, jumper cables, and warning triangles or trouble lights. One spare tire and two snow tires with wheels, either mounted or unmounted, can be stored in the vehicle.

Lieberman noted that stereo equipment needs to be bolted down. The VPC in Los Angeles offers strapping tape and screws for service members to bolt down loose equipment, but "they have to do it themselves," she said.



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Lakisha Croley

Each vehicle should have the oil changed prior to storage. Any propane tanks need to be removed unless installed as an integral part of the vehicle. A complete set of keys needs to be turned over to VPC personnel and a duplicate set needs to be retained by the service member.

If someone other than the service member is turning in the vehicle, the service member must give the designee a letter of authorization or simple power of attorney declaration to give to VPC personnel.

The contractor must store vehicles in accordance with the vehicle manufacturer's recommendations in effect at the time of turn in for storage. Vehicles will be washed, and stored indoors. Fuel stabilizer will be added as required. Every 30 days the vehicle will be started and its air conditioning and heater cycled. The vehicle will also be moved to prevent flat spots on tires.

"There is a service maintenance track to these vehicles," said Steve Douthit, contractor operations manager for the POV storage program. "The vehicles are covered and stored indoors. Engines are started once a month. For each vehicle, we follow the manufacturer's recommendations for long-term storage."


The vehicles are not necessarily stored on-site at the VPC. The Los Angeles VPC ships vehicles by truck to Bloomington, Calif., 60 miles away, to a facility where the regular maintenance is maintained, Lieberman said.

STORING SECOND VEHICLES

Service members who have second vehicles or a vehicles that do not conform to MTMC specifications for government storage may have to find storage on their own before deployment.

At best, a professional vehicle storage facility may offer periodic vehicle maintenance that includes starting the vehicle, running the air conditioner and heater, and moving the vehicle. If long-term storage can be obtained from a friend or relative, service members may consider using an electronically regulated battery charger (not an inexpensive trickle-charger that should be used for no longer than a few days at a time) to keep the battery fresh. Examples of voltage-regulated battery chargers are float chargers such as ChargeTek, or microprocessor-based three-stage or four-stage chargers such as Battery Tender or BatteryMinder.

Raising the car on blocks or jack stands will help keep moisture from accumulating on the underside of the car, as well as keep the tires from getting flat spots and going out-of-round. Fuel preservatives available at auto parts and supply stores can keep the fuel from losing its consistency.



The worst-case scenario would be for a vehicle to be stored in a barn or shed with a wood or dirt floor. In this case, plastic drop cloths should be placed under the car, and the car raised on jacks under the axles or frame to maintain airflow. Some car owners suggest placing mothballs under the hood and inside the car to deter rodents and moths from eating or making nesting material out of plastic tubing, ignition cables, hood insulation and upholstery. Crack windows slightly to maintain ventilation. If possible, have a neighbor or relative start the car once per month to maintain engine lubrication. If the car has an automatic transmission, the person starting the car should shift gears through drive, reverse and low and back again while holding down the brake pedal.

CAR INSURANCE

Most storage facilities hold insurance policies that include vehicles stored on the premises, which is usually adequate for a car that is no longer registered with the state of residence and stored for more than one year. If registration is kept up-to-date, as is most often the case with short-term storage, car insurance coverage can be modified at reduced rates while the vehicle is stored.

Geico offers a rate reduction of up to 70 percent during vehicle storage while maintaining comprehensive and collision coverage, said sources at Geico. If the service member is under emergency deployment, the rate reduction could be as high as 75 percent.

USAA offers insured motorists similar reductions in insurance rates for temporary storage of vehicles, while maintaining basic insurance benefits, either with continuous vehicle registration or interrupted registration.

"In some states, you may delete your liability and collision coverages if the vehicle will be stored for an extended period of time and not driven," a USAA report stated.

Insurers will require an accurate odometer reading at the time of storage and the time of vehicle retrieval in order to administer the rate reduction and the return to normal car insurance coverage.

VEHICLE PROCESSING CENTERS

Service members need to consult their local transportation office to determine the proper VPC from which to ship or store your privately owned vehicle. The "Storing your POV" pamphlet contains a listing of all CONUS/OCONUS VPC locations to include toll-free numbers.

A copy of the pamphlet can be on the MTMC website at <http://www.mtmc.army.mil>. Once you enter the site, click on the blue Publications tab, then click on the Personal Property link on the left side of the next window and then click on the Storing Your POV link on the left side of the third window. A pdf of the pamphlet will appear on your screen.



BUYING A CAR ON TDY

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) is well known for selling cars to service members overseas while on PCS orders. However, AAFES is now authorized to sell cars and motorcycles through its exchanges to service members serving on Temporary Duty (TDY) orders while overseas.

Service members on TDY orders for at least 30 days are authorized to buy automobiles at AAFES exchanges overseas. Service members on TDY orders for at least 90 days are authorized to buy Harley-Davidson motorcycles at AAFES exchanges overseas.

The new vehicles can be purchased for in-country or stateside delivery.

"This is a great change that benefits service members who will be deployed overseas for 30 days or longer," said AAFES Commander Maj. Gen. Kathryn G. Frost. "Customers have shown a lot of interest in this issue and we're delighted that we can now accommodate troops assigned temporarily overseas who are in the market for a new vehicle."

Previously, only service members assigned outside CONUS who were on permanent change of station (PCS) orders could purchase a new vehicle from Exchange New Car Sales for stateside delivery.