

The Cost of Pimping

Written by Robert ID642

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Federal regulators fined West Coast Customs of Inglewood \$16,000 as part of a crackdown on auto customization shops that remove safety gear from vehicles, it was reported today.

The famed shop, affiliated with the MTV car makeover show "Pimp My Ride" hosted by west coast rapper Xzibit; was fined for removing airbags to install video screens in steering wheels, according to the New York Times.

Rae Tyson of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the fines are the first of what is expected to be a larger crackdown on car customizers who are disabling safety equipment.

While the agency does not have jurisdiction over installing video monitors in trucks and cars after they are manufactured, it does have jurisdiction over tampering with safety gear such as air bags, according to the newspaper.

"It's not only a bad idea to disable the air bag, it's against the law," Tyson said. "Air bags are there for a purpose, to protect you. If you have a DVD player there instead of an air bag, it's not going to protect you in a crash."

An updated California law that took effect last January also bans most video functions in the front seat, including DVD players, with the exception of technology such as navigation systems.

"We know that all kinds of distractions can be a problem. But it would be hard to think of something more distracting than watching a video while you're driving," said Anne McCartt, a vice president for research at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. "It's a really worrisome trend."

Over the last decade, annual spending on after-market car parts and accessories has doubled to \$29.8 billion a year, according to the Specialty Equipment Marketing Association.

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On "Pimp My Ride," where hip hop generation youth submit their cars or trucks for a major redesign by West Coast Customs, a recent episode showed a team installing a camera built into the passenger-side visor of a 1989 Ford Mustang. A photo printer was built into the center console.

Safety investigators were drawn to the shop by something posted on the West Coast Customs Web site, according to the Times, not by rapper Xzibit's popular hip hop culture TV show.

[Source](#)