

How to Fight a Speeding Ticket

By CATHRYN CONROY

What About You?

Mel Leiding, an attorney from Anaheim, California and author of a 53-page guide titled "How to Fight Your Traffic Ticket and Win," says he would rather be mugged than get a traffic ticket. Why? Getting mugged is faster, cheaper and has no long-term repercussions, such as increased insurance premiums, loss of a license or being forced to attend traffic school. According to HowStuffWorks.com, millions of traffic tickets are issued annually in the United States with many tickets costing \$100 or higher. It's a billion dollar business. If you pay the ticket by mail, you're admitting guilt and will pay the maximum fine. In addition, the ticket will be part of your DMV record for three years. Here are the only two legitimate ways you might be able to wiggle out of it. The key word is "might." Good luck!

1. Ask for a warning.

When you're pulled over by a police officer for speeding, remain in your car. Never get out. When the officer comes to your car window, look contrite. Be very polite. Do apologize -- profusely. And ask very nicely for a warning instead of a ticket. Never answer such questions as: "Do you know why I stopped you?" or "Do you know how fast you were going?" Say "I'm not sure," instead of saying something that admits your guilt.

2. No matter what the facts are, plead "not guilty" and ask for a court date.

Never pay the ticket by mail since that is the same as admitting guilt. Remember, this is the United States where you are innocent until proven guilty. Even if you think the evidence is solidly against you -- after all, there is that radar gun the cop was using -- don't give up. There are many ways the police can make mistakes that will result in your ticket being dismissed. Leiding says that as many as half of the traffic tickets issued in this country are dismissed because the police officer who wrote the ticket doesn't come to court. Those odds notwithstanding, when you do go to court, be prepared to fight the ticket. Consider hiring an attorney, which could be cheaper than the increased insurance premiums you'll have to pay if you're found guilty.

How to avoid getting a speeding ticket in the first place:

- Know the speed limit. While you want to keep up with traffic around you, try to not exceed the speed limit by more than nine mph.
- Don't drive in the left lane. Use it only for passing. More tickets are given to drivers who are in the left lane than other lanes.
- Realize that police officers with radar guns position themselves so you can't see them until it's too late, such as in parking lots or around a bend in the road.
- If you see a police officer giving someone else a ticket or driving on the opposite side of the highway, don't assume you're safe. The police could still be tracking you.
- Don't call attention to yourself. Keep the bumper stickers and vehicle modifications to a minimum. Make sure your car isn't loud.
- And what about speed cameras, the hottest new tool to catch speeders? Forget it. You're stuck with that bill. The only good news is that it's not reported to your insurance company or your DMV record.