

GOLF CART OPERATION ON THE ROADWAY

The Germantown Police Department routinely receives citizen inquiries regarding the legalities of golf carts on the roadways. There has been a great deal of misinformation on this subject so some education is certainly in order.

There are three categories of vehicles related to this issue in Tennessee state law.

Traditional Golf Cart - A motor vehicle that is designed and manufactured for operation on a golf course for sporting or recreational purposes that is not capable of exceeding speeds of twenty miles per hour (20 mph).

Low Speed Vehicle - Any four-wheel electric vehicle (excluding traditional golf carts), whose top speed is greater than 20 miles per hour (20 mph) but not greater than twenty-five miles per hour (25 mph).

Medium Speed Vehicle – Any four-wheeled electric or gasoline-powered vehicle (excluding traditional golf carts), whose top speed is greater than thirty miles per hour (30 mph) but not greater than thirty-five miles per hour (35 mph).

Per Tennessee state law, a vehicle meeting the above definition of a “traditional golf cart” **IS NOT** street legal and may not be titled and registered for on-road use, UNLESS it has been modified to meet all the low or medium speed vehicle requirements in Tennessee state law and related federal safety standards.

A golf cart that has been designed and manufactured for on-road use or is modified to meet all the low or medium speed vehicle requirements and federal safety standard does not meet the above legal definition of a “traditional golf cart”. Since this vehicle is legally not a “traditional golf cart”, it may be legally registered as a low or medium speed vehicle if all necessary requirements are met.

To register a low or medium speed vehicle, designed and manufactured for on-road use, applicants should provide to their local county clerk’s office a copy of the vehicle’s MSO (manufacturer’s statement of origin), as proof that the vehicle meets all statutory requirements and safety standards, along with the traditional documentation required for vehicle registration.

Individuals who modify a traditional golf cart to meet low or medium speed vehicle requirements must submit a low or medium speed vehicle affidavit (see links below) that certifies that the vehicle has been sufficiently modified to meet the necessary legal requirements. The affidavit must be submitted with the registration application as a condition of registration.

Low Speed Vehicle or Medium Speed Vehicle Affidavit:

<https://www.tn.gov/search-results.html?q=low+speed+vehicles#q=low%20speed%20vehicles&sort=relevancy>

To be street legal, a low or medium speed vehicle must meet the following requirements:

- Must have head lamps
- Must have stop lamps
- Must have front and rear turn signals
- Must have tail lamps
- Must have reflex reflectors (one on each side near the rear and one on the rear)
- Must have a parking brake
- Must have one exterior mirror on the driver side and one additional mirror (either on the passenger side or in the interior)
- Must have a windshield that conforms to the federal motor vehicle safety standard on glazing materials
- Must have seat belts (type 1 or 2) located at each seating position
- Must have a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN)
- Must be registered and have license plate displayed
- Must be insured with proof of insurance available
- Must be operated by a licensed driver with a valid Class D driver license in their possession

A street legal *low speed vehicle* may be operated on streets where the posted speed limit is thirty-five miles per hour (35 mph) or less. A street legal *medium speed vehicle* may be operated on streets where the posted speed limit is forty miles per hour (40 mph) or less. While a low and medium speed vehicle may not be driven on streets that exceed the respective 35 and 40 mph limits, they may cross such streets, but only at intersections. Drivers of all street legal low and medium speed vehicles must obey all traffic laws and rules of the road.

Additionally, pursuant to the Germantown Municipal Ordinance, vehicles (to include traditional golf carts as well as low and medium speed vehicles) may not be operated on sidewalks, in city parks, or on the Germantown Greenway.

Finally, Tennessee D.U.I. laws apply to any motor vehicle to include traditional golf cars as well as low and medium speed vehicles.

It is important to note that anyone who chooses to ignore the above regulations concerning traditional golf carts and low and medium speed vehicles may be subject to significant traffic penalties.

Reference:

<https://www.tn.gov/revenue/title-and-registration/vehicle-registration/off-highway-vehicles.html>