

Understanding VIN Decoding: Full VIN Decode vs. VIN Mask



A VIN is like a fingerprint for a car – it's the DNA, that unique 17-character code that tells you everything you need to know about a specific vehicle – not just year-make-model.

When we talk about accuracy in the context of VIN decoding, we're talking about the precision and detail available through a full VIN decode versus a VIN mask. That said, gaining access to the meaning behind each digit is a challenge because that level of insight and detail is tightly guarded information. This means complete accuracy relies heavily on the available solutions at the shop – and not all VIN tools provide the same, highly accurate vehicle information.

Accessing the VIN

While repairers and shops take different approaches to getting accurate insights into vehicles, especially for parts orders, when it comes to accessing VIN information, there are a few primary approaches:

- **VIN Mask:** A VIN Mask is a partial VIN that consists of the first 10 characters of the 17-character VIN. The 9th character in this sequence is a check digit created when the complete VIN is assigned. The VIN Mask doesn't provide full details about the vehicle because it does not include the last 7 characters, which contain specific information about the vehicle's assembly plant, serial number, specific configuration, options, and exact build data.
- **Full VIN Decode:** This involves using all 17 characters of the VIN. The last 6 characters are especially crucial because they provide the vehicle's unique serial number. With a full VIN decode, you can access detailed information into the vehicle's specifications, options, and build data. This level of detail is necessary for ordering the correct parts the first time around.

Why this matters

If you're in the repair business, you already know that accuracy is critical – and it's been repeated time and time again. VIN decoding proves that, when it comes to ordering parts, accuracy really matters. With the seemingly endless amount of sophistication in vehicles, minor inaccuracies have significant downstream effects. Accuracy in vehicle identification & repair is essential for several reasons:

- **Complexity:** Vehicles are complex with numerous variations in models, trims, and components. Accurate identification of these specifics is needed to ensure that the right parts are ordered and installed.
- **Safety & liability:** Using the correct parts is necessary for the safety and performance of the vehicle. Incorrect parts compromise vehicle integrity, leading to potential safety hazards and increased liability for repair shops.
- **Efficiency:** It's no secret the industry – across the board – is facing labor shortages, making efficiency more important than ever. Accurate parts orders minimize delays and rework,

allowing shops to maintain high throughput and customer satisfaction.

- **Returns and rework:** Ordering the wrong parts not only causes delays but also increases the likelihood of returns and rework. This damages the shop's reputation and profitability. If a customer needs to bring a vehicle back because the wrong part was installed, the shop didn't just lose one customer, it lost all the customers that one person tells.

The advantage of the right parts ordering platform

Most parts ordering software only allows users to input the first several characters of the VIN, limiting access to specific data, like whether the car is a hatchback or a sedan, if it's the sport model or hybrid with different engine specifications, and so on. As a result, the shop team often needs to gather all the detailed information from the customer. This creates extra paperwork, additional back-and-forth communications, and other steps that slow things

down. Without built-in precision and accuracy, shops may even start the process by ordering every version of the part for the vehicle repair, using the correct one, and then returning the others, creating an inefficient and costly process.

Repairers are better served by a parts ordering platform that allows for full VIN-based parts lookup and ordering, meaning the full 17 VIN characters and access to comprehensive vehicle data. Fortunately, a few parts ordering platforms, like RepairLink, offer this level of detail, allowing users to quickly and easily order parts based on data from the full VIN. These **platforms streamline the parts ordering process** while reducing returns, saving time and money, and supporting a smoother workflow. By leveraging detailed VIN decoding and accurate parts data, repair shops can navigate vehicle complexity and, ultimately, drive customer satisfaction and shop profitability.

Does your shop leverage accurate, precise vehicle data?

Interested in leveraging a full VIN decode in your facility? Click [here](#) for more insight and how to get started.

