

9 Things Every Woman Should Know When Stopped by the Cops

Remember this when you see the blue lights.

 by Mia Arderne

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A friend of mine was pulled over by a cop recently while driving alone at night. The male officer who stopped her was aggressive. He shouted at her, leaned both his elbows right through her window and asked her inappropriate questions including whether she was married or had a boyfriend. He followed that up with: "What would it take for you to marry me?". There weren't many other cars around, leaving her vulnerable: "The whole experience just left me feeling really unempowered," she told me. Worryingly, this experience is not uncommon.

Most of us panic when we see blue lights, even if we've done nothing wrong. When I hear about encounters like this one, it makes sense. The police are supposed to be there for our protection, but there's a power dynamic that can be (and often is) exploited. As a woman alone on the road, here are a few things to remember when you get stopped by SAPS:

1. Over 100 Sexual Assaults by Police Officers Were Reported Last Year

There have been many reported police attacks on women over the last year. An IPID (Independent Police Investigative Directorate) annual [report](#) shows there were 105 incidents of sexual assault by police officers recorded last year. According to [News24](#), the alleged police rapes included a 42-year-old constable [accused of raping](#) a 22-year old woman arrested for drinking in public.

2. You Can Insist on a Female Officer When Being Searched or Arrested

As a woman, a male officer is not allowed to search or arrest you without a female officer present. The body search must be performed by a woman officer. If there is no woman officer present on the scene, however, this does not mean you can just leave. A [female officer](#) must be called onto the scene. You can remain in your vehicle until a female officer arrives.

3. You Can Request to Stop in a Safer, More Public Location

If a uniformed official pulls you over on the road, you have to stop. But you do have [rights when you get pulled over](#). If you are feeling unsafe, you can request to stop in another safer, more public location. This is important to remember if there are no other motorists in sight.

4. You Can Demand Proof of the Officer's Identity

We've all heard of people pretending to be police officers. When you get **pulled over in South Africa**, you can ask that the officer identify himself with an appointment card. This way, you can verify that the person is, in fact, a cop. You can ask to see an appointment card whether or not the cop is in uniform. Officers are obligated to carry this on them and provide it on demand. Should the cop fail to provide this, all other actions are considered unlawful, you do not have to comply, and be sure to take down the van's number plate.

5. An Officer May Not Randomly Search You/Your Car Without a Warrant

Officers are not allowed to single you out or arbitrarily search you, your car or your possessions. There needs to be a search warrant and a valid cause. So if you are randomly pulled over to be searched, you can ask to see a search warrant. According to *Women on Wheels*, however, when it comes to roadblocks, search and seizure is usually authorised beforehand, so searches in this context should be expected.

6. Breathalyzer and Blood Tests Must be Taken Within 2 Hours of Arrest

BusinessTech reports that, should you be stopped, breath and blood samples must be taken within 2 hours of being arrested. Also, remember that you can be prosecuted for refusing to take a breathalyzer test to test your alcohol levels.

7. Officers Cannot Simply Ask You Whatever They Want

The questions should be relevant to your identity particulars (name, address, driver's license). These are the **standard questions**. They should not be asking if you have a boyfriend. You do not owe them any casual conversation.

8. You Can Ask for Equipment Certification When Stopped for Speeding

If you're pulled over for speeding, you can ask to see the calibration certificate for the speed measuring equipment. You can also ask to see the operator's certificate and the officer's appointment certificate (as mentioned above) as this is your right. Also, note that signing an infringement notice is not an admission of guilt, it simply means that you're aware of the incident.

9. Upon Arrest, Officers May Not Drive Around Unnecessarily With You in the Back of a Van

You still have **rights** if you are arrested. The officer must inform you of your rights immediately after the arrest. You must then be taken *directly* to the police station. An officer may not drive around with you in the back of the vehicle unnecessarily.

It's a sad reality that there are policemen who abuse their power, but we can empower ourselves and others with knowledge. Power-tripping cops often rely on you not knowing your rights.

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