

HOW TO BUY VEHICLES FOR UKRAINE



How to Buy Vehicles for Ukraine

Intro

Vehicles are a critical part of the Ukrainian war effort. A military unit needs to be able to do three things to be combat-effective: Shoot, Communicate and **Move**. At the onset of the 2022 Russian invasion, Ukraine found itself scrambling to equip its soldiers with reliable and combat-effective vehicles. Since the beginning of the current invasion, thousands of vehicles have been imported into Ukraine by non-profit groups looking to outfit Ukrainian soldiers.

This guide has been created to serve as a comprehensive resource for individuals and organizations from outside Ukraine seeking to purchase vehicles to support Ukraine's defense forces. We believe that by making this process more accessible and clear, groups can buy and ship more vehicles for less money, thus hastening the victory.

Whether you are a military procurement specialist at a non-profit or a concerned citizen looking to support Ukraine's defense efforts, this guide is written to help you procure military vehicles that will contribute to Ukraine's defense.

In this guide, we will discuss the types of vehicles most commonly used and requested, pre-purchase inspections, registration, and importation into Ukraine. Also included is a list of useful military equipment that can be sent along with the vehicles. We invite you to explore the following chapters, which will provide you with essential insights, best practices, and guidance on acquiring the necessary tools to protect Ukraine's future.

Please keep in mind that regulations about importation and registration of vehicles in Ukraine and other countries can change constantly, and it is advisable to check for the latest updates.

Слава Україні!



Oleksandr Ratushniak (Reuters)

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Chapter 1: Types of vehicles needed by the Ukrainian military

While the obvious need is for heavily armored transports such as MRAPs, the average person cannot provide these for the Ukrainian military. However, other types of civilian vehicles are critically needed by the Ukrainian military both at the front lines and behind the lines for logistics.

Pickup Trucks

Pickups such as the Toyota Hilux, Mitsubishi L200 or Nissan Frontier are popular as military vehicles for good reason. Trucks can be used for personnel, equipment or for casualty evacuation. Whether they are called *technical*s, *Banderomobiles*, *panzerniki*, or *tachanki*, 4x4 pickup trucks are extremely useful and the type most often requested in 3 of the 4 seasons, summer, spring and fall. During winter, SUVs are often more popular, to keep the boys from freezing.

4 door trucks (King cab or Crew cab) are especially desired.



[4x4 truck used for casualty evacuation](#) from Bakhmut

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SUVs

Popular for many of the same reasons as a pickup, SUVs have their own use cases. They provide quick, fully enclosed transport for many soldiers at once. Roof racks double the gear carrying ability.

Some shops are converting SUVs to trucks. Contact us for details.

Vans

Vans are incredibly useful as ambulances and logistical transportation. Check with the soldiers you are supporting and find out if they can use a van.

Cars

2wd cars are much less useful than 4x4 SUVs. That said, they are still highly useful in the cities where most unit's HQs are and thus are unlikely to be turned down by any unit.

4x4 vs 2WD

Most vehicles provided to the military should be 4x4 (or AWD, which has comparable performance). Conditions at the front lines are rough and the roads are terrible. Dirt roads can be rutted deeper than 1/3m and tracked vehicles churn up piles of slippery mud. 4x4 drive is useful and the higher ground clearance is very important. In cities near the front, cars are often required to hop curbs or drive under trees to hide from drones.

All that said, 2wd cars are still useful in the cities where most unit HQs are located. For supply runs, ferrying personnel and picking up gear from other big cities, ordinary 2wd vehicles are very useful and almost no unit will turn them down.

Manufacturers

We recommend sticking with Japanese vehicles when possible. British and American trucks are hard to find parts for in Eastern Ukraine and German vehicles tend to be very expensive to fix. We've been told that Nissan Navara D40 body type are not reliable due to weak frames.

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Chapter 2: Buying a Vehicle

It's important to understand how vehicles at the front lines will be used. Front line vehicles in combat will be abused...**heavily**. Most will not survive more than a few weeks or months. They will be bottomed out, run at high speed over curbs and other major obstacles, driven into and over small trees and other obstacles, overloaded without care to maximum weight, bashed into brush and otherwise abused. The main author of this guide saw his units' vehicles driven into and out of brush 10x per day to hide from drones, resulting in mirrors torn off, windows bashed in, tires popped, mufflers ripped off, and other damage after just a week at the front. In addition, soldiers are not known for carefully checking fluids or performing other preventative maintenance. When something breaks, they will drive it anyway. Oil leaking or coolant steaming? Drive it anyway. When it finally shudders its last gasp, park it on the side of the trail for the Russian bomb-dropping drones to find. Therefore, large quantities of cheap (but reliable!) vehicles are preferred over small numbers of shiny new expensive vehicles.

Inspection

When buying a car it's essential to fully check it out first. Unfortunately, many owners of broken down vehicles see selling it to the military as an easy win and they will often obscure the defects until it is too late. The inspection checklist presented here in this section is a general guide of major points for you to reference. In the Appendix section, there is a more comprehensive list of inspection items that you can print out or view while inspecting a car.

Rust

We love rusty cars! Damaged paint or other surface rust is usually not a major issue as long as the frame and other structural components are not compromised with severe corrosion. Check to make sure that the metal is not flaking off and that parts are whole.

Mileage

The older a vehicle is, usually the cheaper it is. You must strike a balance between age of the vehicle, mechanical reliability, and price. The condition of the vehicle is vastly more important than the number of miles on the odometer. It is not cost effective for non-profit groups to send brand new trucks. However, with a good pre-purchase inspection, you can ensure that any vehicles you send will last long enough to be useful. Without a comprehensive inspection, problems that can cost lives will inevitably arise during operation.

Blagula Bilen states their condition standards for used vehicles are:

Typical cost: \$3-10k USD. Average = \$6.5k USD.

Typical age: 1995-2010

Typical mileage: 200,000+km (124,274+ miles)

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Tires

Tires are usually in high demand. Often the first thing to be destroyed, tires are a critical piece of the vehicle that cannot be ignored. Regular road tires are less useful off-road, necessitating the purchase and installation of MSS tires (mud/sand/snow). Tires rated for mud, sand, and snow can be expensive, but don't expect regular road tires to be sufficient. These are best purchased outside of Ukraine and shipped with the vehicle itself. In some cases, you will want to use road tires for the trip into Ukraine as they are limited to off-road use only throughout Europe.

If the vehicle you are looking to purchase comes with tires, verify if they are on- or off-road tires. Check the date code on the side of the tire and measure the tread depth..



On-Road Tires

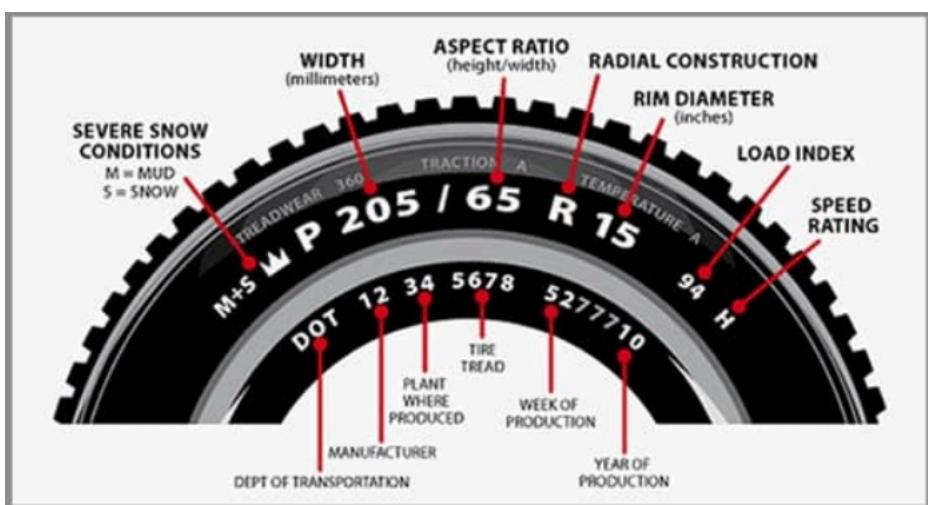
Brand new on-road tires usually have a maximum tread depth of 11-12 cm. 6-7cm is the lowest tread depth you should allow

Off-Road Tires

Off-road tires come in many forms.



How to read tire size, type and manufacture date



The vehicles we buy typically come with street or street/gravel tread. We end up having to put "super-knobby" tires like these on them.

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Chapter 3: Registration

After the fundraising, registering the vehicle to get it across the PL>UA border is usually the hardest part of the process.

Methods

There are three ways to register the vehicle:

- 1) To a military unit
- 2) To a registered Ukrainian NGO
- 3) To a Ukrainian citizen

Each of these options has pluses and minuses.

- 1) **To a military unit.** The downsides are
 - a) While any unit commander can make a request on paper, typically only battalion and higher commanders are able to stamp the forms and it's very difficult to get the initial requests from them.
 - b) The battalion commander may decide the car is better sent to a section of the unit other than the one the donors were fundraising for. If it's a very nice vehicle, he may keep it for personal or staff use.
- 2) **To a registered Ukrainian NGO.** NGOs are often concerned about tax liabilities and reluctant to register the car then give to the designated unit.
- 3) **To a Ukrainian citizen.** Citizens are often unwilling to register multiple vehicles that then are given to the UA military due to tax and paperwork liabilities. That said, it's often possible to pay a small fee (\$200-500) to them to make it happen.

Most major groups use option #1. It's much simpler when dealing with bulk deliveries.

Blagula Bilen uses the following administrative process:

- Invitation letter
- Import declaration
- Export declaration
- Number Plates
- De-register the vehicle in Country of purchase
- Temporary Insurance

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Legal Details

The procedure for importing vehicles for the needs of the army is regulated by two main legal acts:

- Law of Ukraine 1192-XIV "On Humanitarian Aid"
- Resolution of March 1, 2022 No. 174 "Some issues of the passage of humanitarian aid through the customs border of Ukraine under martial law"

Національна Гвардія

На № _____ від _____

Начальнику регіональної митниці
Державної митної служби України

Дійсним повідомляю, що наступний транспортний засіб:
- легковий автомобіль Nissan NP300, регистраційний номер [REDACTED] (VIN [REDACTED])
придбано у якості гуманітарної допомоги, прямує до м. [REDACTED]
області для потреб військової частини [REDACTED] код СДПРОУ [REDACTED]
Також повідомляю, що вказаним транспортним засобом керує [REDACTED]

Даним листом підтверджую, що вказана техніка прийнята та поставлена на
баланс вищевказаної військової частини.

Просимо посприяти у якнайшвидшому проходженні митного/паспортного
контролю з українського боку.

Т.в.о. командира військової частини [REDACTED]
майор [REDACTED]

АКТ
приймання-передачі
товарно-матеріальних цінностей

«_____» 2023 р.

Цей акт приймання-передачі матеріальних цінностей – транспортного засобу
складений Сторонами:

Отримувач: військова частина [REDACTED] т.в.о. командира військової
частини [REDACTED] та [REDACTED]

Передавач: Благодійна організація [REDACTED]

про наступне:

1. Передавач добровільно та безоплатно передає, а Отримувач приймає у свою
власність та розпорядження наступний транспортний засіб:
- легковий автомобіль Nissan NP300, регистраційний номер [REDACTED] (VIN
[REDACTED])
2. Метою здійснення безоплатної передачі визначеного в п.1 цього Акту
транспортних засобів є добровільне сприяння Передавача у задоволенні
потреб національної оборони держави у зв'язку з широкомасштабним
вторгненням в Україну збройних сил російської федерації, введенням
вогнівного стану на всій території України та загальнюючою потребою в
автомобільній техніці Отримувача для виконання бойових та службових
задань.
3. Транспортний засіб, що передано за цим Актом, не підлягає поверненню
Отримувачем Надавачу.
4. Цей Акт набуває чинності з моменту його підписання Сторонами.
5. Цей Акт складено у двох автентичних примірниках по одному для сторін.

Передавач: [REDACTED]
Отримувач: [REDACTED]
Код СДПРОУ [REDACTED]
Підпись: [REDACTED]

Example of required documentation

Note: in 2025 the vehicle importation laws have changed. Check with DTU, a Ukrainian NGO or other experts before purchasing a vehicle to import.

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Chapter 4: Buying and Driving From Europe to Ukraine

Poland and Romania have already been scoured for good 4x4s. Beware of “too good to be true” online deals requesting deposits to secure that nice L200. There are still some good options bought in from other countries. Many buyers are going far afield to find good 4x4s. Blagula Billen brings good 4x4s from Sweden and many groups are bringing right-hand drive British trucks.

Buying the car will often require a citizen of the country to temporarily register it in his/her name, then buy temporary plates for 5 or so days. So getting it across the border can be a time-sensitive challenge.

Usually, when buying a car in Europe, you need a standard package of documents:

- registration certificate;
- contract of sale;
- export declaration EX.

It is also desirable to have a letter of guarantee from a charitable foundation, public organization or military unit. Such a document is not mandatory for the import of a vehicle as humanitarian aid, but it will reduce the number of questions: customs and border guards will know for sure that the car is being imported for its intended purpose. In addition, although such a letter is not guaranteed, it can help to negotiate a way out of the queue even on the Polish side.

Resources

- <https://eauto.org.ua/en/news/235-how-to-bring-a-car-for-the-armed-forces-without-problems-theory-and-practice>
- <https://cargoline.com.ua/en/customs-clearance-cars/>

PL>UA Customs

If the paperwork has been properly prepared, the job is simply to find the border crossing with the shortest line. Some groups prefer to have Polish and/or Ukrainian friends ride along to smooth out any translation issues. We are unaware if the Romanian>UA border is better than the Polish border.

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Chapter 5: Buying and Shipping a Vehicle from the USA

America has a plethora of inexpensive used 4x4 trucks. However, the time and cost of shipping (\$2-4k per vehicle) must be included and many makes (American such as Jeep, Ford, Chevy, etc) are not as easily repaired in eastern Ukraine. We recommend sticking with Toyota or Nissan trucks, and Suzuki or other Japanese SUVs.

Shipping a vehicle from USA to Ukraine

A 40" container is approximately \$3000 and fits two cars (one may need to be jacked up onto the other's trunk). Contact us for more info or see links below.

More info

- <https://dniprollc.com/en/ukraine/ship-a-car-from-the-usa-to-ukraine/#:~:text=How%20much%20does%20it%20cost,valid%20until%20November%2030%2C%202022>
- <https://www.wcshipping.com/ukraine#:~:text=Shipping%20Options&text=Cars%20are%20shipped%20to%20Ukraine,a%20single%2040%20ft%20container.>

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Chapter 6: Modification

There are many modifications that should be done for the soldiers before the vehicle arrives at the front. It is typically cheaper to accomplish these modifications in major cities behind the front lines. Once the vehicle is handed off to the troops, the mods will likely not be made or done crudely. The good news is that Ukrainian mechanics are very creative and can do almost anything with very little parts.



A well-modified pickup truck

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- 1) **Camo paint job/matte green paint job.** Camo paint is critical at the front lines. It also allows easy bypass of the many checkpoints snarling traffic in the eastern half of the country. That said, some units prefer civilian-appearing vehicles. Check with them before painting. Camo paint jobs are usually done “via rattlecan” or spray paint cans for \$300-500 in Ukraine. Make sure any shiny chrome such as wheel rims or trim are cleaned for good paint adherence. Be sure to tell the painter whether you want most windows painted. often they paint the rear windows and windshield, to minimize glint. We typically prefer all windows to be free of paint.

Before



After



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- 2) **Brake light shut off switch.** This is a safety requirement. One of the first things your soldiers will do is disable the brake lights somehow. Sometimes, this is done by removing the headlight fuse, but oftentimes is accomplished by taping over or even smashing the rear taillights so they no longer work. A brake light shutoff switch is a less permanent modification that allows troops to use the vehicle legally in areas that are not a battle zone.
- 3) **Roof rack.** Either universal or, more often, handmade custom racks are greatly prized by soldiers. Not only is carrying capacity greatly increased, but in an emergency soldiers can ride on top and/or sides.

Cheap universal rack:

https://www.amazon.com/ARKSEN-Universal-Extension-Luggage-Carrier/dp/B013COCXDC/ref=sxin_17_pa_sp_search_thematic_sspa



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- 4) **Truck Bed Rack.** A rack in the bed of a truck is extremely helpful to soldiers riding in the bed to hold onto, lash equipment to and mount weapons to. They can be cheaply welded up by Ukrainian mechanics.



- 5) **Armor.** Vehicles with heavy-duty suspension can be “up-armored” with plate steel or (much more expensively) ceramic armor. It’s generally accepted that $\frac{3}{8}$ ” steel will stop most threats. Contact us for details.

Resources:

- Recommendations for steel needed
<http://www.bulldogdirect.com/steel-armor-plate/>
- How to armor a vehicle on a budget
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJpfA3t28PU>

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Chapter 7: Humvees

Humvees are prized by Ukrainian units for their off road capability. They can be bought used in the US on govplanet.com for \$3500-7000 USD and shipped 2 to a 40' container for approx \$200 each. No registration is needed but sometimes Polish customs can require a steep fee.

Used Humvees are not armored - armored Humvees and the parts to armor them are not allowed to be sold by the US govt. Humvees can be "up-armored" by bolting on steel plates but this can overload the suspension. Note that used Humvees are not known for their reliability and parts can be extremely difficult to source in Ukraine.

Humvee tires and batteries are among the parts that can be hard to find in Ukraine. Contact us for details.

For more info, see our dedicated file on Humvee buying and shipping at
<https://defensetechforukraine.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/How-to-Buy-and-Ship-Humvees-for-Ukraine.pdf>

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Chapter 8: Additional Equipment

If time and money are available, a standard vehicle equipment kit should be bought and added to the vehicle. This kit should include (in no particular order):



• 2 recovery tow straps	• 2-4 heavy-duty ratchet straps
• Toolbox	• Headlamp
• Folding shovel	• Small fire extinguisher
• Tire chains (essential for snow or mud)	• Set of fluids (3x oil, power steering, auto transmission fluid)
• Medical kit	• 2 rolls duct tape
• Two 20L cans for fuel	• 12v USB phone chargers/holders
• Tire repair kits and cans of Fix-A-Flat	• Camo netting
• Paracord (20m)	• One or more boxes to hold the gear

All should be labeled with the name of the vehicle, and listed on a paper Equipment List. Investing in this vehicle equipment kit is likely to help keep each vehicle on the road for much, much longer than otherwise. Note that camo netting to drape over vehicles is a critical need now in the age of drone warfare

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Chapter 9: Appendix

Resources

- How to bring a car for the Armed Forces without problems?
<https://eauto.org.ua/en/news/235-how-to-bring-a-car-for-the-armed-forces-without-problems-theory-and-practice>
- VEHICLE INSPECTION CHECKLIST (Контрольний перелік перевірки авто)
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dd7p6uZqPOx2FOnags4aFbNREPulXGkX5b4I1-PFFIQ/edit#heading=h.am17wlejay6d>
- Civilian Fords and Toyotas Turned Into Battle Trucks for Ukraine's Forces
<https://www.businessinsider.com/civilian-fords-and-toyotas-turned-into-battle-trucks-for-ukraines-forces-2022-6>

Groups sending vehicles

- <https://www.blagulabilen.se/>
Blågula Bilen is a Swedish organization which, since April 2022, has been supporting the armed forces of Ukraine as well as their civilian first responders with cars, trucks and heavy trucks. We have sent over 400 vehicles and have north of a hundred volunteers in Sweden. We have great experience and know-how of the Polish and Ukrainian customs-process. Feel free to reach out to us through: kontakt@blagulabilen.se
- <https://uk4ua.org>
UK4UA delivers vehicles to Ukraine from the UK
- <https://wheels-of-victory.com/>
Wheels of Victory works with US, UK & Welsh volunteers have imported, serviced / repaired then donated to the Ukrainian military over 350 vehicles including ambulances, pickups and trucks others. shaun@uk4ua.org
- <https://carforwar.ca/>
- <https://car4ukraine.com/>
Car for Ukraine is a volunteering initiative that brings people from various backgrounds with a common goal to defend Ukraine. As of November 2023, the team has delivered 325 vehicles to the frontline, where vast majority of them are lightly armored pickup trucks with machine guns. Contact us via <https://car4ukraine.com/contact>
- <https://amicusukraine.com.ua/en/>
Amicus Ukraine is a Kyiv-based NGO. Through our partnership with Lithuanian customs agency, Amicus Ukraine has delivered over 120 confiscated vehicles to Ukrainian defenders and set up vehicle delivery routes from UK and North America. Instagram @amicusukraine or contact at amicus.ukraine@icloud.com
- <https://donate.wah.ua/>

Contact these groups for personalized assistance and the best deals.