

Almanac

BY JOE FODOR

How To Fix Parking Tix

USEFUL TIPS THE PARKING VIOLATIONS BUREAU DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW

PARKING TICKETS, THOSE unwelcome summonses, have finally met their match.

In fiscal year 1998, the Parking Violations Bureau collected \$378 million in fines from New York motorists. This year they are expected to reap \$385 million. Next year they hope to vacuum \$400 million from city drivers, the most ticketed in the country.

This means that the average New Yorker will contribute about \$50 in parking summonses in fiscal 1999.

There are two ways to avoid parking tickets: Don't own or drive a car. Or religiously study parking law, park honestly at all times, and fight every single ticket.

This is the path chosen by 38-year-old Louis Camporeale, the self-proclaimed Parking Pal of Gravesend. He still gets tickets tucked under the wipers of his Honda Civic, but they don't faze him. He doesn't pay because he won't be intimidated. He knows his rights.

"The city's only concern is to write as many tickets as possible," says the Parking Pal. "They see this as free money because most people won't dispute tickets. But New Yorkers *do* have parking rights. And among these rights is the right to not pay unjustified parking tickets."

This declaration is borne out in his manifesto, *The New York City Motorists' Parking Survival Guide: A Primer on How to Avoid and Deal with Parking Tickets Effectively*, 147 pages the P.V.B. would rather you not read.

Two simple ways to get a parking ticket dismissed are to prove that the meter was broken, or that the "No Parking" or "No Standing" signs were missing or unreadable.

The broken meter defense is the easiest to implement. Call (800) 203-3770, the

Automated Repair Center of the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Parking. Enter the serial number of the parking meter in question, then indicate whether the meter gave you the time that you paid for (if it was fast) or if the problem falls under the "other" category—i.e., it was busted.

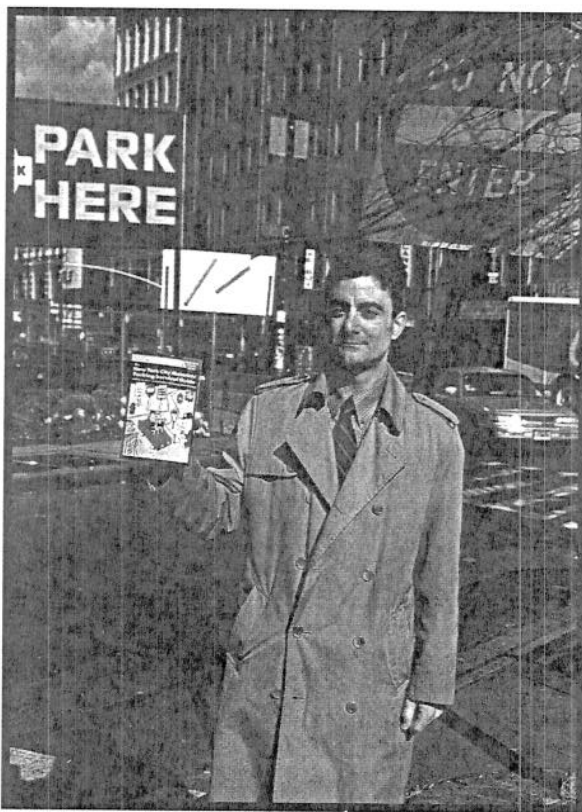
The missing-sign defense requires the aggrieved motorist to photograph the entire block where the ticket was received, documenting that there are no parking regulation signs. The photos go to the P.V.B. along with a simple explanation. This results in a quick dismissal, and the car owner only loses the cost of the film.

It is important to act quickly—within 29 days of receiving the summons—and to have everything sent certified return receipt. This insures that you get a card back in the mail proving that the letter has been delivered. Without it, folks at the Department of Finance might be tempted to do some creative "round filing" with your letter by placing it in a wastebasket.

"I've seen people who get tickets and just take them off their windshields and throw them in the street," says Camporeale. "It blows my mind." These ignored tickets mount up over time. When the outstanding fines reach \$230, your car becomes fair game. Chances are your car will be towed, and you will have to pay a bundle to reclaim your wheels.

Camporeale's Parking Pal company has a line of complete ticket-fighting equipment, including a yearly calendar showing when street cleaning regulations are suspended. His quarterly journal, the *Parking Pal Motorist Education Report*, contains info on parking in New York, as well as stories about the Parking Pal's latest appearances on TV and tales of parking regulations in other cities.

"After all, this is still America," he patriotically points out in his *Parking Survival Guide*. "Nobody is going to tell me I should sell my car and take public transportation. Them's fightin' words!"



Even if the meter is broken or missing, the car will get a ticket if you "overpark," so don't be seduced into thinking that you've found a free day-long parking spot just because the meter is kaput. Camporeale sells a special laminated sign for \$9.95 that you may place in your window, informing the Traffic Enforcement Agent that you are parking legally at a busted meter. The card includes a place for you to note the time that you left your car there.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARA FAYE LETHEM