

He's your man when car deal goes sour

Vince Megna Take Five

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Maybe you've seen a yellow 2002 Corvette with Wisconsin license plates "LEMN LAW" and wondered who was behind the wheel. It's self-described lemon law lawyer Vince Megna. Megna's car is featured on the cover of his new book, "Bring on Goliath: Lemon Law Justice in America." Fittingly, the car is a replacement or a red 2000 Corvette he purchased earlier that turned out to be, you guessed it, a lemon. Megna took time Tuesday to speak with reporter Jamaal Abdul-Alim about his book and his experiences with the auto industry, the "Goliath" he has repeatedly beaten in court.

Q. I'm pretty sure you've contemplated the old saying that when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. That's pretty applicable to you?

A. Yes, definitely....There's a double standard in how they (auto manufacturers and dealers) treat people. They treat me really good because I know the law, and they're going to give me what I ask for because if they don't, they're going to get sued and they're going to lose. But it's just the opposite when the (average) consumer approaches them. They don't give them anything.

Q. If lawyers could be compared with boxers, what are your statistics in terms of wins and losses?

A. I've sued General Motors 450 times and never lost a case. We have filed about a thousand lemon law cases or warranty cases, and we've lost nine times. About 99 percent of the time, we've had favorable decisions.

Q. Do your license plates serve as a de facto advertisement?

A. Yes, I guess so. I get stopped a low... by people asking me what to do if they got a lemon.

Q. At what point do you recommend people sue?

A. I recommend that people talk to a lawyer to figure out where they're at when they feel there's something wrong with their car and they haven't been able to fix it and they've been back a couple of times... At that point they should realize, "I might be headed toward having a lemon." The main thing is to keep your records, keep good documents, notes of when you go into the dealership, because the dealerships and manufacturers are not your friends in these cases. The last thing they want to do is give you your money back or a new car. These companies fight you every step of the way.

Q. Why do you say Wisconsin has a good lemon law?

A. Because in Wisconsin we can get double damages. It's very good because it gives us leverage against the manufacturers. Our law has some teeth, because the manufacturers, they understand money and that's about it.