

Buying a car from “home”

The majority of vehicles imported/re-registered in Spain are for ex-pats who owned the vehicle before coming to Spain to live, either permanently or on a part-time basis.

Where the vehicle was pre-owned, they are re-registered under the regime known as “Cambio de Residencia” (*Change of Residence / country*) and the rules regarding the age, approvals, emissions etc are relaxed as the vehicle is included as part of their personal possessions

Vehicles in this category are motorbikes, cars and motor homes irrespective of where the steering wheel is

Due to the high cost of new and particularly second hand vehicles in Spain, more and more ex-pats are obtaining vehicles from their country of origin and importing them

If any individual of any nationality is registered on the Padron, or has “Residencia” then any vehicle that they wish to bring into Spain is classed as a pure import and the rules are more stringent.

It should not be assumed that just because a vehicle is registered in another EU country it will automatically be accepted here. *Why?* Well since the vehicle was originally made and registered, the acceptable standards have risen, particularly in relation to emissions, so the original country may be stuck with it, but other countries don't want them

How can these vehicles be imported?

Since the late 1980's a European standard has been in force for all vehicles that are to be sold within Europe, irrespective of where they were made. Every vehicle that achieves this standard is given “European Type Approval” and an accompanying identification number. Here is an example: 13*97/27*0040* *Where a vehicle has such a number, import is no problem.*

If the vehicle does not have the approval number, then it may not be possible to import it

Do not assume that because the vehicle was made in Europe, it has type approval; it may have been made for another market such as the Far East or Africa. Last year, we re-registered a Land Rover, made in Solihull, Birmingham that did not have type approval as it was made for the USA market, so the vehicle was imported as unique at a higher costs than usual

If the vehicle does not have European Type Approval, does this mean that it cannot be imported?

Not necessarily, there are 2 ways that it may be possible to import. The most common is by “Unit importation”. This means that the vehicle is treated as if it was a “one-

off' and undergoes an inspection by a specialist team who create a comprehensive technical report, however, this is quite expensive

A vehicle imported under this regime must comply with modern build standards, specifically emissions. If the car does not meet these standards, it will not be allowed in. For example, many cars built for the US market will not achieve the desired standard. Incidentally, in the USA, reversing and rear fog lights are not a standard fit, though this is easily overcome and the indicators are commonly red, not orange as demanded in Europe

The other way to import is if the vehicle is more than 25 years old; it can then be imported as an "Historic Vehicle." Whilst this is also not cheap, it does mean that the vehicle can be imported in its original condition, without the need for modern upgrades and is provided with a special number plate denoting it as historical, thereby making it attractive to car buffs as well as adding value

So why do people buy abroad?

As previously mentioned, the main factor is to save money. At the moment in the UK in particular, the car sales market is flat. Both the UK and Spanish governments, amongst others have introduced the scrappage system to encourage the trading in of old cars with inherently high CO2 emissions and stimulate the market. Whilst this has worked to a degree, it is still most definitely a buyers market in the UK and other countries with many bargains to be had, though why this does not seem to be the case in Spain is beyond me

Of course having bought a bargain car, you need to get it to Spain and pay for the re-registration. Whilst most people would prefer to see the car that they are buying and then drive it over, they can also be transported door-to-door at surprisingly low cost.

Import/ matriculation tax

The price for re-registration contains fixed costs, but the biggest factor to consider is what the import tax would be, so how can this be reduced?

The taxes are based upon the Hacienda (tax office) value, *not what you paid for it*. This is different for every vehicle type and age. The value is then multiplied by 4.75, 9.75 or 14.75% of the value depending upon the CO2 emissions, to determine the tax liability

It may be worthwhile having a few cars in mind, rather than just one make and engine size etc, then seek advice as to what the tax would be. We at Spanish Number Plates are quite happy to do this for you free of charge and with no obligation

Having this information and an idea of the total costs involved will allow you to decide whether the overall savings still make it worthwhile buying a car "back home". In most cases, but not all, the answer is "yes"

What to look out for and what are the pitfalls?

Apart from the vital Type Approval number and the overall condition and mileage of the vehicle, it is critical that the paperwork is in order. If the car has UK registration, then it is prudent to have it transferred to your name at a UK address (DVLA will not register a car to a non-UK address). This way you have full ownership of the car before leaving the UK and if the car has “history” it should be noticed at this stage

Some people are understandably attracted to Left-Hand-Drive cars and these are often still on non-UK plates. You would think that the best buy would be a LHD car already registered in Spain and this can be the case, but we have had many instances where ex-pats have purchased Spanish cars in the UK and become unstuck. This is because the car has outstanding finance, fines, unpaid road tax etc and you as the new “owner” are liable for these. Additionally, the paperwork required to transfer ownership is sometimes not available which makes transfer virtually impossible. We can check all of this out for you

If the car is in the UK, but registered in neither the UK nor Spain, it is almost always the best option to register it in the UK before bringing it to Spain

Again, before buying, seek advice

Most ex-pats are not aware that the transfer of any vehicle in Spain not only costs registration fees, but also a tax of 4% of the vehicle’s value too, hence having it registered to your name before bringing it to Spain makes sense in order to save this cost and to make the process much simpler

This can all sound daunting and some people reading this may be thinking that it is all too complicated so forget the whole idea. Anything unfamiliar is daunting but if undertaken step-by-step and with the right guidance, you can buy the car of your dreams and still have money left over to fill it with fuel!