

Caravans and trailers

When my daughters were young; (I have four, to which I attribute going prematurely grey) we used to spend the summer holidays touring Europe, mostly France with our caravan in tow. It was a great way to see the countries and meant that we weren't tied to a certain place if we didn't like it as well as being economical, a very important consideration when there are six of you

Many expats bring their caravans and trailers with them from the UK and understandably assume that once their car has become Spanish, they merely have to put a Spanish number plate on the back of the caravan/trailer and drive on the roads as we can in the UK

Registration in Spain

Most are surprised to find that their caravan or trailer has to be registered in Spain in the same way that a powered vehicle does and has to go through a similar process of registration. Blimey, what does this involve?

Every caravan and all trailers with a carrying capacity in excess of 750 Kg have to be registered

Firstly, let me make it clear that contrary to popular belief amongst the "bar room lawyers", the door of a caravan can be on the left or on the right. Bit like a steering wheel really; it doesn't matter which side it is on. Having cleared up that point, then onto the process itself.

If the caravan has a Certificate of Conformity, (a.k.a. European Type Approval or Homologation), then it will proceed straight to the ITV for a mechanical inspection. After that it is lots of paperwork being presented to the authorities, fees being handed over and in return getting a Registration Document. Following this the red number plate can be obtained. You will see these conspicuous plates on all sorts of trailers and caravans, the most obvious ones being on the back of 40 foot trailers that slow you down on the caminos

Sounds simple eh? Maybe or maybe not, I guess it helps if you know the rules. Firstly a look at caravans and the larger trailers

Caravans and larger trailers

Let's take a look at the paperwork, which as we all know is of paramount importance in Spain. Firstly, you need to prove that you own the caravan or trailer. As they are not registered in the UK, you will need the invoice from when you bought it. If the caravan is already registered to you in another Continental country, France for example, the registration document acts as the proof. Secondly, you will need Certificates of Approval for any gas or electric installations. If you don't have these, I know a firm that will inspect the installations and provide the certificates.

Finally, you will need the Certificate of Conformity and this is where the problems can start. Not all caravans or trailers are made to EU wide standards, though they may be perfectly acceptable in the UK. If you have a CoC with the caravan, great; if not you should contact the manufacturer or dealer. If the caravan was made in Germany for example as so many are and you are not conversant with that language beyond “ein bier bitte”, then again I can help you. Does this mean that if you cannot obtain the CoC all is lost? No, but your wallet is about to become more empty

Unit importation

Where no CoC exists, then the caravan or trailer will need inspecting by a highly specialised bunch of engineers from Madrid who drive around Spain looking at such vehicles, go away and produce a massive technical report just for your pride and joy (incidentally, they also inspect cars in certain circumstances for similar reasons). This inspection is not cheap but overall, paying for this can still be much cheaper than buying a caravan already registered in Spain. A couple of months later, the report appears and we can go onto the next stage. The above is known as “Unit importation”

ITV Inspection

At the ITV your caravan or trailer will have a mechanical inspection. This is essentially tyres, brakes and running lights, though they also like to prolong the process by measuring the caravan to ensure that the boys from Madrid used their tape measure correctly. Sometimes the engineers will specify more running lights so that people don't confuse your white box on wheels with a Transit van.

Testing the brakes means that your caravan will be taken onto the nearest motorway by a large 4X4 that will slam its brakes on and see if the caravan stops! Only joking, in reality, the caravan wheels are placed on the rolling road and the towing vehicle reversed to replicate the action of stopping; all quite safe really

So we now have an ITV card and can proceed to Trafico with our wheelbarrow full of paperwork. Having had the paperwork checked over, copied and stamped, we obtain a registration document and wander off to find somewhere to make the all important red number plate, not forgetting a replica of the towing vehicle plate also.

These vehicles are next ITV'd when they are six years old and thereafter every two years

Smaller trailers

So that covers caravans and the bigger trailers, but what if your trailer is only for carrying a bike or the dog or rubbish to the local skip and if it carried 750 Kg would collapse under the weight

Trailers below 750 Kg carrying capacity are not registered like their big brothers, nor do they display a red plate. Whoopee, does this mean that I can just stick a copy of the car number plates on the back and tow away? If only!

When a trailer is sold in Spain as brand new, the owner will be given a document that confirms that the trailer was made to the required standard and has European Type Approval, which will show amongst other things the chassis number. It will also have been inspected at the ITV and the document confirming this also provided, so now Antonio or Carmen can happily tow away not having to worry about registration or ITV ever again

So if you buy a new or second hand small trailer that has all of these Spanish documents no problem, but many of us have brought our trailers with us. What now?

Firstly, you will need a Certificate of Conformity for the trailer. Where one exists it is obtainable from the dealer or manufacturer if you don't already have one, again showing the chassis number matching the one that is normally stamped on the "A" frame. Once you have this, then an ITV inspection is required. This is a one-off inspection and never needs doing again, but you will have the correct paperwork for when the Policia decide to give you a pull (pun intended!), which they most certainly will if the trailer is without the correct paperwork

Insurance

Finally, don't forget to advise your insurer that you will be towing a caravan or trailer and arrange the appropriate insurance for both vehicles

Now we're off and can explore the joys of Spain at our leisure and without fear of a pull from the "Boys in Green". Accompaniment by various adolescent females is not obligatory!

If any reader has a specific topic that they would like covering, I'd love to hear from you