

“Change of Residence” for vehicle imports

Before moving from the UK to Spain, I looked around for a people carrier to drive over and use here, as these vehicles can be very versatile. Of course at that time I knew nothing about importing or re-registering cars as it was only much later that I found out what a complex area it is and I was fortunate in many ways.

Fortunate because like the vast majority of us who choose to move to a foreign country, some research was carried out into the Spanish way of life but I did not undertake enough research about taking a car to Spain; in other words I was naive, green and wide open to exploitation which potentially could have cost me a lot of money

Firstly, I had the Voyager that I bought changed to my name at DVLA as you do. When I came to Spain it was then deemed to be part of my personal possessions, which just happened to make re-registration much simpler. Secondly, I bumped into a former colleague, who immediately put me wise about various issues and saved me a lot of money in the process, I think I bought him the promised pint, but he'll no doubt remind me when he reads this!

Many ex-pats have found themselves in the position that I was in, but because of naivety or more often poor advice given by the notorious bar-room lawyers, have been misled, thereby paying out far more than they needed to and in quite a few cases being ripped off by our unscrupulous fellow countrymen who seem to proliferate over here in many fields of endeavour

How does Change of Residence work?

The majority of ex-pats moving to Spain bring their vehicles with them with a view to either part-exchanging it for a Spanish car (until they see the prices of vehicles in Spain) or with a view to re-registration, as happened in my case. (We'll ignore those who flout the law of our hosts and risk potentially severe sanctions). The Spanish have a very good system for dealing with vehicles imported in this way, which is known as “*Cambio de Residencia*” (Change of Residence/Country)

Under Change of Residence, a vehicle can be re-registered without the more stringent impositions on pure imports. Provided that the owner can prove that he owned it before living in Spain and the vehicle is fit for use on the road, there is no problem in importing/re-registering

Proof of ownership is the registration document of the vehicle, often referred to as the logbook, which shows the date that you acquired the vehicle. To demonstrate that the vehicle was owned before coming to Spain, the acquisition date must be prior to signing on the *Padron* or taking out *Residencia*. The date that you obtained your NIE is of no concern in relation to this subject

Assuming that you qualify under the above, then your vehicle can be re-registered provided that it is mechanically sound enough to pass the ITV (MOT equivalent) test and it conforms to the standards presently accepted such as having lights suitable for Spanish roads.

Headlights and fog lights

In most cases, vehicles will need a new set of headlights to conform to Spanish roads. Very few headlights have the ability to be switched from UK to continental driving, but before going to the expense of buying new lights, it is still worth checking. Remember that all headlights can be adjusted to ensure that they point in the right direction and you don't blind drivers coming the other way. Where they are switchable from UK to continental driving, the vehicle manual will specifically state so. The plastic "beam benders" stuck on the glass will not be acceptable at the ITV.

Most cars have a small wheel on the dash, normally graded from 0-3 is to enable you to adjust the lights up and down only, for when you are carrying heavy loads or towing a trailer or caravan. This does not alter the lights to make them "continental"

Where a motorcycle has a "flat line" headlight with no left or right bias, this is normally acceptable at the ITV.

Whilst most people understand that headlights may need changing, many are not aware that the rear fog light has to be on the left side of the car (though having two is perfectly acceptable). I have always joked that the fog light would be used about as often as snow chains, but was forced to eat my words whilst driving in the recent *gota fria*, when visibility was appalling and most drivers thankfully used their fog lights as well as their brains!

The position of the reversing light is not important, though one has to be in situ

Tow bars are OK, provided that the data plate on the bar is still in place; bull bars are also fine, but extra spotlights are not. The age of the vehicle is immaterial, though why I keep hearing from customers that a bar room lawyer has told them that cars over 10 years old cannot be imported is one of life's mysteries!

There are three types of vehicle that can be imported under "Change of Residence" which are cars, motorbikes and motor homes. Steering wheels can be on the left or on the right, but generally better in the middle on bikes!

Another advantage of Change of Residence is the concession given by the Spanish of not paying "import tax" or "emissions fee" as it is more properly known, but the concession is only applied where ex-pats act in a timely manner after moving here

To avoid "import tax", you must:

- 1/ Have owned the vehicle for at least 6 months (as shown by your logbook)
- 2/ Re-register the vehicle within two months of arrival in Spain as demonstrated by the date of application of *FIRST Padron* or *Residencia* whichever has the earlier date
- 3/ Obtain a document from your home consulate that is called a *Baja Consular* confirming the date that you came to Spain. This costs 150 euros at the British

Consulate and 30 euros at the Irish and most other consulates and in virtually all cases is less than the cost if import tax

Please note that if you are paying the import tax, there is NO minimum period of ownership to re-register the vehicle under Change of Residence

For more information regarding this process or about “import tax”, please contact us at Spanish Number Plates