

Do's and Don'ts in the car

Apart from the ongoing saga of people being fined for wearing flip-flops that continues to stimulate significant debate amongst the ex-pats (boy what a tough old life we live out here), there have been similar stories about drivers being fined for using their phones, having dogs in the car and fiddling with their radios so let's try and get to the bottom of what you should and should not do and carry in your car.

I have canvassed information from professionals working in the admin', legal and technical end of the motor industry, all of whom are Spanish and will attempt to provide definitive answers, though of course the laws and rules are changing all the time and the interpretation of the law as always is down to the individual police officer concerned

So, what paperwork should we carry in the car

- Driving licence (Carnet de Conducir)
- Registration document (Permiso de Circulacion)
- ITV card (Tarjeta Inspeccion Technica de Vehiculos)
- Insurance papers (Seguros) including accident report form

Some people are nervous about carrying these documents in their car in case either the documents or the car itself are stolen. It is prudent to have copies available in case of loss and I understand that notarised copies are acceptable, or you could keep the originals in the car and a standard photocopy at home; mine are scanned into the PC

What physical items should be in the car?

- Two warning triangles. In the case of breakdown or accident, these should be placed at sufficient distance in front of and behind the car on 2-way roads and behind the car only on a one-way street or motorway. The actual siting will vary depending upon where the car is stopped. Having them about 3 metres behind the car may not give sufficient warning to either following or oncoming traffic, which after all is the purpose, especially if you are on a bend
- At least two reflective jackets, commonly know as high-viz vests. These should be readily available to the driver and passenger *before they exit the car*. Anyone leaving the car when it has broken down or been involved in an accident must wear a high- viz vest, so it makes sense to have enough for the amount of passengers that you may carry.

Is it just that I have become warped by my job or has anyone else noticed that whilst very few Spanish drivers seem to obviously carry these vests, foreign plated cars have them hanging over their back seats which is very sensible, but almost always have stickers showing bulls, "I love Spain" and "Barcaloony

English radio” on the rear. How I wonder do they explain to the police that they are only holiday makers and do not need to re-register their vehicle?

- There was previously a need for a spare set of bulbs for all of the lights in the car. These are normally purchased from dealers or motor factors. Mind you no one seems to use them, especially at the rear where the amount of non-functioning brake and tail lights has reached epidemic proportions.

The law on this has only recently changed, so that it is no longer compulsory because with many cars it is a workshop job to actually change the bulbs, but it still makes sense to carry them

- If you wear glasses, then you must carry a spare pair in the car. I am also advised that if you have had correctional surgery (normally laser treatment) on your eyes, this must be noted on your driving licence!
- Whilst not obligatory, it is recommended that you have both a fire extinguisher and first aid kit in the car. A personal recommendation is a bottle of water also. I was once a passenger in a car that broke down on the AP-7 near Benidorm during August and the 2-hour wait for the grua was made much worse by not having any drinking water

Whilst a first aid kit is not compulsory, it is against the law in Spain not to render assistance to someone who has had a personal injury

What are the general restrictions?

- Pets must be kept in a caged area at the back of the car. They cannot be loose as they may get excited and bark in the driver’s ear or jump on his lap which could put him off a bit, nor be merely strapped in
- You cannot eat or drink whilst driving and I don’t just mean alcohol, yeah I know, you may spill it, but not even water can be taken whilst driving
- Conversely, you may smoke whilst driving, though throwing lighted butts out of the window is definitely forbidden as many roadside fires are started this way and if you have ever ridden a motorbike, you will know how nervous it makes you when following a smoking driver, just in case the dog-end comes your way
- You can adjust your radio, but not your GPS (Sat-nav)
- You cannot use a phone, even on “hands-free”
- Some people have televisions fitted to their cars; I assume that this is a throwback to when suffering the dreadful hold-ups in the UK that Spain seems mercifully free of. Once the car is in motion, you must switch off the screen, but can continue to listen to the sound.

The only screens that can be displayed are sat-nav, monitors for seeing what your back seat passengers are up to, especially kids and a screen that shows the back of the car, normally used when reversing

What to wear whilst driving

- Whilst my Spanish colleagues had not heard of a specific ban on flip-flops (I guess they don't read the English language press) they confirmed that footwear must be worn and that *you cannot drive bare footed*
- Another new one for the rumour factory to make hay with is that you cannot drive bare-chested. This is a very disappointing one for the chaps who can't bare their rippling torsos for everyone else to admire and because he is not likely to see a female topless driver either!

Is all of this up to date?

Well as I mentioned earlier, the interpretation of the law is down to an individual police officer and his discretion when he is dealing with a driver either following an accident or during one of the many random checks here (Anyone else been breathalysed at 8 in the morning?) and changes in the law do not seem to filter down the chain of command too quickly; they will always find out *manana*, so I still keep everything that I need or may have needed in the car; after all isn't it simpler to show the officer what he wants to see there and then rather than have to visit a police station at some later date, even if you are technically right?