

Driving Licences

There has been a flurry of activity amongst ex-pats recently to have their UK licences stamped at Trafico. This follows a few stories in the free press and an article from a normally reliable source

There are many issues that confuse us guiries over here, such as why do football matches start at 10 at night, where do all the natives go in the afternoon and why do they insist on speaking foreign? The regulations surrounding motoring causes great debate amongst the bar room lawyers and the apparent lack of clear direction regarding driving licences gets us all reaching for the vino tinto

Ambiguities

Well I'm going to put my neck on the block and try and explain the ambiguities, so that you can consider what is the best option for you. The laws, regulations and meaning of driving licences is constantly being reviewed and updated by our masters in Brussels no doubt to try and make things easier when we are all in the United States of Europe. These very changes cause confusion because they take so long to trickle down the chain of command throughout Europe and are often open to individual interpretation by member states but even more so by law enforcement agencies

The issuing of and rules governing driving licences is essentially the same throughout the EU; the licences even look the same. I have a Spanish licence and a copy of my old UK licence; in comparing them, I look like a thug on the Crimestoppers most wanted list on my UK one and a benign grandfather on my Spanish, but only because of the passage of time. The UK licence gives my address and on the Spanish the NIE number is shown, the details on the reverse are identical except for the renewal dates

A driving licence issued by any EU member state allows the holder to drive any vehicle for which he has competency anywhere in the Union. This is fact so where does the confusion arise? Well as with many issues, each country will still cling to the old ways of doing things or maybe introduce additional requirements because of their specific laws or culture. For example in Italy, you can drive with one hand whilst holding down the horn with the other, in France you can treat with contempt any foreign driver specifically English, the Spanish licence allows you to park where you like and in the UK you can commit road rage to anyone who dares to share the same stretch of road as yourself.

Holders of foreign licences in Spain need to comply with the Spanish regulations as if their licence were Spanish, so joking aside let's take a look at what this means. The law here is that when your licence is renewed, you are required to undergo a medical to ensure that you are fit to drive which includes a coordination test. Therefore if you renew your licence in the UK, you should consider having a medical. If you have not had one I guess that the Spanish authorities could say that your licence is invalid

Renewal periods and addresses

In Spain, licences have to be renewed every 5 years, irrespective of your age, which means re-applying at Trafico, having the medical plus updating your mugshot. My Spanish licence shows that authority to drive expires after 5 years from first issue date in Spain. This is different to my old UK licence as the renewal period was after 10 years just to update the photo, though the validity of the authority to drive took me to the age of 70

Earlier I mentioned that the UK licence shows the address at which you live. Now here is a tricky area. If you change address, DVLA needs to be advised so that your licence can be updated, but you have to use a British address. Many of you will still have property in the UK; for those of you that don't whilst you could use a relative's address, you are making a false declaration stating that you live there. If you advise DVLA that you are living in Spain, they will not renew your licence, but instead issue a form D737 showing your entitlements to drive so that you can apply for a Spanish licence

Hopefully you can now see why there is so much confusion as there are quite a number of apparent contradictions. So, what to do? My advice? If you live here more or less permanently then consider getting a Spanish licence, but I guess if you wish to keep your UK licence you should have a medical at renewal to be safe

Points sanctions

Please bear in mind that a Guardia officer who can read your licence through the obligatory sunglasses may not be aware of all of the nuances if you produce a UK licence upon demand, but best not to argue, after all he has a gun and plenty of mates. If you have committed an offence which requires a points penalty there is a law pending that allows Trafico to advise DVLA so that you receive the sanction on your licence, but you may instead be forced to obtain a Spanish licence so that the sanction can be applied; yet another ambiguity. And yes they can and do take your UK licence from you if you are banned from driving in Spain

A couple of final points. If you drive a motor home for example over 3500 Kg, then you need a licence which covers this (applies to UK and Spain). If you have a quad bike, in Spain you must have a motorbike licence, unlike in the UK where you can ride a quad on your car licence. What happens then if you have a UK licence and ride a quad in Spain? Good question; not sure of the answer, but I imagine that you are committing an offence; after all this is a minefield of grey areas

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