

Motor homes and campers

If there is a difference between motor homes and campervans I don't know what it is, but the anorak in me gets curious about such trivia. Called vans with curtains, homes on wheels and other less flattering names, but never mobile homes as these are large static caravans; ah well

Many people who like the freedom to wander prefer these to caravans (meaning towed trailers on wheels built for living in) and are popular throughout Europe. The price of new ones is mind-boggling so are only available to lottery winners, the mega thrifty and those spending their kids' inheritance. It is perhaps for this reason that I receive many enquiries, particularly at this time of the year from people looking to buy a motor home from "back home" or another country such as Germany as they are less expensive outside of Spain as are cars. I am told that the specifications are higher too

So what is different about re-registering a motor home as opposed to a car or motorbike? Well we go back to a subject mentioned in previous articles (repeated on my website) which is "change of residence" a regime allowing people moving to Spain to bring their pre-owned vehicle with them without the need for modification. The import into Spain of any type of vehicle under this regime is normally straightforward

For those of us that are settled here and are looking for a portable second home, there are a few obstacles in your way, not all of which can be overcome. To be honest the main obstacle is the age of the vehicle, not because it may not be roadworthy but because it may not conform to the latest standards. Apart from change of residence, there are three ways in which a motor home may be re-registered; the same applies to cars, but less cars fall foul of the regulations. The cost of each process varies considerably

Historic vehicles

Any vehicle more than 25 years old can be re-registered in the condition in which it was manufactured and generally any modern attachments accepted so if you have an ageing VW micro bus much beloved by the surfing fraternity, you should have no real problems apart from rust, lack of power, under performing brakes etc. but who cares; it's your cool baby

Modern vehicles

Well trying to define modern in this context is not easy as it varies from brand to brand of vehicle and no I don't mean whether it has a satellite dish, self flushing loo or an automatic parking facility. It means whether it has European Type Approval (homologation), the system of Europe wide standards that has been applied to cars for over 20 years, but only this century for motor homes

The first motor homes had a basic body bolted to a chassis. The same chassis could be used for a variety of applications such as having a delivery van body, a small crane or just be a flat bed. This system persisted for many years and to an extent still does. Builders of these vehicles bought in chassis from say Mercedes or Fiat (remember the Talbots?) and built coachworks onto it. There have been thousands of different designs with beds at the back, on the side and almost on the roof when Luton boxes made an appearance. For many years, just the chassis had homologation, but not the coachworks and therefore not the entire vehicle. The homologation must apply to the whole build for it to be accepted for re-registration

Unit importation

This regime is known in the UK as SVA (Single Vehicle Authority) and is used where a vehicle does not have homologation and is not being imported under change of residence. It is commonly used for cars made originally for the USA market, but equally applies to any vehicle irrespective of where it was made. The vehicle is re-registered as if it were the only one ever made and undergoes a thorough examination in order to gain its vital statistics in terms of size, weight, specification etc. the biggest stumbling block here is that the emissions must comply to the latest standards introduced in 2004 and called, surprise surprise, Euro 4!

OK anorak, why does this affect me?

If your motor home (or any other vehicle for that matter) does not qualify under the above three headings, don't buy it!! A few people have said to me, "ah well, I'll leave it on English plates and take a risk as I won't use it much" Fair enough, but it's like having no insurance, saves a bit of money up front, but extremely expensive if something does go wrong- your choice

One of the most enduring urban myths about motor homes and caravans is similar to that about my place of birth Nottingham, where apparently we chaps are outnumbered by at least 3 to 1 by the ladies, that in Spain you can pick a few oranges from the fields every year without risk of prosecution or being bitten by the farmer's dog or that the Spanish will soon be banning right hand drive cars. All of these are complete hogwash, but like to be re-told by those who are never wrong!

The oft repeated tale about homes on wheels is that the door must be on the right hand side i.e. that facing the kerb when normally parked. Now I can't deny that jumping out of the door when it is on the side of the traffic is potentially suicidal, but this applies wherever the door is, so yes you can have a door on the left side of your motor home or caravan, so there! It can be right hand drive too, another myth in the bin

Incidentally insurance may only be granted as third party cover, but where there is a dealer network in Spain; making parts easier to come by, you should be able to obtain higher cover

Happy motoring and camping!

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