

New year reminders

About this time of the year, those of us who write about motoring matters are prone to offering what we hope is sensible advice about....well motoring.

This often runs along the lines of check your oil and water, keep your tyres inflated correctly, ensure that the car is serviced regularly (ah, that reminds me- must book my trusty old Citroen in) etc etc. Even in Spain it makes sense to carry spare water for the car and for drinking, blankets, wellies, Kendal mint cake, a rope, snow chains and judging by how many people get washed away during the gota fria, a lifejacket

All good stuff that you can read about elsewhere. As I deal mainly with the laws of motoring, re-registration, transfers etc, here a few more things to add to the list

Road Tax

January 1st is the date when all road tax in Spain becomes due. Just about now, calls will be received asking how and where the tax can be paid, so just to put your minds at rest, here is the way it works

Although the tax is levied from January, the bills are sent out over the Spring. In most of Alicante province this is handled by the SUMA office; for other towns the bills are sent from the Ayuntamiento (Town Hall) directly. Each bill will show the due amount, plus when and where it is to be paid. If you haven't received a bill by say March, this either means that you have moved and not told anyone. (I can hear the groans of anguish now!!) or the bill hasn't been sent out yet, but you may want to chase it up

If you have moved, the bill will have been sent to your old address and is still payable in that town, so hope you haven't moved too far. Additionally if you have moved, your log book will need updating so that the person who bought your old house doesn't come round and visit you with a load of unpaid speeding fines and parking tickets and kindly asks where you would like them

ITV inspection

ITV inspections are due every two years or annually depending upon the age of your vehicle. Both the ITV card and the pretty coloured sticker in the windscreen will tell you when the next inspection is due.

Of particular importance to those who are not full-time residents is that you may not be in Spain when the car becomes due for inspection so it may become out of date. In these circumstances, the Guardia Civil will send out tow trucks to take your car for crushing, or at least that's what the "bar-room lawyers" will tell you. In reality, if you are not going to be around when the ITV is due, then have the vehicle inspected during your last visit before it expires. Vehicles can be inspected early giving you another year or two of roadworthiness. Remember if you allow your ITV to run out, then you are not only committing an offence, but your insurance may become invalid

Insurance

By now you will have another year's worth of "no-claims" bonus so may wish to consider fishing around for a better quote when the time comes, though make sure that you compare like-with-like not forgetting that all important breakdown cover (no-not all policies provide it automatically). If you loan your car to visiting relatives, ensure that they are covered, especially if they are less than 30 years of age.

Driving Licence

How about a new driving licence; still using your UK one? If you are resident in Spain for more than six months of the year, then you ought to go native with your licence. Plenty of expats don't get a Spanish licence because they think that this way, they cannot accumulate points, nor get banned and they do have a point, but you know how it is, as soon as you think you're onto a safe bet, the government comes along and spoils all the fun. It is expected that this year will see the imposition of the law that has been passed in parliament forcing all holders of foreign licences who live in Spain to change it to a Spanish one if an endorseable or banning offence is committed, so rather than go through the hassle just when you don't need it, do it now at your leisure

Re-registration

Your car still on UK plates? Ah well. In 2009 I dealt with drivers who were heavily fined, had their cars impounded, had their insurance made invalid and gave their cars up, as the cost of getting them out of the compound was dearer than the car was worth, but then they had to buy a new car. Many have been forced to re-register just when they had thought of buying a new three-piece-suite and others have had to pay hefty import tax because of poor timing. No problem eh lads and of course the ladies in our lives were so understanding about all this!

Buying a new car?

Before doing so, consider having the car's history checked as many people end up with unexpected costs. Buying a car from the UK or another country, or thinking of buying a brand new car? Give me a call before you do, as I may be able to save you money in taxes

The Police

Our dear friends in the nice green uniform as well as the Bobbies of the Policia Local are rallying around to help fill the government's coffers by fining motorists for all sorts of reasons. Those of you from the UK will find this frighteningly familiar, as motorists are an easy target, so drive safely and legally and don't give them the chance to hassle you.

Finally, my new website has just been launched and is bang full of useful information including lots more on the above subjects as well as containing a section with all of my articles from your favourite paper, the Costa Blanca News