

Number plates

Satisfied customers have told us at Spanish Number Plates more than once that we do exactly what it says on the can.

Of course, some people take it literally and think that we are a supplier of number plates. Well we are when a vehicle is re-registered, but that is the end result of our service, though we do get asked for replacement plates not only for Spanish vehicles, (no problem), but other countries too, which is not possible

Why? Well these days plates are issued against the documents pertaining to that vehicle and the transaction recorded. In Spain the suppliers can only produce Spanish plates. Although plates are generally the same size throughout Europe, the configuration differs between countries

A frequently asked question is why Spanish number plates are designed the way they are and why there are different types, so today I'll try and explain, once I've shrugged on my anorak!

On 18th September 2000, a new registration system was introduced covering the whole of Spain, showing 4 numbers and 3 letters. These plates are black lettering on a white background for both front and back of the vehicle. Also introduced was the "E" inside the stars of Europe. The royal coat of arms of Spain appears throughout the plate like a watermark

I imagine that the first plate ever issued was 0000 BBB and is probably in the stable of the King or another important personage (No vowels are used in number plates to save confusion with similar looking numbers and I imagine so that rude words are not shown!)

The sequence is BBB, BBC etc. When BBZ was reached, the next in the sequence was BCB with 0000 up to 9999. One fine day we will be at 9999 ZZZ. I'm sure someone with a slide rule can work out when that will be, or can he?

You may be thinking that come January or September 1st a new sequence of letters would commence. Not so. The letters will continue until all of the numbers are issued against it. For example, the first letter now is "G". This will carry on until 9999 GZZ when 0000 HBB will start. At the rate that new cars are being bought, this could be some time away

What is of more interest to our customers is what their registration will be once their vehicle becomes Spanish. Well, it's whatever is being issued on the day their papers are presented. There is no difference at all whether the car is gleaming new fresh off the production line at Porsche or someone's pride and joy of a 1993 Ford Focus as each could receive consecutively numbered plates. How's that for a status symbol!!

So whilst you might have an idea how old a car is, there is no certainty

We are also asked if personalised plates exist in Spain. In short, no. In the UK these are all the rage and big business. Well done to DVLA who must make a fortune out of this each year.

Transfer of plates from one vehicle to another cannot be undertaken either. Earlier this year the letters being issued were GJS, my initials! Be a nice idea I thought, but the only way would have been to buy a new car, but the lottery hasn't been kind to me, or to re-register another UK car, but when that eventually went off to the scrap yard, I still couldn't retain the number

For vehicles registered before 2000, the number plates look quite different as they were regionalised. The most common ones on the Costa Blanca begin with an "A" for Alicante, "MU" for Murcia, "V" for Valencia etc and most people prefer this type. Numbers followed much like they do on the new plates and the last two letters indicated the year, more or less

Why change?

Well for a start, the numbers were running out in place like Madrid ("M") and Barcelona ("B"), but of equal importance picture this.

Walking down the street with baggy trousers, football shirt, skinhead haircut, tattoos, nose ring and no brain I see a car belonging to the town that just beat my home team at football. "It's his fault," I decide and so scratch a greeting down the car and just so the owner notices, smash the headlights

Alternatively, I am a separatist or terrorist or just have a general grievance about central government; I spot a car from Madrid, and decide that everyone in the Capital is against me; same result as above

No surprise that regionalisation went out of the window. The opposite has happened in the UK, but who understands that system??

Plates commencing with "H" show that the car has been registered as "Historical" (over 25 years old) and is therefore allowed on the road in its original status, for example without seat belts if the car was made before they were introduced

Green plates for temporary periods only were once very common and could be easily obtained at Trafico just by declaring that the original documents had been lost. These plates were supposed to be on the car pending more formal registration, but this system was abused by people wishing to avoid road taxes etc and is now only used for imported cars where the registration has to be given up in the country where it was previously registered prior to export.

These are now rarely seen, as re-registration is normally straight to normal Spanish plates

There are two types of Red plates. The most commonly seen are on the back of trailers and caravans. In the UK trailers and caravans are not registered, but in Spain

they need registering and inspecting just like a powered vehicle. The red plate shows the registration number of the trailer.

Red plates can also be trade plates and can only be used where a dealer owns the vehicle. Their use is strictly controlled, where each journey using the plates is recorded

SP appears on many vehicles including taxis, buses and trucks, this means *Servicio Publico* and that the vehicle is licensed to be used for profit

MP is the opposite of above. *Mercancias Propias* means that the vehicle itself is not used to make a profit, but is only used to carry people or goods on behalf of the owning company. You may see this for example on a furniture delivery van where the goods being carried belong to the store in question and not a third party

You may have read about trucks and coaches being stopped by the police and the owners fined because they were driving on a Sunday, which is generally prohibited

Those companies that can show a need to drive on Sundays, (Domingo), for instance when carrying fresh produce can obtain a licence to do so. Proof of this is a green plate with the **letter “d”** on it.

Anorak off now, I'm going for a Sunday drive in my old “A” plated Citroen