

Spanish Driving Licences

Many ex-pats coming to Spain wish to exchange their UK or other foreign driving licence for a Spanish one; some prefer to keep hold of their present licence. As always, there is a lot of misunderstanding surrounding this subject; so what are the pros and cons?

As you will see later, the arguments in favour of obtaining a Spanish licence are about to become more compelling

Licences issued by EU Member States under Community law generally speaking remain valid in Spain under the conditions in which they have been issued in their country of origin but exceptions apply. For example, in Spain the minimum age for a driving licence is 18 years, so if you have 17 year olds in your family with a UK licence, they cannot drive here until their next birthday

The holder of a licence issued by another EU state whose normal residence is in Spain. (*Normal residence means the place where a person usually lives, generally defined as being for at least 185 days per year, because of personal and/ or occupational ties*) **is subject to the same provisions as Spanish licences relating to the duration periods of licences as well as control of their “psycho-physical skills”**. No, not psychos!! This means that the holder is fit to drive

Therefore, licences have to be renewed in line with the time periods of Spanish licences and a medical examination will be required at some stage

Normally, no medical is required for the first issue of a Spanish driving licence, though the licences have to be renewed every few years and a medical is required at the time of renewal.

However, drivers with a disability that does, or may in the future affect their capability to drive, will require a medical upon first application

Classes of licence in Spain are the same as those throughout Europe and will be carried over from the original licence to the new Spanish one.

Periods of licences and medicals

Category B on the licence is the most widely used and corresponds to those vehicles with a weight less than 3500 kg and specifically includes cars. Presently, this category has a term of ten years from date of issue until the owner reaches 45 years of age and then every five years until he is 70. After this age, the licence is renewed every 2 years

Therefore, unless you are over 70, then the first time that you will need a medical is 5 or 10 years after it was first issued

Categories other than “B” will have different renewal periods for both the licence and medical

Glad that this all makes sense and now that you understand it, please note that the above are the regulations currently in force, however they are about to change!!

The changes have already been approved by the Spanish parliament and the next stage is publication of the Official State Bulletin (BOE) confirming this. The new regulation will enter into force six months after publication. *This is expected within the next 12 months, so watch this space*

These changes specifically include a major shift in policy towards non-Spanish licence holders

Among the new features are included:

- The categories of A (motorcycles) and B (cars) must be renewed every 10 years up to the age of 65 years and from that age, the renewal is conducted every 5 years.

-To prevent discrimination that can work in the favour of foreigners resident in Spain who hold a licence issued elsewhere, the laws relating to restrictions, suspension, and withdrawal of license or loss of points will *equally apply to holders of foreign licences*

It is anticipated that if an offence is committed by a foreign licence holder resident in Spain which involves the loss of points, drivers will be obliged to change their foreign driving licence for the Spanish equivalent and the sanction will immediately be applied to that licence, including points deduction and where appropriate, banning.

Where a driver has a foreign licence and does not live in Spain, *the Spanish authorities will be advising the authorities in the home country of the offence for the relevant action to be taken*

Incidentally, whilst in the UK, points are added to your licence for certain infringements, in Spain it works the other way around in that each driver starts off with 12 points, from which points are deducted until you have none left!

Recently those drivers who have had a clean licence for the last 3 years have been awarded with additional points, making it harder to get banned

To save a lot of potential trouble later, it would make sense if you live in Spain (even if your foreign licence is valid) to make an effort to exchange the foreign licence for a Spanish one

Should you wish to do so, the following documentation is required

1.Application via an official form

2.Proof of identity and residence, which are:

a/ Passport, or original National Identity Card or Residents Permit

b/ Original Certificate of Registration in the Central foreigners Register (“Residencia”)

c/ If your present address is different to that on the “Residencia”, you will need a Padron, which must have been issued within the last 3 months

3. Driving Licence: Original and photocopies of both photo licence *and* paper counterpart.

4. Photograph: an original 32 x 25 mm. (passport style)

5. A form containing your signature. This will appear on your licence

6. Written statement that the person has not been banned by law from driving motor vehicles and mopeds, or is subject to any other suspension or intervention that prohibits the issue of a licence

7. Written statement that the person does not hold any other driving license or permit, issued in Spain or in another EU country, other than the one being exchanged

To summarise.

- Your driving licence should be issued in the country in which you spend at least 185 days per annum
- A medical is required irrespective of where your licence is issued in line with Spanish guidelines, both present and future
- Renewal periods of licence are also in line with Spanish guidelines
- Where you have a foreign licence and commit an offence, you will in future be forced to obtain a Spanish licence or where this is not appropriate to you, your licensing authority (DVLA for example) will be notified of the offence

I already hear the tom-toms drumming away; just wait till the “bar room lawyers” get hold of this one, they are going to have a field day

As is normal when dealing with any bureaucratic process, it seems complex, so if you are considering changing your licence, expert advice should be sought