

Time limits for your non-Spanish vehicle

The recent introduction of new motoring laws in Spain mostly covering road safety were widely reported in the English language press and caused a massive furore. The alarming part of the new laws was that all foreign vehicles must be re-registered within one month or removed from the country. This caused a surge in my day job I can tell you!

Essentially the law regarding this matter has not changed it is merely being reinforced. Well merely is not quite the right word as I have had to rescue cars from municipal compounds and deal with some very upset clients who were dealt with in a heavy handed manner by the police, normally the Policia Local of their towns who in turn had been poorly briefed by their superiors

Simply put, the law is such that a foreign registered vehicle can only remain in Spain for 6 months for non-residents or tourists. If the owner is deemed to be resident then the vehicle must be re-registered within one month of the person becoming resident.

What is Residency?

Many expats do not wish to become fully resident. As a result they try to keep a low profile and do nothing that may affect their status quo. In so doing they may overlook that their vehicle can become illegal if it remains registered in their home country. So in the context of vehicles what determines residency?

Having a Residencia certificate or card, being registered on the Padron, living in Spain for more than 6 months in any 12-month period, having children at a Spanish school, working here

Full financial residency means taking steps in addition to the above so if you wish to consider this seek specialist advice, but not from someone down the pub where the notorious “bar-room lawyers” dispense their usual rubbish

How you are spotted?

The clampdown means that vehicle details are being recorded and if a vehicle is deemed to be here for longer than the prescribed 6 months you risk fines and/ or having the vehicle impounded

UK tax discs or any similar giveaway such as inspection (MOT) or insurance details shown in the windscreen of cars registered in other EU counties are scrutinised to ensure that the car is legal. A car must be legal in its country of origin to be allowed to use the roads in Spain, so declaring SORN or having no tax disc is an offence. The police now have instant access to DVLA records

Green plates

A number of local police officers have said to owners of vehicles that all they need to do is apply to Trafico for green plates which takes only two days and they will be legal. This is over simplistic and frankly in most cases impossible. Trafico will only issue green (provisional) plates in exceptional circumstances such as when a vehicle is awaiting certain documents which is very rare. However they will allow green plates to be issued where a car is in the municipal compound and needs to be driven to an ITV station to start the full re-registration process. The catch is that road tax and registration/import tax has to be paid in addition to the usual fees before such plates will be issued so is no quicker than going for full re-registration and certainly no cheaper. Green plates are valid for two months only

If you are in danger of having your collar felt or your car impounded, don't take solace in those that have got away with it for years as they are the more likely to wake up and find their car gone. The alternatives to re-registration are allowing the police to keep it, scrapping it or taking it "home"

If you are unsure, don't become alarmed but seek impartial, professional advice. I can help, after all this issue has made me very experienced!

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