

6-Month rules

Of all of the rules, myths and misinformation surrounding the import and re-registration of vehicles into Spain, the 6-month rule is the one that causes the most confusion for those bringing their pride and joy with them to this country

To be fair to the uninitiated and for a change to give the bar room lawyers some slack, it is no surprise that confusion reigns as there are several 6-month rules and it is easy to get them mixed up. They are nothing to do with how long it takes to queue for an NIE, to get through to Iberdrola on the phone, to discover that not all of the tradesmen who offer to do work for you are fully qualified and to become convinced that the winters in Spain really can be quite cold

So what do I mean? Firstly, you DO NOT have to wait until your car has been in Spain for 6 months before you can re-register it. This is by far the biggest misconception and is frequently asked of me by potential customers; in fact waiting 6 months can cost you money in many circumstances, so let's take a look at the various 6-month rules

Keeping a foreign plated vehicle in Spain

6 months is the amount of time that you can keep a foreign registered vehicle in Spain before the law requires to you to re-register it or take it out of the country

It is also the length of time that the vehicle has to be out of Spain before it can be brought back again, so to stay within the bound of the law, you should use your car in Spain for 6 months, take it to your home country for 6 months before returning with it again. Hardly practical

These two laws are by far the most widely flouted by ex-pats of every nationality. Many people have had their cars here for considerably longer than the law allows. The potential consequences of doing this have been covered before and I still have to assist people recover their cars from police compounds. This situation used to annoy me quite a bit for many reasons, but now I no longer get wound up about it as there are more than enough law abiding people to keep my business buzzing. Just a thought though, generally the roads in Spain are excellent and to keep them that way, it would be nice if more of us expats paid the annual road tax which by comparison to the UK is pretty low

“Import Tax”

Of significant annoyance to many people who wish to re-register their vehicle is the tax levied by the Spanish authorities on all vehicles entering Spain. It is almost always referred to as “Import Tax” but is more correctly know as “Registration Tax”.

Registration tax is paid by anyone of any nationality who buys a brand new car in Spain, so the tax gatherers have decided that it should be levied on foreign plated vehicles too, irrespective of any taxes paid when the vehicle was purchased in its

present country of registration. To avoid this tax when you import your vehicle, you must have owned the vehicle (as shown on the present registration document) for at least 6 months. BUT and this is a big but, even if you have owned the car for 6 months, to avoid the tax you must also re-register the vehicle within 2 months of applying for your FIRST Padron or for your Residencia. Because of misinformation, quote a few expats have paid the tax when they need not have done had they been given the correct advice.

It is worth bearing in mind that this is a concession given only to foreigners moving to Spain provided that they react in a timely fashion. It cannot apply to Spaniards who have lived here all of their lives as they will always have to pay Registration Tax on new vehicles that they buy

Importing a brand new vehicle

Another 6-month rule applies to brand new vehicles brought to Spain. If you re-register a vehicle in Spain that is less than 6 months old, you will pay IVA even if you paid VAT in the UK. You ought to be able to reclaim the VAT, but this has to be done through the supplying dealer; but the last time that I tried to help a customer to do this, we received the two-fingered salute from the dealer in question. Additionally, even if you are going to pay import tax, you should wait until you have owned the vehicle for 6 months before re-registering and have covered 6000 Kms. This way the import tax would be levied on it as a used vehicle and not brand new; the savings here can be considerable. I would not recommend temporary export plates when buying a brand new car from the UK for the above reasons

Re-cap

You will have gathered by now that it is no surprise with so many different 6-month rules applying why people get it wrong and also why specialist advice should always be sought, so to re-cap:

You can legally keep and drive on Spanish roads a foreign plated vehicle for up to 6 months before having to do something about it

To avoid import tax, you must have owned the vehicle for at least 6 months as shown on the log book before re-registering it. In this case, you must also re-register it within two months of applying for your first Padron or Residencia, whichever comes first though note that Residencia is NOT needed to re-register a vehicle. A document from your Consulate is also required. I accompany all of my customers to get this so there is no hassle

If you buy a brand new car outside of Spain, you should wait until it is 6 months old (and has been driven for 6000 Kms) so that it is taxed as a used car which can save a lot of money. This way, you can also avoid paying purchase tax (VAT/ IVA) twice

Complex? I would say so for the uninitiated, so any questions regarding your personal vehicle, please get in touch

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