

A cautionary tale

Back in England we are sat in the garden of our home in Meadowview Prestige Developments, thinking about buying a new car. A mate mentioned that a chap up the road has one for sale, so we go and take a look. Nice car, seller seems decent enough, so we pay over our money and receive the registration document, MOT certificate and get a receipt from the seller for our hard earned cash

Both the seller and you have completed the relevant sections of the registration document and sent them off to DVLA. A while later, we receive the new logbook in our name; job done! Or is it?

As simple as this in Spain? No need to answer this question! Yes it is far more complicated in Spain and is not free as a tax of 4% is payable on all transfers. Ten, yes TEN bits of paperwork are required between the seller and buyer and you need to visit Trafico or have someone do this for you. Over the top? Maybe, but the Spanish system is designed to ensure that the vehicle is being legally transferred and many checks are undertaken, so when you buy a newer car, you can be pretty sure that all is OK

So, we are sat on our terrace in Buena Vista Urbanisation and thinking about buying a newer car. You see an advert in the paper and make a call, see the car and pay for it, receiving some paperwork in return. Job done?

Help please!

Now follows a true story that happened last week, but I have altered some small details to protect the innocent. I answer the phone to an ex-pat whose opening line is "Graham, I've done something really stupid; can you help me?" For sure, he has my attention and I admire his humility. In response to an advert, he met in the car park of a well known shop a Dutch ex-pat with a car to sell. Being mature, intelligent and wary, he agreed to buy the car but wanted the transaction to be undertaken in the offices of his solicitor-Good idea. On the day in question, the solicitor wasn't there, just the receptionist. Money was handed over and some paperwork received

A day later, the buyer is sat on his terrace when he hears a beep as the locks on his new car are opened and is just in time to prevent the car being stolen by someone with a family resemblance to the seller. He reports this to the Guardia Civil who claim to be able to do nothing as no crime has been committed, only prevented. Eventually, he realises that the paperwork that he has doesn't look authentic and so he seeks advice from his solicitor who does his best to get to the bottom of it, but can only find out that the car was reported stolen in Holland, so he calls me and I don't know whether to be flattered or think that he is clutching at straws in his desperation. Either way, I like a challenge

On the trail

Through my contacts, the Dutch authorities are advised of the situation and agree to help, but we need the buyer to make a denuncia, so that the Dutch and Spanish police can collaborate

Initially the Guardia don't show a lot of interest, but then suddenly turn up at the buyer's house whilst I am with him and take away the car asking us to go to the barracks to make statements. The buyer is predictably upset and initially thinks he is being accused of doing something wrong himself, but calms down and later we are back at the barracks and the Guardia really are trying to help, so spirits are rising. Then the bombshell

We are advised that the same car has been reported stolen previously by yet another ex-pat, before my customer has even bought it. Seemingly, this scam could have been going on for some time. The car is a nice one and sensibly priced, the paperwork looks OK but there is only ever one set of keys available; the others being used to recover the car later ready for the next victim. My customer is now without a car, out of pocket by several thousand euros and may not get either back because others may have prior claim

Couldn't happen to you? Several times I have dealt with people who have bought a car in good faith but when I see them, they just do not have the correct paperwork from the seller, therefore they cannot prove to the Spanish authorities that the car is theirs. It then requires a lot of work to get everything in order for the transfer to take place.

Buying fever

I agree that the Spanish system is long winded, cumbersome and not cheap, but at least it has the advantage of ensuring that the person selling the car is the legal owner, and that all taxes etc have been paid. This is why the ten documents are needed.

Often when making a purchase a fever overcomes us, we just have to have it and common sense can go out of the window (ask the wife, she may understand this phenomenon as one dress is never enough!). Most of us have experienced this feeling but with something as expensive as a car, we have to be wary, so here are a few tips

- 1/ Try and meet at the home of the seller
- 2/ If you are interested, have an HPI or equivalent check carried out
- 3/ Give yourself time to think through the decision; don't get the fever!
- 4/ Ensure that you get all of the documents necessary and make sure that they are original and not copies
- 5/ Seek specialist advice on what is required to transfer ownership
- 6/ Ensure that the car is legally transferred to you by doing it yourself or employing a specialist (someone like me). Do not rely on the seller doing it alone

I'm looking for a newer car myself, so if you have a popular make diesel saloon for sale, please get in touch. I just hope that I heed my own advice!

Spanish Number Plates
Graham Shelton
Orihuela, Alicante
www.spanish-number-plates.com
info@spanish-number-plates.com
966 753 375
605 319 889