

Buying non Spanish cars

Ever wondered about coincidences or serendipity? Why is it that we suddenly hear from people that we haven't heard of for a long time and then two or three others phone up within days? Why if we win 5 euros on the lottery, we find a 50-euro note in the gutter. Why do things generally happen in threes?

Well following my saga of blowouts and noisy exhausts I met with a customer this week and he asked to have a new pipe fitted to his exhaust before the ITV inspection. Simple enough, he drove a popular make of car and a supplier confirmed that the pipe was in stock. We duly turned up at the supplier and lo and behold, that exact type was not in stock, but would be available manana. The customer lived an hour or so away and preferred to get it done that day, so we drove to various other suppliers who gave the same mantra of "manana". One did say that he would have one at 4PM, so we had lunch and a wonder around until the promised hour. No sorry, couldn't get one!

Rather than inconvenience the customer, we swapped cars so that he could go about his business while I sorted it out. After yet another failed promise of delivery, the job was eventually done and because of the delays caused through no fault of my own, I paid for it as an act of goodwill. His headlights then failed at the ITV, but that's another story

Difficult re-registrations

I'm now awaiting the next episode in the exhaust, blow out and lighting saga, but this past fortnight, I have had more calls than I can remember from customers wishing to re-register vehicles that for various reasons, are either very difficult, or impossible to do

We are all in the EU right? Virtually every vehicle that needs re-registering is also from Europe, so why can't they have Spanish registration? Basically because there is no consistency in the rules throughout the EU and each country imposes its own restrictions. In Spain, they are keen to only allow in vehicles that meet certain standards and are deemed to be fit to be driven. This is not about general roadworthiness, but more to do with emission levels and consistency of build

Where a driver has owned a vehicle before coming to Spain, then generally there is no problem in re-registering it as the vehicle is entering Spain as a personal possession under the rules known as "Change of Residency". It would be discriminatory and certainly against the right to free movement of goods if this were not the case. It is where a vehicle is purchased after moving to Spain that the buyer has to be wary

Here are some examples from the many calls received recently. *All of these vehicles have UK registration.* A Honda 90 motorbike registered in 1980 that was lying up in someone's garage for about 10 years. A 1993 VW that has just been purchased. A German built motor home, first registered in 1992. A fairly new Chrysler first registered in the USA. All of these vehicles share the same challenges to re-register. The present owner has just bought them and he is registered in Spain Why does this matter?

Incidentally some people confuse “import” and “re-registration”. It could be said that if a vehicle is physically in Spain, it has been imported, well no as it still shows its original number plates. Were you to go to France for a holiday, you are in France, but not French; the same applies to your car

Are you Spanish?

The bureaucracy surrounding making a vehicle Spanish can be bewildering and certain documents are necessary for the purpose. One of these is the Padron. Once you have signed on the Padron and/or have obtained the useless “Certificate of Residency” as far as re-registering a vehicle is concerned, you are Spanish (Oh Lord, don’t misinterpret this, you are not really Spanish and will not start paying taxes, being called up for Jury service nor have to swear allegiance to your local mayor). This means that any vehicle you wish to make Spanish has to conform to the rules and regulations in existence at that time. In brief these presently are:

- The vehicle must have been built to European standards and will therefore have European Type Approval (Introduced some 20 years ago)
- Where no Type Approval exists, the vehicle must be re-registered as unique requiring an expensive engineering report. A report will only be produced where the vehicle meets modern standards and in virtually every case if it was made before 2004 it will not meet the latest emissions standards
- Motor homes are a body on top of a chassis. The chassis may have Type Approval, but the coachworks may not. It is critical that the entire vehicle has Approval

A car could have been made in Stuttgart or Birmingham but if it was made for a market outside of the EU, it may not have European Type Approval. This specifically applies to vehicles brought from the USA and Japan. These vehicles may have UK registration because they were imported as unique. This uniqueness applies only to the UK and is not transferable to Spain

Caveat Emptor (buyer beware!)

So, before you consider buying a non-Spanish car from your neighbour on the urb’, from a mate in England or a website in Germany be absolutely certain that it can be re-registered first or you have just wasted your money and will be driving illegally in Spain. As mentioned I have had many calls about this type of vehicle in the last fortnight, but am happy to take more, so if in doubt or if you want re-assurance, please get in touch

Finally, I am writing about this subject because it is topical, but let me assure you that the vast majority of vehicles can be re-registered with no problem, but before buying, a few basic checks could save you a lot of grief