

Driving in Spain

Last week, I was driving in inland Murcia virtually alone despite it being the middle of the day and marvelling at what a joy driving in Spain is compared to the crowded roads in the UK. Despite covering close to 1000 Km per week on business, the amount of delays that I have experienced are minimal

By now, I am used to the Spanish way of driving and on the whole prefer it. OK, indicators are an optional extra and the tailgating can make me nervous, but this is not normally done in an aggressive manner as I am as likely to see a granny in bifocals as a sleek haired dude in shades in my rear view mirror. I never feel threatened, as road rage is virtually unknown

Even the Spanish habit of not giving way is preferable; at least you know where you stand, whereas in England, if you don't give way, the least that you can expect is a one fingered salute or a hand inviting you to shake a bottle of ketchup (I think that's what it means!)

I felt my anorak closing around my shoulders as I considered the differences after seeing a square blue sign with a number on it and further on a sign saying Canada above a picture of a cow. Arriving back at the ITV station, there we were, a German, three Spaniards and a lone Englishman, either engineers or computer boffins (not sure about my category) so I started to ask about driving in Spain and after some Mickey-taking at my expense, hope I have come close to the truth. Fortunately one of the lads has a dad in the Guardia Civil, so was probably read the Highway Code instead of fairy tales at bedtime

Types of roads

What about the numbering of roads? Did you know that the E15 starts in Inverness, Scotland and goes all the way through to Algeciras near Gibraltar? No neither did I. A lot of the AP7 motorway is also the E15, the "E" meaning European road

The AP7 is an autopista, in other words a toll road, unlike the A7 that is a toll free autovia. Want to avoid the tolls? Not all parts of the autopistas have tolls. Normally when the motorway is about to become a toll road, this will be indicated at the last junction before the tolls start, so you can slam on your brakes and turn off the motorway quickly

"N" roads such as the N332, which meanders from Vera in Almeria then follows the coast to Valencia, are National roads in Spain. Regional numbers show the name of the region, such as CV for Comunitat Valencia and MU for Murcia

Camino Rural are country roads with no markings, frequently referred to as "Camino de Cabras" by the natives, or Sheep Roads. These are often in a poor state of maintenance and you will spend more time dodging potholes than sheep

Speed Limits

How about speed limits? On motorways it is normally 120 KPH (75 MPH for those with UK speedos), though as I found out to my cost, sometimes the limit is 100

On other roads, the maximum is 100 KPH, unless indicated otherwise by signs or by the width of the hard shoulder. Hard shoulders are notoriously narrow in Spain with barely room for an anorexic moped, but they have more significance than you think. Where the distance between the white line at the edge of the road and the edge of the tarmac itself is more than 1 metre wide, the speed limit is 100, half a metre wide, it is 90 and where less than half a metre, 80 KPH. Need good eyesight to work this one out

Ever noticed the sign that indicates the name of a town, which later has a red line through it when you leave the town? Between these two signs, the speed limit is 50 KPH. When in a town and you come to a cross roads, the right of way is always to the car on the right. If several cars are at the cross roads from different directions, you can wave forward the car on your left only or just put your foot down and hope for the best, which seems the usual protocol

Roundabouts

If you hit a vehicle in front of you, you are always to blame, which is why I can't understand tailgating, unless it gives certain people an adrenaline rush, which leads me neatly onto roundabouts where adrenaline is frequently called upon. Driving across the lanes, not indicating and cutting you up are all part of the fun. The rules, where they are acknowledged are that the vehicle in the inside lane has priority, so if you want to turn off and a car is on your inside, you had better slow down to let him pass or go round again. The outside lane is for overtaking. You should always indicate right as you approach your exit and if going all the way round indicating left is a prudent measure, even if few other drivers do so.

Flashing and parking

The flashing of headlights in the UK is a means of saying, "After you please Claude". In Spain, it means, "Don't you dare move hombre as I'm coming through", so best not to flash at all to save confusion

Parking can be haphazard to say the least. Parking is forbidden where the kerb is painted yellow and also where a sign indicating "Vado Permanente" exists, as the owner of a garage has paid to have permanent access; I imagine that's why so many cars park on pedestrian crossings. Where the kerb is painted blue, you can park but must pay to do so, usually at a meter

What about the square blue signs with a number in it that I mentioned at the beginning? This is the recommended maximum speed limit, though as the compulsory maximums are widely ignored, this sign seems a little superfluous. Canada above the cow's picture is not the entrance to a milk farm specialising in North American heifers, but a crossing for animals

Ah well anorak off now or I'll end up a real saddo