

Emergency Lighting

A few years ago, my neighbour was having her 7 year old grandson over for a holiday. On his first morning, he asked his granny in a tremulous voice “What was that terrible noise that I heard in the night?” “Ah, that’s nothing to worry about son; it’s the Englishman in the apartment upstairs snoring”

Well I suppose that was the final straw; after years of complaint from my long suffering other half, guests and anyone passing by my apartment in the middle of the night, I sought a cure; after all if I was frightening little children, something had to be done. Three years, much testing, examinations and potential solutions later I was outside of the hospital at 7 in the morning standing next to an ambulance (yes there may be a motoring link coming up) having a final cigarette before my operation

Laying on a narrow bed in the pre-op room and somewhat sedated, I started to think the kinds of thoughts that we all go through just before an operation; you know life, death, will the procedure work, will I be able to talk again etc. etc. Well actually no; if you are as obsessed about your work as I am (is there a cure for this also?) you start to think about ambulances. I had studied the ambulance during my smoke fest, thinking about how well equipped it seemed and whether all of the gear that it carried affected the speed too much and could this jeopardise lives when time is of the essence

Fast take off

Apparently a call had been made to one of the many numbers available for the various emergency services (112 is broadly speaking the equivalent of 999) as there was a flurry of activity. A female nurse came out of A&E and hopped into the middle of the bench seat in the waiting mercy vehicle. About a minute later a much older doctor waddled out and struggled to drag herself into the vehicle; clearly the days when she could give Kelly Holmes a run for her money were long gone. The trio was completed by the young and agile male driver who leaped into his seat relishing the thought of hitting the two tones and dodging around the early morning traffic.

Expecting the ambulance to speed off in a sudden burst of energy, I was surprised when the driver got on his mobile phone and spent a couple of minutes talking. I don’t imagine that he was talking about the previous night’s football or putting in an early call to his girlfriend, but who knows? I have to assume that he was getting instructions about where to go, but if so, couldn’t the nurse have dealt with this? Maybe job demarcations exist; but they were off soon enough and back again half an hour later with an eastern European looking gentleman who looked like he’d just upset Frank Bruno

Look behind you!

Still awaiting my op’ I again wondered why ambulance and fire engines in Spain use orange lights instead of blue ones like the police (yeah I know; I’m getting seriously sad). Just a thought, but you could be tooling along minding your own business when some dirty great truck fills your rear view mirror; “Blimey” you think “The dustmen

must be in line for a bonus driving at that speed, but no need to tail-gate mate”. The blare of the sirens makes you pull over and let the firemen pass.

So what should you do when you spot an emergency vehicle roaring up behind you? A statement of the bleeding obvious is let him pass, but for a more considered answer, I am indebted to a customer whom we shall call Roger from Quesada, because he is. Also he is a former traffic cop of many years service. In official jargon a motorist driving in front of a police car showing lights and/or sirens should “safely allow the emergency vehicle to pass”. Actually Roger said something like “get out of the way you prat”. I asked if one should stop. “Well ideally yes” said Roger “but not, as is often the case, next to an obstruction, bollards, a motorist coming the other way or somewhere else equally stupid” (I paraphrase).

Just slowing down can be dangerous, especially if your speed is inconsistent as the driver of the emergency vehicle has to try and judge your speed and course whilst looking out for oncoming traffic and pedestrians, so pulling over is the right thing to do. Once the emergency vehicle has passed, you should check that there are none of its colleagues also coming along, then when safe to do so pull back onto the main roadway. It is not a good idea at this time to try and jump the traffic in front unless you want the ambulance or police car to do a U turn to rescue you from the driver that you have just carved up

Blue, orange, green or red?

Here in Spain, only the police use blue flashing lights, everyone else uses orange ones, including the other emergency services, dust carts, breakdown trucks, road sweepers, delivery vans, Iberdrola et al. For us expats taught to move over for blue lights, giving way to white van man can get a little tiresome. I remember reading recently though that blue is likely to become the norm here too sometime in the future

When I was a taxi driver in Guardamar, the light on the cab was green, which meant “I’m free!” Boy did it use to annoy customers trying to flag me down if I forgot to turn it off when I had fares on board. I have heard that the taxis that drop the girls off at the roundabouts use red lights, but by now the calming sedative given me by the nurse is really kicking in

Well, sales of soundproofing have fallen in the town and little children have surfaced from under their bedcovers, so the procedure may have worked and after a few days off I need to work also, but are those fairy lights I see or the flying dustman?

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