

Frequently Asked Questions

An “ex” has been described as a has-been and a “spurt” as a drip under pressure, so it would be foolish of me and certainly conceited to say that I am an expert in anything, especially in something as complicated, bemusing and baffling as Spanish motoring law

Nevertheless after a few years of dealing with this subject and re-registering about 700 vehicles, dealing in transfers, driving licences and rescuing motorists from the welcoming arms of the various police forces, let’s say that I have an understanding of what is what, despite the ever changing rules. Working with a specialist lawyer certainly keeps me up to date. So in order to assist those expats who are continually misled by the “bar room lawyers” here is a summary of what is and isn’t allowed whilst motoring in Spain

Yes and No

Can I drive a foreign (non-Spanish) car in Spain? Yes but only for up to 6 months in any 12-month period

If I take my vehicle back to the UK for a MOT every year, will this keep it legal? No. The law requires a vehicle to be registered at the address where it is normally kept

Will having an ITV (Spanish MOT) on my UK car make it legal? No, a test on a foreign vehicle is purely voluntary and has no legal standing

Can I have my right hand drive car put onto Spanish number plates? Yes, the vast majority of cars that I have re-registered were right-hand-drive, though RHD commercials can’t, hence the amount of UK plated white vans in Spain

My caravan has a door on the left hand side is this OK? Yes, it is immaterial where the door is

My motorbike has a flat beam headlight, will this pass the ITV? Normally, yes, but no guarantees

My car is 15 years old; can it be re-registered? Yes if you owned it before coming to Spain, the age of the vehicle is immaterial. Furthermore, vehicles over 20 years old can be re-registered as Historical with no changes from the original build required

If I am resident in Spain, can I import another vehicle? Yes, if it has European Type Approval. Re-registering a vehicle is at its most straightforward when the vehicle was owned prior to registering yourself in Spain as there are virtually no restrictions and if you get the timing right, you will save the dreaded import tax.

If you buy a vehicle after moving here, then restrictions come into force and limit the type of vehicle that can be re-registered; this particularly applies to motor homes, so always check before buying a non-Spanish vehicle if resident

Do I have to register on the Padron to re-register a car? Yes, if the car is right hand drive. No if it is LHD, has Type Approval and you pay import tax

If I get a new Padron, does this mean that I can avoid import tax? Not if your first Padron is over 2 months old. There is a time limit for avoiding import tax of two months from the date of application of your first Padron. This date is known as the “fecha de inscripcion” or “fecha de alta” and should be shown on the document

Will the Baja Consular from my Consulate always mean that I can avoid import tax? No, only in certain circumstances, consistent with the date of Padron or “Residencia”

If I take my car back to England, can I re-register it there? Yes, but you must declare to the Spanish authorities that you will be doing so; if not taxes will build up which can be charged against any other assets that you have in Spain, such as a property

If I am resident in Spain, must I have a Spanish driving licence? Yes, your licence should reflect your normal address

Can I have my UK driving licence withdrawn from me by the police in Spain? Yes

Are the stick-on beam benders OK for the ITV test? No, these are fine for holiday makers only as a temporary fix to avoid dazzling oncoming drivers

Does my caravan have to be registered? Yes, caravans and heavy trailers are registered in the same way as cars

Is it OK to let the buyer of my Spanish registered car take care of the transfer of ownership? Definitely not; I have had many cases where this just does not happen and so the seller gets all sorts of fines and has to continue paying road tax. So ensure that you as the seller take care of it preferably via a specialist service

In summary

You get the gist. I have tried to keep the questions simple and relevant to the questions that I get asked on a daily basis. What this means is that there are always what ifs, how abouts and quite frequently if onlys! Like “if only I had known that at the time I could have saved money and why did I listen to the resident expert on the urb?”

The answer is because when we come to Spain we all have different priorities, such as getting the kids into school, looking for a job or finding a golf club and for most of us, sorting out our car is a low priority. Also most expats are genuinely helpful to new arrivals and can be a godsend when we know nothing about the country we have decided to call home, so why wouldn't we listen to their advice? Unfortunately, what may have worked for them when they arrived may well have changed since and the other category of expat who knows the answer to everything can easily be spotted and should be listened to with a high degree of scepticism

It is always better to seek professional advice no matter what the subject is and better still to ask several specialists to see if the information is consistent

Fuller FAQ's can be found on my website and I am always on hand for specialist advice, so ask away!