

Little white boxes

For me caravanning spells freedom; for others they are those little white boxes that clutter up the roads slowing down the traffic and are difficult to overtake; furthermore the owners don't even pay road tax

Like many things in life such as health 'n safety and political correctness opinions are polarised and unlikely to change, but I am a fan. When my four daughters were young we spent many happy weeks touring the vast continent of Europe going where we wanted when we wanted; if we didn't like a place we just hitched up and buggered off elsewhere. Ah the freedom to wander, the early morning smell of frying bacon, the pints in the friendly campsite bar and wondering through the woods.

Interesting smells

Funny how selective the memory is, whilst I remember the puncture in the middle of nowhere and turning over the caravan on the M4 whilst on the way to the ferry for France, I try to forget putting up the awning in a roaring gale whilst being lashed by rain, and emptying the portaloos was never one of my favourite chores. My then wife always fancied a motor home, but I couldn't see the point of having to stow everything away in order to drive down to the local village which is no doubt why some of these vehicles carry motor scooters or even tow a car behind them. Still each to their own and motor homes are highly popular

Another freedom in the UK and Ireland is that you can have a tow bar fitted, buy a caravan and tow away to your hearts content with no training, no need for an MOT and no need to register the caravan or trailer. The rest of Europe is not like that. Here in Spain, tow bars have to be of an approved type, be fitted by a specialist who will then provide a certificate taking responsibility for the fitting, followed by a visit to the ITV station to have the tow bar inspected and added to your ITV card

Caravan registration

All caravans and trailers over 750 Kg in weight need to be registered in the same manner as a car is which results in a red number plate at the rear of the vehicle. This is the tricky bit. If the caravan is fairly new, it will have a European Type Approval Number (as your car does) and the process is fairly straightforward and not too stressful to the wallet. Better still if you have registered your caravan with CRiS as this is now accepted in Spain as a registration document like the V5c is for your car. If your caravan does not have Type Approval, then it will need to be registered as if it were a unique vehicle and this more or less doubles the cost of registering as well as taking considerably longer to do

Because the cost of caravans in the UK is much cheaper than in Spain and the build spec' of a higher standard, many people buy them there just as they do cars, but be aware, towing a non-registered caravan on the road is an offence; you cannot just stick a number plate on the back and drive off. If you are thinking of going to the UK or Ireland to buy a van, then towing it with your Spanish car, please get in touch as this is not straightforward

Complications

In essence, registering a caravan is always possible; this is not the case with motor homes for the simple reason that they have an engine. As with all vehicles if the motor home was owned before you moved to Spain, then it can normally be re-registered with no problem under the regime known as “change of residence”. If you wish to re-register any powered vehicle after you came to Spain then a different set of rules apply. If the motor home has European Type Approval, then no problem, however such approvals have only been given to motor homes in the past few years. If it does not have type approval, then it may be possible to re-register under the more expensive route of “unit importation” but this will only be allowed if the engine has been built to the latest emissions standards that were introduced in 2004

Phew, hope that you’ve got that, my anorak was doing overtime there. Of all of the enquiries that I get, it is those for motor homes that cause the most confusion and it is very sad for me when I talk to a couple who have bought a UK registered motor home from a neighbour in Spain only to advise them that it cannot be re-registered. The complexities of this are not helped by people being given conflicting advice even amongst my competitors. It is never in my interest to advise someone that their vehicle cannot be re-registered as this is how I make my living, but sometimes I just have to say “sorry, can’t be done” so before you buy, seek honest advice

Inspections

The process of registering a caravan or re-registering a motor home parallels the same process of a car or motorbike. Firstly you need the important engineers report (or a Certificate of Conformity) then the ITV inspection, broadly speaking an MOT, though this is carried out by inspectors who give an honest and impartial assessment of the vehicle as there is no commercial gain for them in finding fault (just like back in the UK eh?). For caravans it is the brakes, tyres and lights that come under scrutiny but with all vehicles built for living in then the gas and electric installations have to be inspected too, independently of the ITV.

At the end of all this, your second home on wheels will be fully road legal, safe and ready to sample the delights of a muddy field or a 4-star campsite of your choosing where you want, when you want and with whoever you want. Happy camping!

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