

## Mind your speed!

As we get older the old memory plays tricks, but if I recall it was during the infamous “three day week” when Edward Heath was prime minister that the speed limit on British motorways was reduced to 70 MPH. Before that we could travel at any speed we liked, not that too many cars could sustain high speeds then. At the same time, the speed on de-restricted roads was limited to 60 MPH. These were designed to be temporary measures, so just how temporary is temporary? About as long as manana here in Spain!

The above happened during a fuel crisis when supplies of petrol and diesel were becoming limited due to the continuing problems in the Middle East and the costs were soaring, so there nothing new in the world nor in the Spanish government introducing speed limits for broadly similar reasons during the present crisis

### New limits

As of 7<sup>th</sup> March, the speed limit on all Spanish motorways (autovias and autopistas) was reduced from 120 KPH to 110 KPH. As this is a reduction from 75 to 69 MPH it should be a breeze for us Brits and is designed to be temporary with 4 months being the initial period. Will it ever go up again; what do you think? So far the only change to signage that I have seen is coverings over the 120 notices, but the government is spending 250,000 euros on signs showing the new speed limit. Naturally this will be rigidly enforced and fines handed out, but my understanding is that there will be no points sanction on your licence for driving between the old and new limits

The new restrictions are designed to reduce overall fuel consumption thereby limiting the amount that is imported from troubled parts of the world. Seems like a two edged sword to me as the less fuel sold, the less taxes are collected. Essentially a car will burn less fuel if it travels at lower speeds as less energy is required to maintain momentum. It has been commented that surely lower speed limits should be voluntary rather than enforced. I totally agree with personal choice and detest the blanket smoking ban for the reason that it has taken away personal choice for non smokers and smokers alike. The problem with personal choice for speed limits is that virtually every driver wants to drive at the maximum allowed and frustration sets in when we are blocked by a slower driver in front; this frustration can lead to accidents

### Fuel savings

Whilst I'm no expert, those that wish to use less fuel either to help the crisis or save money, will drive slower to do this, as will leaving a larger gap between your car and the one in front thereby reducing the amount of times that the brakes are applied. If you consider that every time you brake your car this is fuel wasted as petrol or diesel is turned into brake pad friction, you get the point. Mind you the Spanish habit of tailgating reduces fuel consumption also as you are being dragged along by the air from the lead vehicle, so maybe they are all closet conservationists

Other ideas introduced are to regularly check your tyre pressures to ensure that there is not too much drag and that your tyres will last longer. An incentive to change older

tyres by introducing a 20 euros reduction in cost has also been announced, but I only caught the basics of this on Spanish TV the other day so don't have full details yet

### Other initiatives

I was forcibly struck when back in the UK recently by the significant amount of cars parked close to motorway junctions, using grass verges, farmer's fields and hedgerows; many of these places looked like junk yards for high end cars. These were the vehicles of car-sharers. The idea of car sharing was taking off quite well when I came to Spain a few years ago and is now being widely promoted here as part of the present initiative. This makes obvious sense when you regularly take the same journey to work for example. Websites specialising in this area can be very useful for one off journeys also

Ever travelled by train in Spain? OK, then picture this; you have taken out a second mortgage for a train that is late, filthy, overcrowded with a buffet car selling junk food at Ritz prices with surly staff who want to play with their train set and regard passengers as a necessary evil. That is my memory of British Rail. Now imagine the complete opposite and on longer journeys a free film thrown in to listen to via a headset; this is train travel Spanish style; railway travel as it should be. To encourage more people to give up the car and take to the tracks, price reductions on what are already very good prices have been announced; try it, you are in for a treat!

So, back to speed limits. When driving through a town, unless otherwise indicated the speed limit in urban areas is 50 KPH. The limit starts when you see the town's name and finishes when you see the same name with a line through it. It is being mooted that for reasons of economy and safety this is to be reduced to 30 KPH; as this is only 19 MPH then it will be quicker to use a bike.

### Cycling

Now there's a subject! Loads of cyclists out for a club race or joy ride I can put up with as there is no way you are going to overtake, so I just accept this and tootle along behind, but those who are out in pairs and insist on riding side-by-side get right up my nose as they are just being selfish. These same people are soon to be allowed on pavements as it is safer and quicker; anyone asked the pedestrians! This is part of the plan to get more people to leave their cars at home and take to two wheels, God help us

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