

Pet hates

Driving in Spain is a bit of a culture shock when we choose to live here. Driving whilst on holiday and putting up with the strange rules of the road is part of the fun for a couple of weeks, but when you move here permanently, the charm wears thin

So what is your pet hate on the roads? A straw poll has provided a list of the usual suspects which will be all too familiar to you, starting with the lack of courtesy. You let another car out or stop at a pedestrian crossing and receive no wave of thanks in return; many Brits who have lived here for years still get really bent out of shape over this one. The Spanish are unfailingly nice when you are with them, so why this apparent lack of courtesy?

After you please

Whilst I'm no anthropologist, I guess it's just the way that Spanish society has evolved, just the same as the British used to be called the politest race on earth, until the "me first" brigade took over. In fact we Brits expect and in many cases demand to be let out of a side road or allowed to amble across a pedestrian crossing. When we are not we see it as personal insult and become very annoyed over this perceived lack of courtesy; road rage may follow, but this is a rarity in Spain

My first taste of culture shock when dealing with the Latinos was during the mid 70's. I was a Petty Officer Electrician in the Royal Navy and had been sent on board a British built destroyer belonging to the Argentine Navy to undertake repairs. I had to go below deck and arrived at a hatch at the end of the lunchtime siesta just as half of the ship's company was coming in the opposite direction. No one stopped to let me down as would have happened in the RN, but the solution became evident when a native just shot down the ladder barging into everyone without so much as a "by your leave". Not right, not wrong, just a different culture.

So if no one says thank you, that's just the way it is

Machismo and women drivers

High on everyone's list is tailgating. No one in their right mind tailgates, as the chances of avoiding the car in front in the event of an accident are nil which is why there are so many multiple pile ups. The Spanish just like to be in front, so let them pass; it really is not an affront to your machismo to let them by and annoy someone else. Leaving a large gap between you and the car in front is an open invitation to the budding Fernando Alonsos to scream by and fill it, keeping them off your tail.

Tailgating, speeding, cutting you up or jumping lights is a particularly male thing, especially for young lads full of testosterone, trying to prove their masculinity. I imagine that many years ago, they would have rode stallions to impress the fillies and intimidate the donkey riders.

So what about women drivers? Well the ultra macho would say that the two words are mutually incompatible; after all they are too slow, indecisive, have absolutely no sense of direction and spend more time doing their hair in the rear view mirror than looking for following traffic. What's more, they don't know how to park. Maybe, maybe not, but they enjoy lower insurance premiums as they have less accidents, so who are the better drivers?

Cyclists

Cyclists! Now there's a subject that causes the blood to boil. The other day, I pulled off the motorway to look up some information to be confronted by a bunch of cyclists taking up the entire carriageway so had to crawl behind them for quite a while. Men's buttocks in tight fitting Lycra is really not my thing, despite having been in the Navy. Why do these things happen when you are in a hurry? Later a friend said that I should have tailgated them or kept my horn fully on; I was tempted to do much worse!

I have a bike too and have ridden motorbikes in the past. On two wheels for sure your biggest enemy is motorists who do not see you, nor allow enough room and just love to open their cars doors as you are passing, but the sheer arrogance of certain cyclists is breathtaking. Why do they insist on riding side by side when other traffic is about? Surely they are asking for trouble from some hot head. I have recently obtained a copy of the Spanish highway code (strewth, I must be getting really sad) so thought that I would look up the regulations on cycling in case the rules gave them an elevated status above mere users of powered vehicles. It states that cyclists must remain visible, should not zigzag and must keep to the extreme right in single file, not along side each other. Guess that the riders that I meet haven't read it

The Highway Code

In case you want to read it, the book is available for a few euros from driving schools (yes they do exist!) and is called Manual de Circulacion y Seguridad Vial (Manual for driving and road safety)

Last year there was a campaign in the Spanish media to get drivers to use their indicators. It's odd that drivers have been drilled in using their hazard lights for the slightest reason and religiously use their headlights in tunnels, but indicators seem to be an optional extra. The campaign increased usage, but there is no consistency, so I largely ignore them and study the position of the other car to determine its movements

Parking on corners, pedestrian crossings or too close to you gets some people upset. "We wouldn't do that at home" they cry. Yeah well this is the home of the Spanish, so their rules rule, OK!

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