

Roundabouts and other hazards

Thank you to Patrick who wrote in last weeks letters page asking about roundabouts

I say thanks because he has given me inspiration. As a purely amateur writer rambling on about motoring matters it is sometimes difficult to think up my next article as I like to keep them interesting, different and topical. Not sure if I always succeed, but I try my best, so Patrick's enquiry has made me re-think what I was going to write about this week

Round and round

Although I have covered roundabouts previously, repetition does no harm and gives me the chance to cover other points too, but I am reminded of an incident when I went back to the UK for a few days last year

I was driving with my other half, her sister and her husband as passengers. We were heading for the zoo and my brother-in-law was giving me directions. All of a sudden, he shouts "Where are you going?" My reply was somewhat short but in essence was "Following your directions". "You're going round the roundabout the wrong way" he yelled and sure enough I was; fortunately no one was coming towards us. So used to going anti-clockwise, I did so automatically

We have been taught when we enter a roundabout in the UK to use the left lane if turning left or going straight on and the right lane if turning right or going all the way around; also to indicate when exiting the roundabout (I was also taught to indicate right if going around). Most drivers do this and we normally know where we are. Problems arise where people do not indicate and carry on round, confusing us, but this is because we have made an assumption about the other driver's intentions and got it wrong

What is different in Spain? Well firstly lane control is pretty poor with most drivers cutting straight across the lanes and indicators are seen as an optional extra. I'm sure that I recall one day when at the ITV station a Spanish driver when asked to test his indicators said "Que?"

In Spain we go around anti clockwise and should stay in the right hand lane unless overtaking. We should always indicate when turning off. Even if we know this to be true, why do confusion, anger and accidents arise? Two reasons spring to mind, the first being that we make assumptions about a driver's intentions and secondly we forget that we are the only perfect driver on the road and the rest are idiots or madmen; well even though they aren't, it's safe to assume that some will be.

How does this help get us round the roundabout? (Incidentally, anyone come across those multiple roundabouts forming a circle where each has to be approached individually? Swindon is famous for them; hope that they don't export them here). Firstly, never assume what a driver will do, just observe his car position. If he turns off without indicating so what? You are either going to follow him or carry on round,

so no hassle. If he carries on past the exit without indicating, this is no problem to you. Where problems arise is if a driver is in the left (overtaking) lane because at sometime he has to come back or cut across the right lane to exit the roundabout; if he doesn't indicate when doing so, he may then cause an accident, but if you are watching him, you will see his wheels start to turn and so avoid him hitting you. Frustrating, yes, but you can keep control of the situation by being vigilant. A driver on your right always has priority, so if you are in the left hand lane and wish to exit, you have to yield to someone on your inside and carry on round

What do I do? Well I'll cut straight across if there is no other traffic around (I've learned to drive like a Spaniard so as not to confuse them!) , apart from that I always stay in the right hand lane unless overtaking a slow vehicle, afterwards getting back to the right. I always indicate left until switching to the right indicator when exiting on the basis that the more I tell other drivers about my movements the less likely I am to be involved in an accident

On entering a roundabout, I take no notice of a driver who is indicating to come off at my exit until I see him make the move, better safe than sorry

Half round?

What about those junctions that look like a roundabout with a main road going through the middle. These are generally "no left turns" which means that you have to go across the main road to join the other half of the "roundabout" if turning left, the urge to just join the main road can be overwhelming, so beware

Hope this helps to clarify otherwise we'll just end up going around in circles!

Police road checks

Patrick also asks what you should do if you come across a Guardia Civil checkpoint? Simple answer is whatever the Guardia wants! I have been stopped several times and see it as an occupational hazard. Normally the police will want to see your documents which are registration document, ITV card, insurance papers and driving licence. If these are all in order, you are normally waved on. Bit difficult if you have no MOT and the car is not in your name but you claim that it's yours. Yes it happens

Best to keep the car documents in the glove box and the driving licence in you purse, or if a lady, in your wallet, so that they are within reach. The police do not like you stepping outside of your car unless asked to do so as I was once forcibly reminded of by a Policia Local who was clearly having a bad day. If they wish to inspect your car, they will say so. Best not to volunteer any information unless asked and above all keep calm; they are doing their job and will always have the upper hand. The guns are quite intimidating to us Brits too!

If you have any other queries about driving in Spain, drop me a line, I may need the inspiration

Spanish Number Plates
Graham Shelton
Orihuela, Alicante
www.spanish-number-plates.com
info@spanish-number-plates.com
966 753 375
605 319 889