

The Penalties of Motoring

Hard luck stories

January 1st. I go to my car to find a New Year present from the Policia Local. On the street where I had parked, the side of the road where parking is allowed changes on the 1st and 15th of each month and my car was now on the wrong side. Whoops a 50-euro fine. Thanks lads, silly boy Graham

Two weeks later whilst travelling at 120 Km/hour on the motorway with customers on board I had a front tyre blow out; very scary especially as the hard shoulders on Spanish motorways can just about accommodate a motorbike, not a car. Two new tyres later I'm back in business

Last week, my exhaust starts rattling, more expense, but on the same day I was driving in a line of traffic on a normal road at 90 Km/hour, the speed limit. Ahead I could see the Guardia Civil had mounted one of their reception committees; they waved me and other drivers in for what I assumed would be a routine check of paperwork, you know the ones where those who drive non-Spanish cars get worried in case it's their turn to say good bye to their vehicle whilst it's towed off to the compound. Mine was all in order but the Guardia explained that I had been speeding. It transpires that they had mounted a hidden camera at a junction where the speed limit temporarily drops to 70 and of course the convoy that I am in doesn't slow down. Nice one, just about everyone was being booked. 100 euros later, I'm on my way

Gone are the days when there was a very lax approach to committing motoring offences, though Spain is not yet at the draconian level of the UK where people are almost frightened to drive, but these incidences reminded me of the pitfalls as well as the joys of motoring. I drive about 50,000 Km a year mostly on business and covered similar distances in the UK, so situations are bound to occur, which is why this week I am covering penalties

What to be wary of

Fixed speed cameras do exist in Spain, but in relatively small numbers though the use of mobile speed cameras is quite prevalent, as I found out to my cost

Seat belts and crash helmets are compulsory, though there is still a hard-core of motorists not using either. I have to smile or flinch at the bikers who wear helmets to protect their heads, but ride in T-shirts, shorts and flip-flops; perfect candidates for road-rash!

Paperwork is all-important in this bureaucratic society. You should carry registration documents, ITV card, road tax receipt, insurance papers and your driving licence. If you are wary about keeping originals in the car, then have notarised copies made; photocopies may not be acceptable in all circumstances. The law requiring motorists to carry all of the above has been repealed so it is no longer compulsory, but as

frequently happens, the policemen on the streets may not be aware of the changes. In any event, it is better to produce them at the time of asking rather than have to visit a police station later.

Similarly, you can be fined for having defective lights, so these should be checked regularly, especially rear and brake lights which drivers seem to forget about. Whilst the law no longer demands that spare bulbs be carried, it is prudent to do so.

Roadside checkpoints are very popular with the various police forces and they are very adept at leaving no escape route. Such check points are to be found at motorway tollbooths, on roundabouts and less often on straight roads. At a checkpoint, you will almost certainly be breathalysed, irrespective of the time of day; bear in mind that the limits are more stringent than in the UK. A quick check of your car may be made and you can virtually guarantee that the paperwork will be scrutinised.

Parking in Spain is pretty haphazard compared to the UK, but don't let that fool you into thinking that it is a free-for-all. If you park in a prohibited area you may find your car missing when you get back to where you left it and in its place is a sticker advising you of which compound it is in. Alternatively you may just receive a fixed penalty as I did

What are the Penalties?

Penalties are often at the discretion of the police officer with fines ranging from about 50 to several hundred euros. There is normally a 30% discount if paid within 30 days. Payment is usually at a bank or the Post Office and is required in cash.

If your car has non-Spanish plates, then the Police may take you to your bank in order for the fine to be paid immediately; this is in case you decide to go back to your country of origin without paying.

If you have a Spanish driving licence, points will be deducted from the 12 that we all start off with (0 points = no licence!). Where your licence was issued in the UK a recent law is about to be implemented meaning that DVLA will be advised to put points on your licence following an offence. If you are banned from driving, your licence will be revoked. Technically the Spanish cannot do this to a non-Spanish licence, but they will!

If your non-Spanish vehicle has been in Spain for longer than the 6 months allowed and you cannot prove otherwise, it may be impounded immediately in addition to any fine imposed. You cannot recover the car from the compound unless it is being taken to an ITV station to start the re-registration process.

So, in summary as with motoring everywhere, if you commit an offence then a fine or other sanction will follow. The Guardia Civil don't mess about, generally do not speak English and appealing takes an awful long time and money. In short, drive safely, happy motoring and enjoy better luck than I am presently having