

ZEN AND THE ART OF CAR IMPORTATION

"We think in generalities, but we live in detail"

Alfred North Whitehead

This is a very long story do you have the stomach for it? Do you want a late night? Go and put on a hot milky drink, find those tartan slippers with the warm wool linings . Read on, this lasts for nine pages. You may learn something, not only about car importation but also about life and the Universe, this must be a good deal.

Knowing Andorra, I had my doubts about embarking on this expedition although my gestoria said it would be fun and character building. I thought my character building had finished with my last cold shower taken at a disreputable English Public School in 1957 – not so, the cold dribbles still drip.

The true way goes over a rope which is not stretched at any great height but just above the ground. It seems more designed to make people stumble than to be walked upon.

Franz Kafka

Thus girded I started to gather about me the accoutrements of bureaucratic necessity. In essence this amounted to the combined days output of paper pulp from the entire southwest region of Oregon. Number one document is the original invoice and receipt that one has torn out of the greasy palm of whatever back street vendor the vehicle came from. In my case this had been surreptitiously bought off a Belgium dockside and even came equipped with a genuine EEC Certificate of Conformity, which joyfully tells me that urban fuel consumption is 10.1 l/100km when I know for a fact that in Andorra it is a modest 16! So much for bargains.

To continue the sorry story don't forget the Registration Document, this also given grudgingly by a poor numptie jobsworth prisoner of The DVLA office in Costa Wimbledon. The pain in his eyes when he had to enter "Amount of Tax **NOT** paid = £3,042", almost brought the tears to mine. I was sternly warned that on pain of death the vehicle must be exported within 12 months - and that included me, and on NO account to come back for six months. There was definitely no love in his voice. He gave me a booklet entitled: *All You Need To Know About VAT Avoidance*; I felt slightly suspicious about this but he had such lovely eyes when he smirked that I was quite taken in.

The thought of having to miss half a years UK winter was a great hardship. I resigned myself to suffering withdrawal symptoms, supping Glühwein on the sunny terraces of Andorra' ski slopes.

Ooops, almost forgot another piece of paper - VAT FORM 410 (the green one), *Application to Purchase a New Motor Vehicle for Export from the European Union under The Personal Export Scheme*. This just duplicates all the rest but has a nice turn of phrase. You must declare that you have read Notice 705. Of course I said yes. Has anybody seen Notice 705? I am distraught at having missed it. Consign this little gem to the inner sanctum of your memory:

"If whilst visiting another EC Member State (such as Estonia) before the due date for export from the EU shown in the registration document, your intention changes and you decide to remain in a Member State, you must immediately notify the fiscal authorities of that Member State and PAY VAT and any other local taxes due ".

Oh Yes! My feet will hardly touch ground as I race on my Nike Air Jordans for the nearest Fiscal Office, clutching hot euros in grubby paws desperate to notify. Who do I notify ? I think I'll notify Milosevic – but they tell me he's dead.

Bad boy, go and stand in the Silly Corner - what have you forgotten? Forgot the Original Manufacturers Guarantee and Service Book. Being written in the original Belgium Walloon this was a great help. The book had to be shipped back to Antwerp for the CORRECT stamps, dates and certificate of First Inspection. By the way, if this is not filled in right way about then the warranty becomes invalid. My Service Manual is now a model of stamped efficiency - alles in orde – this car create an empire that will last for a thousand years.

In the bright light of a Monday morning, off I trot down to St.Julia Duana, don't go into the Espanya Custom's offices because they don't like being woken up before it's time for siesta, instead go into a local Agencia de Aduana's because they're all getting paid lots and lots to stay awake:

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE;

"We are here and it is now. Further than that, all human knowledge is moonshine"

H.L.Mencken

10.00AM. Arrive. Stand at desk with big blue IKEA bag full paper. Agent avoids eye contact. Telephone rings and he spends five minutes apologising to his girlfriend/wife/mistress for what happened last night.

10.05. Agent comes across, papers change hands. He returns to desk and pretends to read papers assiduously for 10 minutes but I'm sure he's doing playing Sudoku.

10.15 Agent tuts and asks what proof I have that I bought it where the invoice said I did. I pointed out the window and said "there it is". My



car doesn't argue. I thought that the factura looked quite genuine. I give him Fax number and he sends two long sheaves of Catalan gobbledegook winging on their way to the Ace Motor Company on Clapham High Road. Kevin rings back from happy Essex asking for a translation. Agent Miguel had one of these but never mentioned it. Belgium is never discussed.

10.50. Faxes finally return, Kevin has apparently stamped everything in sight, in red and in triplicate. Agent Miguel loves stamps, seems happy with all this and scurries off into a back office.

11.05 Agent Miguel returns. Shock Horror, he has found a missing document. Logically I am unsure how you can do this – if he has found it then it cannot be missing, if it is missing then it cannot be found ? He is confident that he has found that the T-Form is missing. I was unaware of T-Forms importance believing these had died out in 1988. He assures me that Andorra gave the kiss of Lazarus to “T” and they really really WANT it.

Both Agent Miguel and myself can see that this is going to lead to a lot of paperwork, his eyes glaze over and he b*****s off again to the Andorran Thought Police.

Space, time, substance and content are tools to be employed in the apportionment of blame

Craig Brown

11.30. Agent Miguel is smiling. Obviously a done deal with T-Form Department. T-Form, in this rare and very special instance can be dispensed with.(Now you know that if you export an item from a Member State into a NON Member State then you need to get a T-Form and make EVERYONE stamp it at every opportunity). Agent Miguel now returns to computer and hammers efficiently at the keys, this goes on and on.

11.55 Agent returns. I wake up. He says he has to contact Madrid to verify the UK VAT number. The computer is now glowing a gentle rose pink as it nears critical mass.



12.20 Agent is not a happy Agent. Madrid say "there is a problem". VAT number is invalid. How can VAT number be invalid, it is plastered all over about six invoices? There is no point in having an invalid VAT number, someone is unclear on the concept. Nonetheless, VAT number is invalid.

Madrid must be consulted and via the miracle of high-speed Internet connection, this happens.

12.50. Although something is happening, nothing is happening. Andorra has all the time in the world. I have none of the time that was once in the world. All day is what I have not got.

The nature of the bureaucracy is a circle of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.

1.20pm. I continue to read Bon Dia for the fourth time. The news doesn't get any better however many times you read it.

2.00pm. Agent taps me on the shoulder. There is a problem with the computer. The problem with computers is, computers. Apparently today is the first day of the implementation of a complete new and highly efficient software system but Madrid has not quite got to grips with it, Bill Gates is on holiday and Microsoft aren't answering the phone.

Computers are useless, they only give you answers.
Pablo Picasso

2.20. The computer decides it can't cope, goes blue and switches off and Agent Miguel says sod the VAT. Things are hotting up. The Earth continues to rotate at 8,786 kmph but Miguel is approaching siesta time.

2.30 Nothing is continuing to happen. This is rapidly turning into a situation –

Things are independent in so far as they can occur in all possible situations, but this form of independence is a form of connection with states of affairs, a form of dependence. (It is impossible for a T-form to appear in two different roles at once: by itself and on a computer).

2.46. Agent Miguel is happy. That special moment has arrived where he can ask for money. Fortunately his fee is not based on an hourly rate. All the documents seem to be in place.

Miguel is unaware of this. I pay his exorbitant fee for which it seems, I receive nothing but a recebo stating that he has done work. The evidence of this work is not apparent, this is the essence of bureaucracy.

3.05 Five hours have elapsed and I feel I have overstayed my welcome. Agent Miguel does not invite me for tea to meet Consuela and his three children, one of whom has a verucca. He comes out of the office to wave me goodbye but I cannot leave because a 55-ton rubble truck has parked across the path of the very vehicle, which I am trying to import. No one knows where the driver is.

If the doors of perception were cleansed, then traffic would appear to man as it is, infinite, but this truck is finite and blocking me in.

3.20 Driver appears and backs up, wiping the greasy remains of chorizo bocado onto his shirt. I drive three hundred yards and park in Andorra. There is softness in the air, a radiant brown ambience but this is just Moroccan dust blown over from Africa.

I have now lost touch with reality. A new and unsullied Andorran Agent has taken me under her wing. All will soon be well. She goes through all the papers again and does much stamping. They even have a machine that makes a perforated serial number on the documents – One would think was an improvement since it lets the light shine through. In reality the light is only diverted. Now we must go to the Duana and pay more, much, much more. We arrive, but this is a very special place and I am made to stand outside. Eventually Maria returns and asks for the large sum of money. I am distraught.” There appears to be an error in your imagination”, I wail. She points her elongated and carminised fingernail at **Total Invoice Price**. I mention that the vehicle is now a year old and as we all know will have lost half its value within 100 metres of the garage door. I refuse to pay, demanding the Pope to intervene. I can see the need for more paper rearing its head over the horizon. I am directed to go to a very important man at *The Vehicular Finances Department* at the Govern. It is now nearly tea time and we all know that everything stops for tea so I clear off home for my Gentleman’s Relish and Earl Grey.

In the night I have a terrible dream probably caused by The Gentleman’s Relish - I am standing by a tractor form machine and every form that comes out has my name on it and I must stamp it before the next one appears, if I miss then another machine appears and I have to go twice as fast.

In the end an angel materialises with a machine gun that shoots official Government Stamps and everything explodes into a snowstorm of paper but as each fragment settles it turns into another form. In the end I drown under the paper and wake up in a sweat.

It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have something in common with it.

Tuesday.

Into The Govern. Senhor Vehicular Finance Man sits in a lonely cubicle, Planta Segundo, Portes 10. He understands my problema and goes off to look for a newspaper to see if he can find any adverts for cars like mine to give himself some idea of the value. The answer seems to lie in *No.17 Down* in the El Periodico Daily Crossword. He knocks four thousand euros off the Duana's imaginative price and I bumble off happy

to pay. I am sent to three different offices in various parts of town, I enjoy the walk and have much retail therapy - but no one wants my money.

In the end I am sent back to the Border. This must be it I think, they're going to deport me to the purgatory that is Ponts on a Saturday night. The Andorran Lady Agent (006 - licensed to stamp) takes a deep breath and starts all over again. It seems that yesterday's papers have all expired and have to be processed again. Many faxes flit back and forth between Andorra and Spain, a distance of 200 meters, and we now have everything in quadruplicate. She runs out of photocopy paper. We wait while an underdog goes somewhere for another tree.

At last I am returned, cap in hand, doffing my forelock (if only) to Uniformed Officer who will now accept my dinero's. Credit card is rejected, and again and again. My trendy Huddersfield Co-op Bank card fails to work. Men are starting to load my car on a transporter, ready for that awful final trip to car hell. "You go get CASH - NOW" yells officer whose dignity has been deflowered by my disputation of his valuation. I know he's important because he has black epaulets with bright shiny badge's. They permit me to take car and I start hunt in St. Julia's back streets for an ATM that will deign to accept my card. It's 2.00pm - all the banks are shut and its 35 degrees sentygrayd . One machine gives me a pittance, two others glower at me through their CCTV's and say "p***s off". I wait and sweat in the burning sun until 3. Banks grudgingly open doors. Ah – the wonder and efficiency of the siesta ! Repeated phone calls and faxed ID finally produce a wad of this strange bizarre European currency. Off I scuttle before they suss me out.

Customs Man's face breaks into beatific smile at the sight of so many green readies. He holds a 100 note up to the light, perhaps hoping to see a watermark of Beckham. Much happy stamping ensues and the forms are mine, the forms are mine. Oh happy day. Beanpole Duana man comes to look at car. "You want to import THIS into Andorra" ??,..... a look of defeated amazement on his face. Obviously the tax is more than the car's worth. He gives the tyre a desultory kick that says "Hasta la vista baby".

There are two more days of action to go. Can you wait? Does the Govern accept it? Will he get a number? What will they say about my bike rack? Will anyone notice that the ink is smudged on the Tax Disc? No, they won't because it does'nt have a tax disc.

Continued next week.....

Next week comes.....

"Thinking is more interesting than knowing, but less interesting than looking"

Goethe

SIX DAYS LATER.

Yes, I'm still here despite rumours that the Foreign Legion have sent for me. Time to go to ITV for Inspection. Who gets inspected ? The gonzo in the office instructs me to abandon my gleaming lifestyle object out in the hot sun, open to hijackers etc etc. For security's sake I remove my only copy of "Abbas Greatest Hits" from the ancient cassette player that I had fitted after throwing away a bizarre object they called a "CD Player", the slot was far too narrow to insert a proper cassette.

I join the other pilgrims, abject haj seekers to the great god Auto. The sun beats down on my mica metallic paintwork; they tell me that Desert Rats used to fry eggs on the deck of their armoured cars, I could cook a paella on mine.

Finally I am called. The hood is sprung and tag details are taken, CO2 emissions are absorbed, every light you can think of is flashed, the rolling road pronounces you competent. I await expectantly.

A President Allende look-alike suspiciously survey's the car, looking for signs of guilt. Ah, his face lights up – he's seen something.....he kicks the tow ball.

Much typing goes on at the terminal. Something of import is happening, the relevance of which I am kept ignorant of. If you need to know then you won't be told. Allende presents me with a glowing sheet of hard copy.

We have to understand that the world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The hand is more important than the eye.....The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.

Jacob Bronowski

The hard copy says my car is "provisional", conditional on the presentation of homologation certificado du muntages ganxo i.e what can you tow with your tow hook, who fitted it and why, and we need lots of certificates (with stamps) to prove that it really does exist in this dimension and has not been sucked here through some Black Hole in entropy (entropy rules – OK).

This is a difficult problem for me to solve. I fitted the b****y thing myself so cannot provide a certificate from a "competent taller" and I come from a Black Hole where tow bars really do exist.

With the help of Google, a nice lady in the back office of Witter's North Wales Wrexham plant "Ah " she says, "You are probably in Spain, we get a lot of enquiries from Spain ". I try to explain the subtle difference between Spain and Andorra and that Andorran Stamps are much bigger than Spanish one's. She understands this immediately. I then find the UK VCA site (Vehicle Certification Authority) and manage to dredge up Type Approval documents, with official looking Government stamps etc etc etc.(Bureaucrats just love etcetera's) . Remember the First Law of Bureaucracy give them a piece of paper.

ABERCROMBIE'S ADVICE

A problem shared is a problem halved, so your problem is really just half of someone else's.

Wednesday Morning.

Return to ITV. Scores of dangerous looking teenagers are taking driving tests next door. Be very afraid. Many of them appear to be passing out successfully. The apocalypse takes another step nearer. I wait, sweating and trepidacious at the golden doors to the inner sanctum of the test site. In the end, El Presidente can no longer ignore me and comes forward reluctantly to accept my "new" documents". He is suitably impressed and goes away to photo copy these! All you need is..... a little piece of paper, thereafter, all doors are opened.

At last, a form with "FAVORABLE" stamped on it. Should I feel superior now that I'm "Favorable" ? Should I write this on a Tee Shirt and parade it up Meritixell ? My ego doesn't feel much more favourable so I'll just bumble along as usual.

The light which experience gives us is a lantern on the stern which shines only on the waves behind us.

Kahlil Gibran

Thursday Morning:

Go to Govern. Show sheaf of papers that have contributed exponentially to my carbon footprint.

Show multiple forms of ID, pay one hundred and eighty eight euros that will disappear forever into the great black well of Andorran debt. Garcia says return en Dilluns to collect little yellow card.

It is not the same to talk of bulls as to be in the bullring.

Pedro Garcia Melasqueze

I have been in The bullring for nearly two weeks and it's WORSE to be talking Bull ! Bull is not what I want to be talking but Bull is what I get. They tell me that *when the Way comes to an end, then change – having changed, you pass through.* **I Ching** may have believed this but he never had to confront THE GOVERN !

Step by Step procedure for Importation of Car into Andorra.

If the car is not New – Original Registration document.

Invoice you received upon purchase. Make sure this has a receipt stamp of some sort on it. Andorra loves stamps.

T-form for export to NON EU country. get this stamped by VAT office at port of departure from UK. If you exit UK via Dover then you are in big trouble because they have moved the VAT office to the edge of town.....allow an extra hour !

If NEW vehicle for which you have paid NO VAT, then DVLA Registration Document **VX302**, stamped and completed at your local DVLA Office. Take your GREEN copy of Form VAT410 (Personal Export Scheme - *Application to Purchase a New Motor Vehicle for Export from the European Union(EU)*) with you.

This should have all the vehicle details , chassis number, importer etc plus Bar code form showing port of Import. The VX302 is very important as it will show the amount of TAX not paid. This must have the relevant vehicle details completed by the manufacturer (or importer) before delivery). It must have the DVLA Local Office Address Stamp placed on both sides and must have the stamp of the importer.

EEC Certificate of Conformity.

This should be provided by the manufacturer and also needs to be stamped by DVLA at the same time as form VX302 is stamped. This is VERY important if you have a tow bar etc since it provided evidence of max. towing loads etc. You will also need Type Approval Certificates for any non original accessories that have been fitted.

Valid up to date UK Insurance certificate.

Go to the border to import (preferably Spain). Go to an agency. Present all these documents.

Agency will process these. Pay Agency 101 euros. Go to Agence on Andorran side. They will process documents, issue you with an Import Form and take you to Duana where you will have to pay the 7% import PLUS Imposit Activat Comercial @ 1.4%, total amounting to 8.4%.? If the vehicle is not new then get a revaluation from the man on Planta Segundo, Portes 10.

Obtain local Andorran insurance for the car. This will be a temporary document since there is no vehicle number as yet. Please note : You cannot get Named and spouse drivers only on comprehensive, you have to pay a premium which covers all drivers – no wonder it's extortionate.

Apply for appointment to have vehicle inspected at ITV at St.Julia.
Take vehicle and all documents, including Andorran insurance.

If the inspection is favourable then take ALL documents and receipts to Govern. They will need your Passport and Residencia. They will also want 188 euros ! They will give you an appointment time to come to collect your "Yellow Card". If the inspection is unfavourable then have another drink. They will also need a further 30 euros for The Automobile Club.

Take Yellow Card to Automobile Club (across the road from Hiper 2000) and apply for Registration Plates. No doubt they will make this as difficult as possible for you but keep smiling and refuse to leave the office until you have satisfaction. Pay 38 euros and rush out.

Next Day: Go to AA and collect reg. plates.

NOW, you can put plates on car –BUT – think first !

With Andorran Plates, by association you become an outcast in Europe. By association also you are labelled a potential smuggler, a fiscal delinquent, a tax sociopath. You will be hounded, strip searched and harassed by every little jobsworth French Gendarme, Catalonian jackbooted Mossos, and the notorious English Department of Stealth and Total Obscurity.

Police forces throughout the EU have you in their sights because they don't really believe – deep in their psyche that Andorra really exists. You will have to take care not to have confidential monetary papers stashed about your person and your whole life will be open for intimate scrutiny by all and sundry. Lastly and possibly worst of all, you will have to cough up the full amount for parking in la Vella and will be vulnerable to the Radar Speed Cameras in THE TUNNEL.

This is an amazing country where on every form every “t” must be crossed and every “i” dotted but out in the real world every sort of traffic violation is being perpetrated with complete impunity by what are, by demonstration, the worst drivers in Europe. Now you are one of them. Have a nice day.

Perhaps I won't bother after all – I only did it because the wife thinks Andorran plates are pretty !

Dear God, I pray for patience and I want it NOW.

Father Sebastian

By Disgruntled of Tunbridge Wells

