

David Barton

motorists' lawyer



'Leaving Kent for a foreign road trip? Stay safe and legal'

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One great thing about living in Kent is that sunshine breaks on the continent are just a short ferry or tunnel trip and drive away.

But if only it was as simple as just remembering to drive on the other side of the road. 'There are a host of things for Kent drivers to bear in mind, like equipment you must carry in your car, speed limits, alcohol limits and even the rules on carrying children', says Kent motoring lawyer David Barton.

'The law can vary depending on which European country you're going to. For example, France recently made it compulsory to carry a breathalyser. And in some countries it's illegal for your satnav to alert you to speed cameras.'

A survey¹ in June showed that almost three quarters of Brits are so confused by driving laws that they dread getting behind the wheel overseas. Yet despite this, one in three fail to swot up on foreign driving rules before they cross the Channel.

'But if you don't stick to the law, you may come home to Kent with more than a suntan,' warns David, an expert in motoring law who has 30 years' experience of representing Kent motorists. 'Apparently two thirds of road trips from Britain to Europe encounter some form of motoring problem, including a speeding fine or even a full-on crash.'

¹ Survey by price comparison website confused.com: <http://www.confused.com/press/press-releases/safety-over-patriotism-nervy-brits-call-for-uk-driving-laws-to-follow-europe>

That's why David is on a mission to help Kent drivers stay safe and legal abroad this summer. He's come up with a pre-roadtrip checklist of things every motorist needs to know – and a few you might be surprised to learn:

Wherever you're going in Europe:

- You'll need a full driving licence, ie not a provisional licence with L-plates.
- Carry your driving licence, car registration documents and insurance documents. Fully comprehensive cover is vital in case you need to transport a damaged car back home, but don't assume your UK insurance policy automatically provides it. You need original copies of these documents – keep spares somewhere safe.
- Stick a GB sticker onto the back of your car.
- Place beam converters on your headlights, as left-hand drive car lights will dazzle cars when driven on the right.
- Buy a first aid kit, red warning triangle and, for each passenger, a fluorescent vest. These are legal requirements in some mainland Europe countries, but recommended everywhere. The vest must be kept in the vehicle so you can get out of your car already wearing it.
- Swot up on the different speed limits for motorways, open road and towns in the country you're going to.
- Most countries seem to do on-the-spot spot fines so take spare cash just in case.
- Bear in mind local drink-drive laws. Drinking any alcohol if you're driving is never a good idea, but the legal alcohol limit for driving in most European countries is lower than the UK.
- Check the minimum driving age. In many countries, you need to be 18 or over.
- Don't think you can return to the UK and escape without paying a fine. The DVLA now gives European police forces access to British driver details.

Driving in France?

On 1 July, French law made it compulsory to carry an unused breathalyser kit in your car (they cost a few pounds each from ferry and tunnel terminals).

In France, there are now no road signs to let you know you're approaching speed cameras, and it's illegal to have those alerts on your satnav too.

Children must be 10 or over to ride in the front passenger seat.

Driving in Spain?

You must use your indicators before and after overtaking on Spanish motorways.

If you wear specs to drive, make sure you have a spare set on you.

You mustn't sound your horn in towns, except in an emergency. Flash your lights instead.

Driving in Italy?

Many historic centres and major towns have Zona Traffico Limitato (ZTLs) where traffic is either banned or you need a residents permit to drive into.

Don't sound your horn in built-up areas unless it's an emergency.

If you get a traffic ticket while on holiday, it could take up to a year for it to reach you in the UK.

Driving in Germany?

If you need to wash your car, don't do it on a public road.

You must deactivate your satnav speed camera alert function. If you can't, don't carry your satnav in the car.

Driving in Belgium?

On motorways, it's illegal to drive under 43m/h (70km/h).

It's compulsory for Belgian drivers to carry a fire extinguisher, and recommended for everyone else. You must be able to access it from the driver's seat.

Driving in the Netherlands?

Always give trams the right of way, except when crossing a priority road.

Look out for more cyclists and skaters than in the UK.

You mustn't use your car horn at night.

For more information on driving in Europe this summer, see <http://www.motorists-lawyer-kent.co.uk/blog/>

ABOUT DAVID BARTON

David Barton is a motoring lawyer who specialises in driving offences in Kent.

Based in Maidstone, he has 30 years' experience of representing Kent motorists. He's an authority on how to stay safe – and legal – behind the wheel, and also has a wealth of knowledge on hot topics affecting anyone who drives. David's website <http://www.motorists-lawyer-kent.co.uk/> has a lot of free downloadable helpsheets on common motoring law problems.