

THE TOURIST TRAP



Our expert RAC patrolman Bob Yarlett has been rescuing holidaymakers for years, and he showed us all the kit motorists need to drive on roads abroad (below) – including two pairs of glasses.

Our exclusive safety spotchecks reveal how 80 per cent of holidaymaking Brit drivers are breaking European laws...

Pictures: Tom Wood

Julie Sinclair

WOULD you break the law? Well, if you're driving to the Continent this summer, there's a good chance you will without even knowing it. As a result, you could be landed with a £340 on-the-spot fine the moment you steer on to foreign soil.

That's because various European countries require drivers to carry certain equipment in their cars. But when we conducted spotchecks at the Port of Dover with the RAC, a staggering 80 per cent of the motorists we stopped didn't have all the necessary kit.

The legal requirements vary between countries. For instance, in Spain

and Switzerland, drivers who wear glasses must pack a spare pair. In Austria, you have to carry a first-aid kit in your motor. Yet it's France that has arguably the strictest rules and, as Calais is the first stop for most people heading to the Continent, every driver needs to be aware of what they are – pleading ignorance won't work with French police.

RAC patrolman Bob Yarlett – who joined us at Dover to give some expert tips – warned: "If you are stopped and found not to have the mandatory items on board, expect to be fined up to 500 Euros (£340) on the spot. The police will even escort you to a cash point if you don't have the money on you."

All UK motorists should check they pack eight essential items – none of which is compulsory on British roads – before leaving for France. Read on to find out what they are... and why eight out of 10 drivers we spoke to didn't have them all.

Reflective vest

A WHOPPING 60 per cent of the motorists questioned didn't carry a reflective vest. Among them were Mike and Lesley Milne of Aberdeen, who said: "Our travel agent didn't tell us about this!"

But it's against the law to step out of a car and on to the highway in the countryside without wearing one in France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Austria and Italy. By January, it will be law in Belgium, too.

Bob advised: "The jacket should be stored in the cabin, not the boot, or you would have to leave your vehicle to fetch it in an emergency."



Towing the line? We quizzed owners of vehicles of all shapes and sizes about driving abroad



Port of Dover staff provide detailed leaflets

the daytime, so I won't need them." Bob pointed out that the lights would have to be switched on if it rained or if Patrick drove through a tunnel.

Warning triangle

CARRYING a warning triangle is mandatory in France and many other European countries. But as many new cars come with one as part of their standard emergency kit, 90 per cent of the vehicles we checked would be properly equipped.

But not all did – including Steve Ford's SEAT Ibiza. And Steve, from Fleet in Hampshire, didn't have any of the seven other essential items for driving in France, either. "I'm only off to the supermarket to pick up some booze, so I didn't think I needed to bother," he revealed.

However, Bob explained: "Even the day trippers have to drive on a section of the motorway to get to the supermarkets." In Spain, you have to carry two triangles – one to place in front of the vehicle and another for positioning at the rear. But not one of the holidaymakers we quizzed who were heading for the country had packed a pair!

GB sticker

AMAZINGLY, nearly a quarter of the drivers we spoke to hadn't fitted a GB sticker – something the police would easily spot. They are a legal requirement in all European countries, as they let local drivers know there is a greater risk of unexpected manoeuvres taking place. Bob told us: "The only exception is vehicles where the registration plate already has GB and the EU symbol – a circle of 12 stars on a blue background – marked on it."



Wild world: Some of the unknown rules of foreign roads...



Austria A first-aid kit is mandatory, as is displaying a motorway tax sticker



Spain and Switzerland If you wear glasses while driving, you must have a spare pair



Croatia It's against the law to carry bikes on the back of your car – so racks are out



Scandinavia Drivers must use dipped headlights at all times – day or night

Motor insurance

YOU need to be able to produce proof of insurance when driving abroad, but one in 10 of the people we quizzed hadn't brought their certificate. A quarter of those we spoke to didn't even realise they should have informed their insurer about their trip. Not doing so can cause some fully comprehensive policies to revert to third-party cover while the car is on foreign soil.

Logbook and driving licence

MORE than one-third of the holidaymakers we questioned didn't realise they had to carry their V5 registration document, which proves ownership of their vehicle. Claire Parkin, travelling with Robert Sankey of Wigan, Greater Manchester, told us: "I thought you weren't supposed to keep the logbook in your vehicle in case it's stolen!"

Bob said: "If the car is not yours, you must carry a letter of authority from the owner, stating you have their permission to drive it abroad." If the car is hired, the leasing firm must supply this.

Only one of our motorists had forgotten his driving licence, and the rest knew the paper version had to be accompanied by a photo ID.

Other things you should know

IN addition to carrying the eight mandatory items, motorists need to be aware of the following to ensure they are not caught out when abroad...

Drink-drive limits: Nearly two-thirds of the drivers we questioned had no idea what these were abroad. They are generally stricter than in the UK – typically 0.05mg of alcohol per millilitre of blood compared with 0.08mg here. Bob warned: "Penalties include fines, confiscation of your driving licence and even a prison sentence."

The simplest way to stay safe and within the law is not to consume any alcohol if you plan to drive. Yet, shockingly, during our study we spotted one motorist swigging booze from a bottle while waiting for the ferry to leave!

Speeds: Again, two-thirds of our drivers had no idea what the limits were in France. On motorways, the restriction for cars is 130kmh (80mph), but it drops to 110kmh (68mph) in the wet.

Our RAC spokesman said: "At the port, there are plenty of heavily laden cars and badly loaded bike racks. If they travel too fast, these vehicles will certainly attract the attention of the police – and so are more likely to be pulled over."

Breakdown cover: This isn't essential, but leaving home without breakdown cover could turn into a costly mistake. "If your vehicle develops a



Plain sailing? Hundreds of drivers line up to take ferries to Continent every day – but we found their cars often aren't ready for foreign roads



Writer Julie Sinclair quizzes motorist at port



Bob criticised over laden cars and bike racks

How foreign cops enforce zero-tolerance

POLICE officers on the Continent are often on the look-out for foreign drivers who are flouting their country's rules.

Martin Buckland's experience is an example of how tough they can be. French cops fined him because he didn't have a headlamp adaptor – even though it had fallen off during his trip!

Martin, of Somerton, Somerset, said: "I had been pulled over for a spot check, but the police gave my car a thorough going-over. I had only recently bought the headlamp adaptors and led the officer round to the front of my car to show him.

"But of course, I hadn't realised that for some reason, one had come unstuck on the road. Despite protesting my innocence – and although the gluey outline of the sticker was still visible on the glass – he fined me 135 Euros. That's nearly £100!"

Adaptors prevent you dazzling foreign motorists

fault, you have to find a local garage, then explain the problem in the native language," Bob warned. The average cost of a repair on the Continent is £400, but getting the motor back to the UK can set you back as much as £2,000! "It's surprising how expensive it can be if your car breaks down overseas when you're not covered," Bob added.

Fire extinguishers and first-aid kits: While this equipment isn't compulsory, Europe's 'Good Samaritan' Clause states that anyone arriving on the scene of an accident must help – so both are

strongly recommended. Yet two-thirds of our motorists had no fire extinguisher, and those who did mostly kept them stashed well out of reach at the bottom of a tightly packed boot.

Speed camera detectors: Gatsos are as popular overseas as they are here. But detectors have been banned in most Continental countries. Get caught using one and you could be fined more than £1,000, according to Travelspot, which sells the essential gear for driving abroad. Boss Charles Sterling told us: "One motorist with a radar detector

fitted to his car was stopped, and told police he wasn't aware they were banned. But the £300 kit was confiscated, and he was fined another £200."

And finally... THERE is no excuse for British motorists driving unprepared on the Continent. We saw Dover staff handing out leaflets explaining the rules to every car boarding the ferry, and all the essential items are available at the port. Travelspot's Charles Sterling said: "We are always surprised by how few UK drivers bother." So are we! ●

Our findings: Continental essentials Brits did and didn't carry in their car...

YES 40%	YES 57%	YES 63%	YES 63%	YES 77%	YES 90%	YES 90%	YES 97%	YES 20%
Reflective vest	Headlamp adaptors	Set of spare bulbs	V5 logbook	GB sticker or plate	Warning triangle	Insurance documents	Driving licence	Fully kitted out
NO 60%	NO 43%	NO 37%	NO 37%	NO 23%	NO 10%	NO 10%	NO 3%	NO 80%