

How to Register a British Car in France

Warning this can take several months, and if problems arise, and you want to be able to still drive your car during this process it is sensible to ensure your vehicle will still comply with the UK regime for up to one year (so arrange UK insurance, road tax and MOT cover for a further 12 months before bringing the car to France). Once you get your French Carte Gris you can always apply for refunds from the DVLA and your insurer.

Provided your British registered car is technically a standard UK vehicle from one of the major manufacturers (i.e. not a kit car or heavily modified) then the process of re-registering a British car in France basically entails working through a number of procedural steps in turn. If it's a non-standard vehicle then you enter the realms of the French equivalent of SVA (Special Vehicle Approvals) which this note is not going to try and explain - perhaps the best advice being "DON'T do it" as navigating through the DEKRA minefield can be very frustrating.

STEP 1 - obtain a "Certificate de Conformity" from your vehicle manufacturer or importer

You need to contact (normally by phone) your car manufacturer (importer) - provide you vehicle registration number and probably the VIN/chassis number and ask them to send you a Certificate de Conformity. For many manufacturers these are only available from their FRENCH based operation so they may refer you to contacts in Paris. However some manufacturers do not have any permanent French presence, in which case you will need to contact the manufacturer in the country of origin (e.g. Japan Taiwan...) and get a suitable certificate from them. UK franchise dealers should know who to contact.

Thankfully for most major makes of car, their French head office will already have someone on their staff who can speak a bit of English to understand what you want to do. But you may prefer to round up a French neighbour to help with the call, as it is likely to quickly stray into quite technical language, especially when they try and explain the process, and any items which may need modifying to make your UK vehicle suitable for registration in France.

Basically (if you have not already got one - VW incorporate them in some of their vehicle handbooks) you need to get them to send you a Manufacturers "certificate of conformity" (in French) which relates specifically to your vehicle.

Typically you will be charged between 100 and 200 euro for the document, which is normally only done by the Service Homologation team in France. However this "team" can be just one person who may have a backlog of many months. Initially you tell them your address and vehicle details over the phone. They send you a letter explaining the documents they need you to send to them. You post them the necessary documents normally just a copy of the UK V5c document together with a cheque for the fee. NB It's a good idea to send all this stuff via Recorded delivery.

Some weeks later a letter will arrive acknowledging your application, enclosing various forms to complete and listing all the "mandatory modifications" required to make your UK car fit for registration in France - normally this entails just changing the headlights. However to issue a certificate Most manufacturers insist that all the modifications and the fitted parts are ONLY be supplied and fitted by an Official Dealership. Hence hold off spending any time and money trying to source cheap ones off Ebay or from breakers yards - unless/until they confirm they will be able to issue a certificate if the items are sourced or fitted elsewhere.

STEP 2 - Modify the vehicle as required

Take the list, and forms to an official dealer and get them to complete and stamp the forms and supply and fit the relevant parts. Once installed, the dealer will provide an official receipt and invoice stipulating the work has been done and the necessary parts fitted, and the mechanic will also complete and sign an Attestation de Transformation form, and probably some sort of Certificate en provenance de l'etranger. This certifies to the manufacturer of the vehicle that the necessary work has been carried out AND that the mechanic has checked that the vehicle chassis and engine numbers are genuine and tie up with the UK registration papers. - This stops people registering stolen UK cars overseas, and confirms that it now meets French Homologation standards.

STEP 3 - Send the paperwork to the Homologation Service

First make photocopies of the dealership invoice and all the other requested documents. Then send off all the requested documents to the Service Homologation people. Typically this will include a copy of the V5c and the

"original dealership invoice, and the original completed "Certificate de provenance de l'etranger" and "attestation de transformation" forms confirming all the work has been done (they will return the original invoice in due course, but normally won't accept a photocopy - so if you don't want to risk even more delay send the original BUT use recorded delivery post! - (Accuse de Reception)

With luck some weeks later, the Service Homologation will send you back any original documents together with a fully stamped Certificate de Conformity. Hooray!

STEP 4 - If necessary submit your vehicle to a Control Technique - the French MOT

To import a vehicle from the UK you will need to have a test done even if the vehicle is brand new as they will need to check the headlights have been changed or aligned suitably for use in France. In France MOT tests are required for cars once they are 4 year old and biennially thereafter. (*There is no testing scheme in France for 2/3 wheelers.*) However for vans and commercial vehicles tests start at three years with annual tests just like the UK.

Any suitable French testing station (Centre de Controle) can carry out a controle technique examination - which is fairly thorough and typically takes 45 minutes. Unlike the UK, their system has 3 possible outcomes - pass, almost passed where you are allowed up to 1 month to continue using the vehicle and during that time fix the identified faults and pay for a reinspection, and fail when the vehicle is deemed unsafe and may not be driven at all so you would need to have it towed away for repair or more likely its time to ring a breakers yard to scrap the car!

Once the vehicle passes they will stick a white sticker to the screen showing when the test expires. Do not remove it - if your windscreen is broken - make sure it is transferred to the new screen.

STEP 5 - Obtain a tax declaration for the Vehicle. (Certificat d'Acquisition)

Before you can get a vehicle registered you will need to obtain a tax declaration for the Vehicle which confirms that where appropriate import tax has been paid. If you are importing a vehicle which has already been imported elsewhere within the EU like the UK then the relevant tax would have already been paid at whatever country it was first registered.

Warning some vehicle tax may still be payable if you want to register a vehicle which has not been registered for at least 12 months elsewhere within the EU, and for vehicles imported from outside the EU - some tax may be due on 20 year old vehicles! NB the Channel Isles and Isle of Man which are not within the EU.

Normally the tax office staff will tell you to take a seat or give you a ticket number - eventually your number or name will be called or displayed - go to the counter and they will prepare the form on the spot.

You will need to provide documentation to prove when and where you bought the vehicle, and how much you paid and evidence that taxes (basically VAT) were paid at that time. This means finding the original receipt or invoice issued to you when you purchased the car in the UK and you will also need the original V5c form to show that you still own the vehicle, your passport for identity, and at least two eligible documents as proof that you have some legitimate link to the address you intend to register the vehicle at, in France. Obviously any form of tax bill addressed to you at the French address goes down well, as will bills from utilities like EDF or France Telecom for a landline only. Most other things won't be accepted!

As long as the vehicle is over 12 months old, then the certificate should not cost you anything, and will be issued on the spot. Additional tax may be demanded in respect of new or almost new vehicles (especially any imports from lower VAT rated countries within the EU).

Once you have paid any tax demanded and got your (Certificat d'Acquisition) its time to head over to the prefecture offices and find the vehicle registration staff - it's usually the one with the biggest queues.

Fortunately in most prefectures the tax office is adjacent to the Prefecture offices.

STEP 6 - Apply for a Carte Gris

At the Prefecture Office you will need basically the same growing bundle of forms.

In most French Departments, vehicle licensing issues are one of the principal tasks for Prefecture staff. So most offices are very busy, and have some sort of ticket based queue system. Brits being very patient will foolishly join the huge queue at the reception desk, and after 40 minutes queuing to speak to the receptionist will be simply directed you to a well hidden ticket dispenser machine applying to staff handling Carte Gris matters. So do yourself a favour - if it's really busy, spend a few minutes examining all notices to find where the ticket dispenser is hidden, and only join the receptionist queue if you draw a blank.

Anyway once you have your ticket - you need to do two things. Firstly find a seat where you can keep an eye on the queue display (it's normally a bit like IKEA returns - with a now serving customer XX display somewhere on the wall). Secondly find and fill out as best you can a "Demande de certificate d'immatriculation d'un vehicule" form. Normally there is a large heap of these on a rack somewhere in the reception area.

If you are not sure on how to fill things in, then simply leave things blank and once your number is called normally the counter staff will spot you are an Etranger and most are happy to help you complete stuff correctly (Why? - Because they want your money!).

OK your number is called - hand the counter staff the form you have just been busy filling in, and with luck they will ask you to present loads of documents. Fortunately these are basically the same documents which you needed at the tax office (*and of course they want the tax certificate you obtained in step 5*).

But to recap you will need to provide all the documentation necessary to prove when and where you bought the vehicle and confirm that all taxes (basically VAT) was paid at the time. This means finding whatever receipt or invoice was issued to you when you purchased the car in the UK and you will also need the original V5c form to show that you still own the vehicle, your passport for identity, and at least two eligible documents as proof of the address you intend to register the vehicle at in France. Obviously any form of tax bill addressed to you at the French address goes down well, as will bills from utilities like EDF or France Telecom for a landline only. Most other things won't be accepted!

Eventually they will tell you if your application is OK or explain if there is a problem. If it is OK, they will immediately print off a "Certificate Provisoire d'Immatriculation" showing your new French registration number and the registration fee payable. Don't rush for the door just yet - as the certificate will then be passed to their accounts people. Just take a seat and settle down for another wait until the accounts person calls your name. Once again you may need to present your passport to prove who you are and pay the registration fee - cash, cheques in euro or chip pin cards are accepted. Only then will you finally be handed the Certificate Provisoire d'Immatriculation which will show your new registration number (the provisional certificate is only valid for 1 month) and you will also be asked to sign a certificate confirming its receipt.

Normally the official Carte Gris will arrive by Recorded delivery mail to your French address within a week.

STEP 7 - Fit new number plates, Arrange French Insurance and cancel your English insurance

Once the provisional registration document is issued you have a maximum of 30 days to obtain and fit number plates and arrange insurance in France for your vehicle with a French Insurer.

Generally insurance in France is a bit more expensive than equivalent cover in the UK because in France your annual road tax is collected with your insurance premium. Your insurer will send you a proforma letter showing start/end of cover which includes a green detachable "vignette" which by law must be displayed on the windscreen.

Note some insurance forms require you to sign both the Vignette and again at the bottom of the insurance certificate in the Box marked "Signature de Souscripteur" - technically the policy is not valid if you have not signed this version of the forms! Recently, with many firms operating online, most have abandoned this practice.

Once the French policy is in place cancel you UK cover and ask for a letter confirming your UK NCB entitlement (to send to your French insurer) and ask for a refund on any remaining UK cover period.

Step 8 - notify DVLA you have exported your vehicle - reclaim unused road tax

Send off the maroon part of your V5c Registration Certificate to the DVLA to say that you have now exported your car, giving them your French address. If you do not do this, you may receive a fine for not paying your road tax in Britain. Go online to DVLA and print off a form to reclaim any residual UK vehicle excise tax - complete

the form attach the tax disc together with a copy of the new French registration certificate - which shows the date when the car was added to the French system and also the date when any refund is due.

Problems

*NB If you are unable to obtain a Certificate of Conformity from the manufacturer, you may be able to obtain an **attestation de conformité** (certificate stating that your car conforms to French road standards) from the DEKRA (the equivalent of the UK special vehicle registration centre). DEKRA will issue you with a form which you will be required to fill in with all your car details and send back, along with your registration document and a cheque, (67€) They will arrange an appointment at one of their centres where vehicle will then be subject to individual inspection.