

## British Cars in France

Many car owners moving to France are unsure of the options open to them and how best to exercise them. Owl Trading is there to help. Formed in 1999, we offer a unique service to British émigrés wishing to sell their sale RHD cars in France.

My wife and I developed the business as a 'hobby' having spent most of our working lives in the motor industry, operating our own Ford dealerships in Britain. We use our network of contacts and our experience to offer you the best possible price for your car in France. The ever increasing numbers of British migrants and the unique aspect of our service have driven the 'hobby' business full time!

Enough of us though. Before deciding to sell you need to consider all the options and their impact upon you now and in the future. We hope that you find the following informative and, above all, helpful.

### What are the options?

Assuming you wish to remain within the law, a British National with a UK registered RHD car has just two options.

1. Register your present car in France.
2. Sell it and buy a French registered car.

Neither option is as simple as might first appear. Both merit careful consideration to ensure that the decision made is right for you.

### Should I keep my British car?

Before looking at the process, an owner needs to consider several points and ask him/herself a few basic questions.

1. A RHD French registered car has little value in France, much the same as LHD in the UK.
2. Will you be happy to 'run the car into the ground'? If you decide to re-register your British car in France this is the logical future action. This is probably fine for an older car but is it sensible/economically efficient for a car with a good re-sale value today?
3. If you envisage selling the car for a reasonable sum at some point in the future you will need to reverse the process, re-register it in the UK and sell it there. In so doing, you will have to 'write-off' the costs incurred in French registration and wait for the DVLA to provide new documentation before you can sell it. Typically this can take around 8 weeks.
4. Will your French insurer charge you a premium for a car with the steering wheel 'on the wrong side'? Remember, once permanently resident in France a British insurer will no longer offer cover. Many 'expats' will tell you that there are ways around this but they are not legal. Cover provided on the basis of 'mis-information' may be fine until you are involved in a serious road accident or need to claim for a stolen or written-off vehicle.
5. How comfortable will you be driving a car with a wheel 'on the wrong side' in the longer term? Is it sensible, safe?

If, after having considered all of these points you decide that French registration of your car is the best option for you this briefly is the process and its requirements

### Car Registration en France

When leaving Britain you will need to notify the authorities (DVLA) that you are permanently exporting your car. You will need to apply for an Export Certificate and will be required to surrender your V5 registration document for this.

At this point you will technically be un-insured by your British insurer and should apply for cover from a French insurer.

Application for registration in France will require completion of an application document, presentation and surrender of the Export Certificate, a Certificate of Conformity provided by the manufacturer's French office (i.e. BMW France) and, if the car is over four years of age, a Controle Technique Test Certificate (equivalent to UK MOT test). Obviously, prior submission of the Controle Technique, you will need to have converted the headlamps from RHD to LHD.

The total cost of this process varies from car to car and make to make. The manufacturer's charge for the issue of the Certificate of Conformity and their charge for fitting replacement headlamps will also vary. In addition there is an application fee. Suffice it to say, the total cost of the whole process averages around £600 for a volume marque.

### Buying a French Car.

New cars in France are about the same price as in the UK. Used cars tend to be a little dearer, particularly for late year cars as these are usually in short supply. The French keep their cars for longer than the British, the average first ownership cycle for a car bought from new being seven years. Consequently very many late year used cars tend to be ex-fleet or rental cars.

As in Britain, discounts can be negotiated with the dealer ('discount' is a universally accepted word) and requests for it are expected by the dealer. Generally speaking, a French dealer will not want your RHD car in part-exchange or will offer an extremely low price for it. You may be tempted to deal with a broker advertising to supply LHD cars (either in the UK or elsewhere in the EU) and take RHD cars in part-exchange. Tread carefully!

- Check that the car supplied will be a French specification, French registered vehicle.
- If it is, the broker will have purchased it via a French dealer putting his 'mark-up' on top of the dealer's price. Check what arrangements will be made to supply the permanent registration document (Certificate d'Immatriculation) and number plates. Cars purchased in France are initially supplied with temporary documents and plates).
- If it is not, you will have to register the vehicle in France. The process (with the exception of headlamp conversion) will be similar to registering a British car in France. Also the car

may not be to full French specification and adversely affect future resale value.

The buying process is broadly similar to that in the UK and in our experience most French dealers have someone on the payroll who can speak English, so language should not be a barrier.

What better way to begin your French Experience than buying your car locally. After all, if ever you have a problem with the car, you'll have a friend on the doorstep!

### **OK, I've decided to buy a car in France and sell mine, what's next?**

Realistically, the only market for the car is in the UK. You need to decide whether you sell your car before you leave or when you get there. Let's look at the options.

**Sell before you leave.** Most of us need to drive down to our new home taking some personal effects and maybe pets with us. If you sell your UK car before leaving you will need to organise a replacement in France and bring that back to the UK. This will involve time and expense and can you be sure that the car you select now will be the car that you really need? A few weeks in France may change your choice. With sufficient time you will probably get a better price but with everything else going on, have you got that time and do you need the hassle?

**Sell after you leave.** To get the best price this has, up until now, meant returning the car to the UK for sale through one of the following routes:

1. **Sell to a dealer for cash.** To get the best price this will take time, effort and negotiating skill.
2. **Sell at auction.** Auctions charge entry fees, commission on sale and delay payout, often for several weeks. What happens if the car does not sell?
3. **Sell the car privately.** Unless you are prepared to stay in the UK for several weeks or have an accommodating friend or relative, this is an unrealistic option. Expense is required and like the auction route, what happens if it does not sell?

The other option is to sell the car in France. Traditionally this has meant selling to a very limited market and acceptance of very low prices. Our unique service offers you the benefit of UK cash prices, with no personal expenditure or risk.

### **How does it work?**

You provide us with a full description of your car and on the basis of this we pre-agree a purchase price with you. We then arrange collection of your car from you and pay-out in full on collection. No cost, no time, no risk to you. Simple.

### **Frequently asked questions?**

*Q. Will I get as much as if I sold the car privately in the UK?*  
A. No. Our offer will be based upon the car's current cash value in the UK, less transportation costs. But you need to have already taken the decision that the private sale option is not for you.

*Q. What do you do with the cars that you buy?*

A. We take all of the cars back to the UK. We retail some but wholesale most to franchised dealer contacts.

*Q. Couldn't I just as easily sell my car to a UK dealer from here in France?*

A. Dealers will be guarded about offering a firm price until they have seen the car. They might offer a guide price and then try to reduce it, for legitimate reasons or otherwise, on your arrival. You will obviously have incurred costs at this stage, probably have travel arrangements made and therefore be at a disadvantage. With our service this can't happen.

*Q. Doesn't this happen to you too?*

A. No. Our dealer contacts are people with whom we have developed long-term relationships. They buy many cars from us and wish to continue doing so.

*Q. How do you pay?*

A. Normally by Euro cheque drawn on a French bank, Credit Agricole. Payment in Sterling can be arranged but this can delay collection.

*Q. How quickly do you collect after acceptance of an offer?*

A. Normally within seven days.

I hope that the foregoing has helped you. Moving to France is stressful enough as it is without having to cope with car buying and selling at the same time. Hopefully we have helped relieve just a little of that stress.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

*Michael Boden.*



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