

You and Your Car

YOUR PRIVATE CAR

Many U.S. built 1975, plus newer cars, are equipped with Catalytic Converters and are designed to run on lead free motor fuel. Lead free fuel is not available in England or on the European Continent. In addition, the Air Force has placed restrictions on where a catalytic converter equipped vehicle may be operated on base due to a fire hazard associated with the high temperature at which converters operate. To further complicate operating a catalytic converter equipped car outside the U.S., the fuel filler pipe will not accept a standard pump filler hose, found on the gas pumps in England. Burning of leaded fuel will contaminate the converter and necessitate replacement at approximately \$125-\$200 prior to returning the vehicle to the U.S.

Prior to shipping a U.S.-made vehicle equipped with a catalytic converter to England, it is strongly recommended that you check with your local dealer to obtain a converter replacement pipe and fuel fill adapter. Ship the pipe ahead of your car so it will be available when your car arrives for pickup in England. As soon as possible after you pickup your car at the port, the converter should be replaced with the replacement pipe. The fuel filler pipe adapter should be fitted by the dealer prior to shipping your car to enable you to service the tank when the car is picked up at the port in England.

As a general rule English car dealers and garages do not carry parts for U.S.-made cars, and they cannot obtain them. The following checklist will assist you in preparing your car for trouble free driving in England and/or enable you to maintain it after you have been in England awhile.

- a. New or very good tires, including the spare. (Tires are not always available locally.)
- b. Exhaust system, pipes, muffler, etc in good condition. (Rust can eat up the exhaust system very quickly in England.)
- c. Spare bulbs and fuses (except headlights)
- d. Fan belts and cooling hoses. (They are not always available.)
- e. Brakes in excellent condition. (Again the parts may not be available.)
- f. If your car is older than 1970 model or is a bit unusual, like a Thunderbird or some other vehicle with a big engine, bring ignition points and plugs. It is a pretty good idea to also ship a carburetor overhaul kit.

Due to the problems of operating large U.S.-made cars in England, many personnel purchase English-built cars after they arrive in England. They are, as a rule, cheaper to run, parts and service are available, and they can usually be sold to anyone, when you desire, including English civilians. There are stringent restrictions to whom you may sell an imported U.S.-made car. It is also strongly recommended that you not ship large or old American made autos to England.

DRIVING LICENSE

Military members are authorized a special U.S. Forces Driving Permit which is the only license recognized for military members. This permit is issued free of charge by the Security Police Pass and Registration Section after the satisfactory completion of applicable training and testing.

Possession of a current and valid U.S. drivers license is a further requirement for a U.S. Forces Driving Permit which is issued for a four year period. You are advised to obtain a copy of the British Highway Code which explains road regulations and procedures.

Dependents of age must possess a valid U.S. driving license in addition to the U.S. Forces Driving Permit in order to drive a car for the first year of their stay in Britain. They are then required to take a British driving test and obtain a full British driving license. Application forms are available from any British post office.

VEHICLE REGISTRATION

All vehicles which are imported into or purchased in the U.K. must be registered within the Security Police Pass and Registration Section. Proof of ownership and satisfactory completion of a safety inspection are required at time of registration.

Once you have received notification that your car has arrived at a U.K. port, contact your base vehicle registration office immediately.

VEHICLE INSURANCE

As a minimum, it is mandatory to carry unlimited third party liability insurance, purchased either in the United States or the United Kingdom when operating your car in Britain. Automobile insurance is sold by various companies located both on base and in the surrounding community. Many offer discounts for accident-free driving when confirmed by a letter from your former insurance company.

GOVERNMENT TAX-FREE GASOLINE

During your tour of duty in the United Kingdom, you will be entitled to a ration of tax-free Quartermaster gasoline. This gasoline, which costs 72-78 cents a gallon, is available for duty purposes only, including TDY and 30 trips a month between the base and your place of residence. Your entitlement will depend on the motor capacity of your car and the distance between the base and your home.

BRITISH GASOLINE

Gasoline (called petrol in Britain) is expensive due to high duties. There are a large variety of octane ratings from which to choose, running from under 90 octane to 100, and the octane ratings are designated by a star system - one star for the lowest octane rating to five stars for 100 octane. When buying gasoline, therefore, go by the star rating, not whether the manufacturer calls the product "Super" or "Extra". The octane requirements for smooth running of an automobile's motor varies according to the compression ratio of the motor.

AUTOMOBILE CLUBS

There are two major automobile clubs in Britain: The Automobile Association (AA) and the Royal Automobile Club (RAC). They are similar and are affiliated with clubs in other countries, including the American Automobile Association. Some of the services offered include aid in planning a trip, road maps, listings of recommended garages, breakdown service, recommended hotels and advice on laws and insurance.

DRIVING IN ENGLAND

In spite of extensive highway development programs over the past decade, the roads in England have not kept pace with the extraordinary increases in the density of vehicular traffic. Generally, the roads are narrow and winding. One lane in each direction and three curves to a mile of pavement is the situation for 80 percent of the driving environment. Road surfaces tend to become slippery when wet and on the older roads many of the numerous curves are blind

and poorly banked, often with the camber of the pavement sloping to the outside of the turn

The driver with a will to survive to drive another day quickly learns to adjust to the new conditions, accepting the limitations on mobility imposed by the new situation.

For the careful, alert and responsible driver there are no unsurmountable problems. Even driving a left-hand drive vehicle on the left side of the highway can be accomplished without difficulty by reference to the side of the road, although it must be said that in this situation extreme caution is required when attempting to pass another vehicle.

On the other hand, the driver who climbs behind the wheel feeling that Stateside skills alone will suffice usually suffers a harrowing and short-lived experience.

ROAD USERS

The act of driving is always a community event, but as a visitor to the United Kingdom you carry extra responsibilities for careful, courteous and consistent control of your vehicle, and for compliance with host country traffic laws and regulations; even if you feel you cannot agree with them all the time.

Be prepared for the worst, such as pedal cyclists at night without lights, stray animals just around the curve, groups of people in town or village walking on the pavement or just stopped for a chat, mothers pushing baby carriages on the highway. Pedestrians at crosswalks must be afforded precedence and no vehicle driver may impede their progress. In any event, humans are rather soft-skinned and have no protection against impact with your vehicle.

Pedal cyclists have been mentioned already, and perhaps you will mention them again more than once under your breath, not necessarily with endearment. The law permits them to ride two abreast, so a pair of them usually will take up as much pavement width as a car, but just remember that they too have a right to be on the road.

A common practice which can cause a driver high blood pressure is that of inconsiderate parking. The law makes it an offense to park a vehicle in such a way as to obstruct the Queen's highway or endanger other road users. However, you will find cars parked in unexpected and hazardous locations so you must be alert for such obstacles to your progress.

On Motorways or Clearways, parking or stopping is illegal, except in an emergency when the vehicle should be rolled on to the hard shoulder or verge.

Talking of emergencies, a good thing to remember is that in these circumstances your normal planned escape route will now be to the left and not the right!

DRIVER ATTITUDES

A responsible, realistic approach to the driving task is essential in order to avoid involvement in incidents or accidents. Defensive driving may be a slightly overworked term, but if it means intelligent anticipation of hazards both seen and unseen, then, in the U.K., it most certainly is the driver's best tool for survival. In this respect, your new driving environment will be very much like home.

Visualize a day when you are happily driving from Bentwaters to your home offbase in that shiny new car. As you approach a curve on the two-lane rural road you are using, you spot an obstacle - a truck parked on your side of the highway! Without thinking ahead or slacking off the gas you swing around the obstacle, only to find a bus bearing down on you from the other direction. The pressure is mounting now, but you figure you can escape by squeezing through, providing the bus driver stays on his side of the road. Then you wonder if it is just a nightmare as the bus pulls out to your side to avoid two women who have just pushed baby carriages out of the village store - straight onto the pavement! Belatedly you go for hard braking - then you spot the tailgator! What do you now think of defensive driving?

Since you cannot control the actions of others on the road, you must live by anticipating problems. In our little example given above, the whole situation would not have risen if our fictitious driver had been driving slow enough to stop at the first sign of trouble.

Speeds too fast for prevailing conditions and improper passing on narrow roads are killers, and they are significant clues in identifying the impatient drivers who try in vain to make up lost time on British roads. They are the drivers who just race you to the next stop light, the next convoy of trucks, the next roundabout, the next system of road works. Adjust speeds to suit new conditions, especially at night. Overdriving your headlights could be a fatal error on narrow twisting roads where curves are not always posted.

Trip planning for journeys, both long and short, should be based on the time allowance of two minutes for every mile of payment to be traveled. You will seldom be able to average better than 35 miles covered in an hour driving in the United Kingdom, with the possible exception of Motorway journeys.

BREATHALIZER TESTS

Civil police can request a driver to take a breathalizer test if it is suspected a moving traffic offense is being committed, there has been involvement in a road traffic accident, or driving efficiency has been affected by alcohol. If the test proves "positive", a second breathalizer test is conducted at the police station. If the second breathalizer test is also "positive", a sample of blood or urine will be requested. You can, of course, refuse any of the three stages. However, this reaction will not help you since the penalty for refusing to comply with the requests is much the same. The limit for illegal intoxication approximates to POINT ZERO EIGHT percent, as against the limit of POINT ONE ZERO in most states back home. Perhaps a more meaningful definition is eight parts of alcohol in ten thousand parts of blood. A mere drop in a small ocean! Excess of this amount results in Court action.

You cannot afford to drink and drive at any time, in any place! In the United Kingdom or the U.S., at best it costs you money and your license, at worst it could easily cost you your life or that of an innocent person. Remember that the very first alcoholic drink reduces your driving efficiency, slows your reactions and diminishes your ability to make vital decisions in time. Alcohol is not an aid to survival on the highway and you are a menace to yourself and other road users long before you reach the DWI limit. This is proved over and over again in the investigation of our fatal accidents - five times out of six, alcohol is a significant factor in our road accident losses.

Under the current legal code, on conviction of DWI, fines up to \$850 can be imposed, together with automatic license suspension for one year. The Bill to be debated in Parliament shortly will also seek to make these penalties much more severe. Refusal to take any part of the breathalizer test results in arrest and incurs similar penalties.

Periodically the Wing Safety Office conducts breathalizer tests at key points on base as part of the USAFE Breathalizer Program. This is a protective program administered on Air Force bases exclusively for the benefit of examinees. No stigma is associated with failure to pass the test. If the test is positive (fail), they will be so advised and requested to park their car or make arrangements to have an individual who can pass the test transport them to their destination. If, after failing the test, a driver refuses to comply with the requested action, the "implied consent" provisions will apply in that any person licensed to drive on base will be deemed to have consented to a blood alcohol test if such is requested by authorized law enforcement personnel. Refusal to submit to such tests, if suspected of operating a privately owned vehicle while ability to do so is impaired by alcoholic beverages will result in revocation of the U.S. Forces Driving Permit.

SEASONAL PROBLEMS

Certain problems come with the season of the year. In winter, it could be fog, snow, or "black ice". The latter is moisture which has collected on the ground during the night and

turned to ice early in the morning. From all appearance this is simply a damp road, but try to stop or turn on it and the fact that it is really clear ice suddenly becomes very clear indeed!

In Spring and Summer you will find more and more people on the roads, in cars that were laid up for the winter, and pedestrians just out for the exercise. Cars stopped on the side of the road are symptomatic of the Sunday Drive - just stop anywhere, get out the picnic tables and take tea. This is fine in a shady grove far away from the traffic flow, but some strange folks are met on the highways; folks who see no problems when they park on the curve, or just around it.

THE VEHICLE

American cars tend to be a bit "over size" for local driving but are favored by some because of the roominess of the vehicle. Problems arising from their use are their size on very narrow roads, comparatively high fuel consumption at the lower speeds demanded by the traffic environment, their superhighway handling characteristics, and the need to make modifications to meet local traffic laws. If you plan to operate an American car which is built for power and speed, remember, these qualities are not necessarily the best answer to safe driving in the U.K.

British law does not require the use of lead-free gasoline in automobiles, and, in fact, is not available in the U.K. American cars fitted with catalytic converters should be modified for use of lead type gasoline. Remember to store all parts removed from the converter, such as the pellets, so they can be reinstalled upon return to the U.S.

Some of the smaller inexpensive sports cars seem to handle like their big brothers, but in order to be produced cheaply the steering and braking systems are less sophisticated and they just cannot handle the same very high speeds, sudden corrections or violent stops. You must know your car and yourself, its limitations and yours. Be warned, the injury rate is high in sports cars.

One of the most popular vehicles is the Volkswagen small sedan with its rear engine, known affectionately as the "beetle". These have to be handled with care and they have proved themselves to be hazardous handfults for some drivers new to the VW. Normally, the car has good road holding capabilities and this tempts inexperienced operators to negotiate curves at speeds faster than they should, but when friction is lost, the rear end breaks contact and slides out without warning, giving the driver little chance to correct before control is lost. Owners of this type of vehicle are strongly advised to heed the warnings given by the manufacturers concerning self-installed modifications. For example, they strongly advise against the use of extra wide wheels and tires on this machine. Slightly higher speeds may be achieved before the critical breakaway occurs, but when this happens the vehicle is completely uncontrollable. The Owner's Handbook also warns against the use of non-standard wheels because extra stresses are created which result in mechanical failure of drive shafts. Another point to remember - in the U.K., extra wide fenders must also be added to enclose extra width tires to prevent road splash.

If you want a headache that APC's won't cure, buy yourself a so-called cheap transport, i. e., a vehicle of ancient vintage and dubious quality. Usually such a vehicle is unreliable and is likely to break out in mechanical defects like a child producing spots during a bout of measles. Once again, as a driver the choice is yours, but the purchase can hardly be called economical if the tie rod breaks loose, or brakes fail one wet windy night on one of the local winding rural roads. Civil police make spot checks of vehicles for mechanical defects and compliance with host country vehicle-in-use regulations. Fines can be tough. For example, a fine of \$50 is not uncommon for one defective tire citation.

The Department of the Environment (MOT) Safety Inspection is a vigorous Safety Check performed by licensed British garages. It is mandatory for all vehicles registered with British Road Taxation authorities. Currently it involves inspection of brakes, tires, steering and lights, and includes a check for corrosion of critical vehicle structures. The cost of repairs to old cars to meet the MOT Standards can be very high.

VEHICLE LIGHTS

Vehicle lighting standards contained in British law specify a different color code to that used in the U.S. Requirements can be conveniently separated into categories which require immediate compliance and those which must be accomplished within 12 months from the time the private vehicle enters the United Kingdom.

a. Immediate Compliance

- (1) Front Parking Lights - WHITE
- (2) Rear Parking Lights - RED

b. Required Within 12 Months

(1) Vehicles first used after 1 September 1965: Front and rear turning signals must be AMBER or YELLOW; and (2) Vehicles first used before 1 September 1965: WHITE or AMBER turning signals at the front and RED or AMBER turning signals at the rear.

A RED light must never be displayed at the front of a vehicle, and a rear facing WHITE light may only be shown when reversing.

Fog or Spotlamps when used on their own must be in pairs and the distance between them should not be less than that for headlamps. If they are less than two feet above ground level, they should only be used in fog or snow. Where one spot or fog lamp is fitted, it must only be used in conjunction with headlamps.

Headlamps must dip left or straight down. If you will be operating an imported vehicle, it is your responsibility to insure that headlamps are adjusted for the left-side-of-the-road driving situation. This normally requires the installation of headlamps designed for left-side driving. They can be purchased at the Base Exchange Parts Store.

After daylight hours, the use of headlamps is mandatory on all roads that have no street lighting. Headlamps are also required by law in conditions of reduced visibility - day or night. Use headlamps to be seen, as well as to see.

SEAT BELTS

Current U.K. regulations dealing with protective equipment make it mandatory to fit safety harnesses that restrain the upper and lower portions of the body to the two front seats of privately owned passenger carrying vehicles. Local laws are therefore satisfied by fitting a diagonal strap across the body, anchored at the shoulder and hip positions, but in the interest of your personal safety, you should fit restraining devices that have a lap belt plus at least one diagonal shoulder strap, i. e., a three-point safety harness system.

The mandatory use of vehicle safety harnesses is likely to become law within the United Kingdom in the near future.

Air Force Regulation 127-5, USAFE Supplement 1, Use of Protective Equipment by Vehicle Operators and Passengers, states that all military personnel and government employees operating or riding in any vehicle at any time will wear the restraining devices that are available in the vehicle. Thus the situation in relation to the use of restraining devices could not be clearer - they MUST be worn at all times, both on base and off base. Do not forget to have your passenger buckle up too. In Civil courts in Western Europe judges have already reduced the compensation paid to road accident victims by insurance companies because the said victims were deemed to have been negligent in not wearing the safety harnesses which were available for their use.