

SHAPE: Motoring and Cycling

Exporting Vehicles from UK: As you all should be aware, there is now a system in UK of declaring your vehicle 'off the road' or having to tax it. If you do not complete a "Statutory Off Road Notification" (SORN) and you do not tax your vehicle, you will be subject to an automatic fine. It therefore follows that you should pay particular attention to the routines for exporting your vehicle from UK.

The correct procedure, for exporting a vehicle from UK is that a Certificate of Export (V561) is applied for and is issued in lieu of the V5. This should be done in advance of your departure from UK. Any individual who has not done this in advance of posting and who has surrendered their V5 in accordance with Belgian Law should complete and return a V756 to DVLA, who will then issue an Export Certificate.

The new style V5 has a perforated tear-off section to declare that the vehicle has been exported. This should be removed, signed and returned to DVLA prior to the V5 being surrendered to SHIPPS.

You would also be best served to obtain a License refund form prior to departure. Forms and comprehensive up-to-date advice can be found on the DVLA website:

www.dvla.gov.uk

Tax Free Motor Vehicles: The tax free privileges at SHAPE differ from those for British Forces in Germany and elsewhere. For your entitlement to purchase tax free vehicles please see the flow chart an Annex A. Individuals posted to SHAPE for a 2 – 3 year tour are currently permitted to purchase one tax free vehicles as follows:

- Single/Married Unaccompanied: 1 x vehicle per tour
- Married Accompanied: See Below & Flow chart at Annex B

Married Accompanied personnel should be aware that there are various rules for working spouses which may affect the entitlement to tax free privileges. Advice should be sought before a spouse commences employment.

A flow chart determining the possible effects of additional occupational income is at Annex B.

If you arrive at SHAPE with a tax free vehicle which is less than 6 months old, this will count against your entitlement until it has been owned for a full 3 years.

If you wish to register a second vehicle during your tour at SHAPE, you will be required to pay Belgian road tax. This amount varies according to engine capacity, however, as a concession, the tax will be levied against the lower engine capacity regardless of which vehicle you registered first.

All vehicles will be registered in the name of the Service person. All drivers must have:

- A SHAPE ID Card and a valid UK or European driving licence. The driving licences and vehicle documents must be carried in the vehicle whenever it is being driven.

Other dependants under 25 years of age who are resident in Belgium and in full time

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education in Belgium, who have a driving licence, may also have a tax free vehicle purchased for them. Again, advice should be sought in advance of purchasing the vehicle.

The rules and regulations can be quite complex and there are many variations that necessitate consultation with the Belgian Authorities. You should therefore always seek advice if you have any doubts about your position. You should also note that special authority from both the Belgian Tax Authorities and the UK National Military Representative is necessary if you wish to register more than 3 vehicles in the course of a 3-year tour.

Finally, you should note that there are two types of tax-free vehicles:

- “T2” vehicles which are intended for use within the EU area and have no liability to Import Duty.
- “T1” vehicles which are intended for export from the EU and are liable to a 10% Import Duty when they are fully registered in the EU. Diplomatic sales and those vehicles sold to British Forces Germany, or elsewhere in the EU, may require Import Duty to be paid so you are advised to check and make provision for the payment if necessary.

General: Prior to arrival ensure your insurance green card is completed correctly, failure to do so will cause you much irritation. After arrival all car owners should borrow and study a copy of the Belgian Highway Code from the UKSU MT. There are very significant differences between the rules for driving in Belgium compared with Germany and the UK; For example, the right of way differs and car documents must be carried at all times in your car.

In Belgium right-hand dipping headlights are mandatory. There is no requirement for yellow lights. Dipped headlights are mandatory in built up areas at night, side lights (or parking lights) are permitted only when the car is stationary. Two rear fog lamps are permitted but it is mandatory that one be fitted on the off-side (left hand side when facing the rear of the vehicle).

The wearing of seat belts is mandatory for all passengers except pregnant women and certain medical cases. Children under the age of 12 years must not ride in the front seats if there is a vacant seat in the rear.

Motor Insurance: The subject of motor insurance can be very complex as many insurance companies in the UK (including some of the better known large companies) cannot insure your car with policies issued by their UK office. If in doubt consult your own insurance broker. Alternatively you can arrive on a temporary “Green Card” and arrange for insurance locally. This is acceptable but is usually more expensive and may marginally delay the provision of SHAPE registration plates whilst you negotiate your insurance cover with the local representative. If you do go to one of the UK Companies suggested it is very important to ensure the following:

- Green Card to be valid for full 12 months.
- Green Card to show CHASSIS No not a Registration Number.
- Green Card MUST show your Belgian correspondence address i.e. SHAPE, BFPO

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- 26.
- Driving Licence.

If you or your dependants do not hold a full UK Driving Licence, you are advised most strongly to obtain one prior to arrival at SHAPE. In Belgium only qualified and licensed driving schools are permitted to give instruction to learner drivers. The cost of obtaining a licence in Belgium is prohibitive because of the high fees of driving instruction and interpreters' fees unless you are fluent in French or Flemish.

SHAPE Gendarmerie Registration Section (SGRS) will advise civilians and dependants who wish to obtain a Belgian driving licence and will issue the required documents. For further information contact UKMT Bldg 244 Ext 5297.

SHAPE Licensed Vehicles and Belgian Road Tax: Belgian road tax is not payable on the first registered vehicle at SHAPE (including motorcycles over 250cc) as this is considered to be for travel between home and place of work. Caravans or trailers are never exempted from road tax. Road tax is payable on any second or subsequent car, unless your spouse is in certain types of full time employment and resides with you at SHAPE and one of the vehicles is registered in their name.

How much Road Tax is due?: Road Tax is calculated according to the size of the vehicle engine (in cubic centimetres). Road Tax on caravans or trailers is a fixed amount. However, be aware that vans, trucks, motor-homes and horse trailers have their road tax calculated by weight and are subject to reduction when they are more than five years of age. As a concession, road tax may be paid on the smallest vehicle (determined by the engine size). The Vehicle Registration Office (VRO) will inform you on how much road tax is due.

How to pay Road Tax: SHAPE personnel have to pay road tax annually before the next following tax period. Under the sole condition that SHAPE members are posted for a limited period, they are allowed to pay for 1, 2 or 3 quarters of the remaining time of their last year at SHAPE. SHAPE members then have to declare to the VRO that they will leave SHAPE at a presumed date. Road Tax will be calculated to the end of the last quarter.

Extension of Posting in Belgium: If for any reason an extension of posting in Belgium occurs, SHAPE members must report with a document of extension to the VRO before the end of the last quarter of road tax. Note. Having registered a vehicle for just one day into a quarter means road tax is due for the complete quarter.

Late Payment of Road Tax: Late payment of road tax – even by one day – will result in an administration fine; this applies to all Belgian residents.

Unforeseen Departure from Belgium. If a SHAPE member is leaving Belgium before his or her scheduled date of departure, a request for reimbursement of road tax for unused quarters can be made at the VRO. The name, address and account number of a SHAPE member staying in Belgium has to be given to the VRO as the Belgian administration does not reimburse outside of Belgium.

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Reimbursement on Disposing of a Vehicle whilst remaining at SHAPE: If a SHAPE member disposes of a vehicle on which road taxes have been paid, they have 2 options:

- To transfer road tax to another vehicle to be registered under their name or:
- Request reimbursement of road tax for unused quarters at the VRO on production of the current SHAPE place for cancellation when the vehicle has been exported, sold or wrecked.

Transfer of Road Tax: When an individual is selling his vehicle for which he paid road tax, the residue of road tax may be transferred to the buyer if he/she is also liable to the payment of road tax. In such a case, the seller must return the licence plate of that vehicle to the RO for cancellation. The lump sum of road tax is not transferable.

Information. If you have any problems or further questions regarding replacing vehicles, transferring ownership, transcription of road taxes etc, please contact or visit the VRO for advice in Building 210, Ext 4148/5147.

Note. Road Tax on caravans or trailers is a fixed annual amount and is not subject to reimbursement.

Warning Triangle, First Aid Kit and Fire Extinguisher: All vehicles registered in Belgium must be equipped with a warning triangle, first aid kit and fire extinguisher, all of which must meet the Belgian specifications. All these items can be obtained locally. A tow-rope is also advisable.

High Visibility Vests – Belgian Law: With effect from 01 February 2007, it is compulsory to carry high visibility vests in your vehicle, immediately to hand when travelling on motorways in Belgium.

Vehicle Licensing and Registration at SHIPPS: Both vehicles in a two-car family must be registered in the Service person's name unless the spouse has privileges in his/her own right. Spouses should ensure that they have a full UK licence prior to arrival in order to avoid the Belgian driving test.

You will need to produce the following documents:

- Car Registration Book
- Evidence of Ownership
- Current Green Card
- Driving Licence and spouse's Driving Licence if appropriate and in addition a passport size photograph
- Control Technique Pass Certificate, for cars four years and over

On completion of registration you will be given a Military Registration number and issued with new registration plates on payment of the registration charge. Once you affix these plates you must remove your 'GB' sticker and you must replace it with a (Belgian) 'B' one. These are issued with your SHAPE plates or can be purchased locally in Belgium.

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You will also be issued a BENELUX 4 (Customs document) which together with all other vehicle documents must be carried in the vehicle at all times. This Benelux Form 4 must be handed in when you finally leave Belgium. The registration will be valid for the entire period of your posting to SHAPE, whilst the vehicle remains in your ownership. However, there is a requirement to revalidate the registration on each occasion that you're International Insurance Certificate (Green Card) or your SHAPE ID Card is renewed.

The revalidation is indicated by two stickers on the rear plate. There is a charge on each occasion that you revalidate the registration.

Vehicle Technical Inspection (Control Technique (CT)): Vehicles temporarily registered in Belgium which is four or more years old (which includes vehicles registered by SHAPE and NATO personnel) must undergo an annual vehicle inspection at a testing station certified by the Belgian Government. Vehicles must be presented for testing during the anniversary month of their original registration (i.e. when new or first purchased). If you bring to SHAPE a vehicle which is 4 years old or more, this vehicle must undergo and pass the annual vehicle inspection before SHAPE registration plates will be issued regardless of whether it has recently undergone a similar examination in the UK. This 'CT' is more expensive than the UK MOT.

The CT centre is 5 minutes from SHAPE on the way into Mons. It is not possible to pre-book so you are recommended to go early and join the queue. The UK MT will give advice if required. For those wishing to sell a vehicle, regardless of its age, an inspection must be carried out on change of ownership; this is the responsibility of the seller. The basic requirements of road worthiness are detailed hereafter.

For further information contact: TCWO UKMT Bldg 244, Ext 5297.

Compulsory Lights: Lights installed by a manufacturer or by the owner must be maintained in proper working order. Exterior lights with broken or missing lenses are not considered to be in proper working order.

- Parking Lights. Two white lights on the front of the vehicle separate from the headlights.
- Headlights. Two high (main) or two low (dipped) beam headlights, correctly adjusted. They may be white or yellow but both lights must be of the same colour. You are strongly advised to purchase European Headlights as the stickers are only a temporary measure.
- Directional Signal Lights .Left and right turn signal lights at the front and rear of the vehicle. The front lights may be white or yellow and the rear lights yellow or red, but in both cases each pair must be of the same colour.
- Tail and Stop Lights. Two red tail lights and two red stoplights on the rear.
- Licence Plate Light. A lamp must be so placed so as to illuminate the rear licence plate and make it clearly visible at night.
- Rear Fog Light. At least one red rear fog light must be fitted. This light must be of an approved type and marked "B1". It must be fitted at the middle or between the middle and left of the rear of the vehicle. Two red fog lights may be fitted; in this case the lights must be marked "B2".

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- **Red Reflectors.** Two red reflectors of any shape, except triangular must be fitted at the rear of the vehicle.

Optional Lights. Two white or yellow fog lights may be fitted at the front of the vehicle but they must work in conjunction with the headlights. One searchlight may be fitted on the front of the vehicle and one or two reversing lights may be fitted at the rear of the vehicle. These must function only when reverse gear is selected.

Seat Belts: Vehicles registered from 15 June 1968 onwards must have seat belts for the driver and front seat passenger.

Shock Absorbers: The shock absorbers must be in good working order.

Speedometer: The speedometer must be in good working condition and show the speed in kilometres per hour.

Windscreen Wipers: The wiper(s) must be efficient and capable of operating without the continual intervention of the driver.

Brakes: The vehicle must have 2 means of applying brakes. If connected, they must be so constructed that the failure of one will not affect the other. They must be able to bring the vehicle to a smooth stop within a certain distance, which may vary according to the type of vehicle, with no evidence of side pull.

Tyres: The tyres of all vehicles capable of exceeding 25 kph must be in good condition and must show sculptures of at least 1mm deep all over the tread. Tyres fitted on an axle must be of the same type. When radial tyres are fitted on the front of the vehicle radial tyres must be fitted on the rear. Retread and studded tyres are not permitted.

Fire Extinguisher: An approved fire extinguisher must be placed so as to be accessible to the driver.

First Aid Kit: An approved First Aid Kit must be carried at all times.

Warning Triangle: An approved Warning Triangle must be carried at all times.

Traffic Rules: Traffic rules within Belgium are different and you should note these differences before your arrival. This will help you to prepare for an accident free tour at SHAPE.

Belgium uses the international road sign system. There is a general speed limit on all roads of 100 kph except where otherwise indicated. On motorways and four lane two way roads with a separate barrier the speed is limited to 120 kph – except where otherwise indicated.

Headlamps must be used when visibility is poor. Rear fog lamps may only be used in fog or snowfall when visibility is less than 100 metres.

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Unless otherwise indicated vehicles approaching from the right have priority. This applies at all times including crossroads, 'T' junctions and roundabouts.

The law concerning roundabouts changed on 1 Jan 95 and is now generally the same as in UK where those on the roundabout generally have priority. Exercise caution however, some locals have been driving a long time and find it hard to remember the change.

Spot Checks: In Belgium the police frequently stop cars in order to carry out spot checks. At these checks the police will want to see that you are wearing seat belts and that you have with you all the essential documents. These include all the registration documents for the car, your insurance certificate and your driving licence. The police are empowered to make very heavy fines via the SHAPE Gendarmes if you are not carrying your motor documents. It is advisable therefore to keep the relevant documents in the car at all times. The police will also examine the car to make sure the tyres, lights, windscreen wipers etc are working and in good condition. The number of checks is increasing every year with the increase in motor regulations.

Operation of Power Assisted Cycles/Bicycles: Belgian law requires all bicycles intended to be operated by persons over 12 years of age to be registered. A number of specific regulations exist and advice can be sought from the SHAPE Vehicle Registration Office.

Drinking and Driving: Permissible levels of alcohol whilst driving are the same as those in the UK. It is pointed out; however, that the small print in many policies renders the insurance null and void if an accident occurs when under the influence of alcohol.

Petrol Ration Cards: Duty free petrol cards are available from the HQ SHAPE Building. The FINA Station at SHAPE and most FINA garages in Belgium will accept the cards. The monthly ration which varies according to engine size is adequate but is issued to only one car per family.

Repairs: Garage charges for repairs and servicing are high and 21% TVA (VAT) is added. There is an Autofixit Workshop at SHAPE which you can use to carry out minor repairs and maintenance on your car. The FINA garage at SHAPE is equipped to carry out routine servicing and maintenance. Spare parts for your car can be ordered there and they offer a large stock of common user items at discount prices. Most Continental and UK manufacturers have agents in Mons.

Driving Habits: One of the most important places to follow Belgian customs is behind the steering wheel on your car; the old maxim of "he who hesitates is lost" could, at the worst, mean dead. Do take your priority; otherwise you will upset the other driver. Should you decide to relinquish it, let him know you are doing so?

There have been some terrible accidents with foreigners here, caused by the flashing of headlights in broad daylight. This sign is usually used to indicate "I am there"; "I am taking my priority". In Britain it generally means "I am letting you go first". You can imagine the consequences. Of course, if the car signalling is behind you, it generally means you are in his way.

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Belgians are particularly good motorway drivers: mostly they keep well to the right (and that means in the inside lane) and leave the way clear for overtaking traffic. You will soon become unpopular if you hog the middle or the outside lanes and you won't do much for our public relations; imagine if you have a SHAPE licence plate or a country sticker on the back of your car.

If you have an accident and it doesn't look as though a 'gentleman's agreement' can be organised early, or if someone is hurt, call the Federal Police on Ext 3334, civil 065 443334.

Do not drive on parking lights, whatever the time of day. They have no legal status here. If the weather is bad or if you are driving at night, drive on dipped headlights.

Beware of parking in front of garages and entrances. You will be surprised how small some of these can be and how they can be dressed up to look like something else. A garage or entrance does not have to have a miniature car number plate with the owner's car number attached to it, although wise residents will make sure this information can be seen clearly. If you park across someone's entrance or garage he has the right to ring the police and have your vehicle towed away. Besides the inconvenience of finding out where your vehicle is, getting there and paying for it being towed away, you will also be fined.