

## Driving in France – March 2012

This information has been gleaned from several sources and, although they offer similar advice, they do differ in some details. This is therefore a consensus.



It's a good idea to have:

- Spare bulbs for your car's external lights (those that you are able to change yourself)
- A fire extinguisher
- A first aid kit
- Breakdown insurance, such as that provided by Towergate
- TR spares and tools !

Other things you should know:

- You'll have to pay motorway tolls - sometimes these are automated barriers, so take plenty of change or keep your card handy. The cost of motorway travel for a car without caravan or trailer is very roughly 1€ for every 10 miles
- It's illegal to carry any radar detection equipment, whether or not it's switched on
- Children under 10 can't travel in the front seat
- The speed limit is 50kph in towns, 80-100kph on open roads and 110-130kph on motorways
- If you're caught speeding, you could be given a hefty on-the-spot fine and your car and license could be confiscated there and then
- The drink-driving limit is 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood - lower than the UK limit of 80mg per 100ml
- You should only use your horn in an emergency
- If you want the car in front to give way, flash your headlights

- In built-up areas, if there's no yellow diamond sign, you must give way to any cars coming out of a side turning on the right
- The last car in a queue of slow-moving traffic must use their hazard lights as a warning

### You must have:

- A valid, full UK driving license (if you have a photo card license you also need to take the paper part). Old style green paper UK driving licences are recognised but drivers must be able to produce photographic proof of identity (e.g. passport).
- Registration document (the original document, not a copy)
- Your motor insurance certificate
- A GB sticker clearly displayed on the back of your car - unless your car has 'Euro-plates'
- Headlamp converters
- A red warning triangle
- A reflective jacket you will need (I understood that you must have two) for use if you break down or have to pull over to change a wheel or deal with any other problems. The reflective jacket(s) must be kept inside the vehicle (not in the boot) so you can reach it without exiting the vehicle. Wearing a reflective jacket is compulsory if the driver and/or passenger(s) exits a vehicle immobilised on carriageway. If you don't have these, you could be fined around 90€.

### Important Changes for 2012:

#### Radar detecting devices and Satnav:

Radar detecting devices have been banned in France since 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011, whether they are actually switched on or not. Drivers using radar detectors (speed camera detectors) are liable for a fine of 1500€ and 6 points off their license. This applies to specific radar warning devices, such as the Coyote, which must have their software updated to remain legal.

Since 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012 French laws have prohibited drivers from carrying any device capable of detecting speed cameras. This includes devices able to warn or inform of the location of speed cameras e.g. Satnav or GPS systems capable of showing speed camera sites as "*Points of Interest*".

If you have a Satnav capable of displaying speed camera locations in France then you must at least disable camera alerts. Contact the manufacturer for advice too as a software or database update is likely to be available that will remove camera data for France from the device.

If you have a Satnav system built into your car then contact the vehicle manufacturer in the first instance.

With regard to TomToms and other GPS systems, which have speed camera locations programmed in to their software, the situation is confusing. These are not officially "*radar detectors*", but manufacturers are obliged to make new software available, and most will be doing so in early 2012. By summer 2012, TomToms and other GPS systems will be technically in breach of the law if they still have speed camera locations listed in their "*Points of Interest*" software; and even if it is not clear how roadside police can stop and check for offending software, rather than hardware, drivers are warned to err on the side of caution and download the latest map software for France.

For both existing radar warning devices and GPS devices, current radar information is being replaced with warnings to announce "*danger zones*", many of which will be areas with speed cameras.

As well as the ban on warning devices, the French government is installing around 400 new, unsigned, fixed speed cameras as well as taking down signs indicating the location of existing camera sites.

### Mobile Phones:

From Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012, drivers caught using (holding) a mobile phone while on driving in France are liable to an on-the-spot fine of 130€ and 3 penalty points if they have a French driving license. The use of hands-free devices is still permissible.

### Breathalysers:

The French government confirmed on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012 that from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012 the drivers of all motor vehicles and also motorcyclists (excluding mopeds) must carry a breathalyser.

This regulation will be enforced from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012. Anyone stopped after this date who fails to produce a breathalyser when requested will receive an on the spot fine of 11€.

The official announcement states that one unused, certified breathalyser must be produced showing the French certification mark NF. We recommend that two single-use breathalysers are carried – if one is used or damaged, you will still have a spare to produce.

The breathalyser produced has to be in date. Single-use breathalysers, normally have a validity of twelve months, will soon be available at channel ports, in supermarkets, pharmacies and garages throughout France, at a cost of about 1€ each.

Sources:

[www.theaa.com/motoring\\_advice/overseas/driving-abroad-whats-new-2012.html](http://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas/driving-abroad-whats-new-2012.html)

[www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/france/](http://www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/france/)

<http://about-france.com/travel.htm>

## What to do if you have minor road accident:

Hopefully, it will never happen to you, but if it does, forewarned is forearmed, and it is important to know exactly what to do if you are involved in a minor road accident (*accident d'auto*) in France.

Place the warning triangle (which the law requires you to carry in your car) at least 30 metres from the vehicle to alert oncoming traffic. Put on the reflective safety vest, also a compulsory part of your car equipment and turn on your hazard warning lights.

If there are casualties, call the fire service (*sapeurs-pompiers*) on 18, the European Emergency line on 112 or use the emergency phones (orange boxes with SOS written on them) which you will find along the motorway and on main roads.

When driving a car in France, you should always keep a '*Car Accident Report*' in the car (typically in the glove compartment). In the event of an accident, you and the other person should jointly fill out the report *IMMEDIATELY*. Failure to do so can result in you being held responsible for damages, or at least the other party being free of all responsibility for the accident. In fact, even if the other party is obviously at fault and even admits to being at fault, failure to jointly complete (and sign) this report within 24 hours can result in him having no responsibility and you having to bear the costs of any damage to your vehicle and property.

*(This form is NOT obligatory, but it makes any subsequent legal proceedings or insurance payments quicker and easier. It is simply an "agreed statement of facts" between those involved in a motor vehicle accident but can save memory lapses or changing of the fact later on and avoid a lot of stress.*

*Never sign a 'constat' unless you are absolutely sure that you fully understand and agree with the statement. Make sure that you tick the boxes that apply, add up the number of ticks and write this number in the box at the bottom to prevent the form from being altered later).*

Completing this report jointly does not mean that you have to agree on either the circumstances of the accident or the cause. In fact, each party can give differing opinions. The report is merely a record of each party's version of events. If you do not agree with the other party, note this on the form and give your alternative view of events.

Once the form is completed and signed by all parties, take a copy of all pages (including any additional pages added to the form). If the other party refuses to complete and sign the form, contact the police and your insurance company immediately, as otherwise the other party may become exempt from responsibility. If you are unable to do so (e.g. due to injury or shock), have someone do so for you without delay.

This form is of course in French. Unless you are fluent in French, you should also keep an English translated version in your glove compartment, so that you can see what information you are required to provide and what you are signing. An English version (which you can print off and keep in your glove compartment) is available. Perhaps more useful is a bilingual version which you can see and print off **[here](#)**

Some tips for your consideration:

- Once the form is completed and signed, you cannot legally add or change the form. Furthermore, it will be difficult (or impossible) to add or change any information afterwards. So it is critical that you fill in the form as accurately and as completely as possible.
- If you do not understand what the other driver has written (either due to language or legibility considerations), note this on the form and provide your version of events.
- It is best to complete the report in French, if you are able to do so. If you use English, the other party (if he/she is French) may later claim that they did not understand what you were saying and consequently were unable to register the disagreement on the form. In essence, the more non-French you use, the more you open the door for the opposing party to change their story at a later date. However, if your French is not adequate, it is better to provide information in English than to not provide it at all.

- In the centre of the form there are 17 tick boxes. Ticking the wrong box, even if done so inadvertently, can result in you being held responsible for the accident.
- If there are any witnesses (unless they are unfavourable to you), you should note their name and address in box 5. Failure to do so may result in their testimony being inadmissible.
- It is also worth keeping a camera (even a disposable one) in the glove compartment. An old-style film camera may be better than a digital camera, as the ability to easily edit digital information (as opposed to film) can make digital photos untrustworthy in court. The main issue with keeping a camera in the car is that the film (or digital camera) may degrade over time if the car becomes very hot (e.g. if left in the sun on a hot summer day).
- The form only has room for two parties. Consequently, if there are more than 2 drivers or parties involved in the accident, you will need more than one form. For this reason, it is wise to carry two blank copies of the form in your glove compartment.
- It is also wise to carry a pen, preferably a ballpoint pen, in the car as well. There is no point in having the form, if you are unable to complete it.

Constat Amiable d'Accident Automobile form -

<http://www.naccess.fr/objects/custom/public/21/FILE-a9b0e6ff0fe2a0c1f8de61f381e43b63.pdf>

Source:

[http://www.france-property-and-information.com/france\\_car\\_accident.htm](http://www.france-property-and-information.com/france_car_accident.htm)