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Gary France
Motorcycling Guides

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EUROPEAN RIDING LAWS

Introduction

In most countries in the world, traffic laws seldom change, but there seems to have been a recent spate of changes in Europe that affect motorcyclists, especially in France.

Trying to keep up with and understand the latest laws can be challenging, so I have tried to set out here the main laws that apply to those of us riding motorcycles in mainland Europe.

The country with the most laws affecting motorcycle riders is France and almost every tour in mainland Europe could involve riding in France, so this guide concentrates on French laws.

Clearly, this document is not all-encompassing and doesn't tell you everything you need to be aware of regarding the law, but it should help with some of the more recent developments.

Finally, many riders think that some of these laws are dumb and infringe on riders personal freedoms. I agree with some of that thinking but I look at it like this: they are fairly easy to comply with and not doing so could result in fines or even points on your licence. Even worse, not complying with these laws could delay you from doing what you are there to do - ride! So, my advice is to respect them anyway.

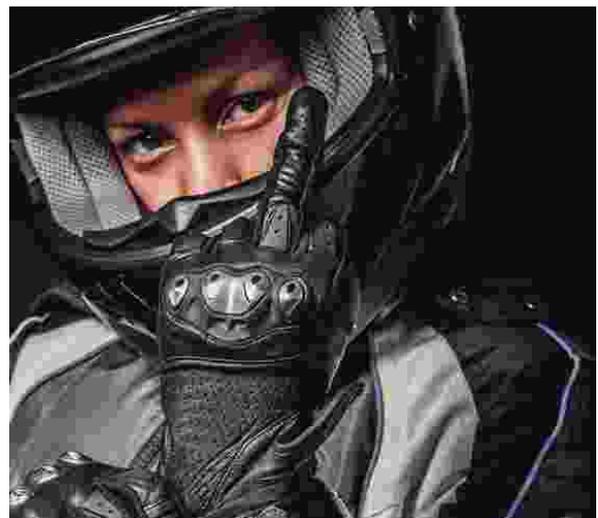
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1. How does the new gloves law in France affect motorcycle riders?

On 19 September 2016 a new law (Decree No. 2016-1232) was put in place relating to the obligation to wear gloves for riders and passengers of motorcycles, motor tricycles, motor quad bikes and mopeds.

This says that riders and pillion must wear motorcycle gloves at all times when riding that conform to with the regulations for personal protective equipment. Those PPE regulations say "Gloves mentioned in article R. 431-1-2 of the Highway Code must respect the characteristics of motorcycle gloves complying with the regulations for personal protective equipment as attested by the CE marking." In other words, those gloves must carry the CE Kite mark - any other gloves not showing the CE Kite mark are not allowed.



The consequences are anyone caught riding a two-wheeler without approved gloves is a fine of approximately €68 and one point will be added to their licence. Adding a point to the licence is part of the French system which has never been applied to UK drivers/riders, but in May 2017 that changed and now speeding offences, fines and points are transferrable from France to the UK.

Suggestion - always wear gloves. If your favourite gloves do not have a CE kite mark, at least carry a pair that do, so you can try to convince the police that you will carry on your ride wearing them.

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2. I don't have to carry my V5 Vehicle Registration document with me in the UK, so why should I in mainland Europe?

Because it's the law!

In most European countries you are required to carry the original of your V5 registration document at all times when riding. I personally never take the original, but instead I always take a good quality photocopy. If you are riding a rented motorcycle, you will need to take the rental agreement (or preferably a VE103R form) to show that you are allowed to have the motorcycle.



You must also obviously take your passport, driving licence, insurance certificate and for good measure, I always take a photocopy of the MOT Test Certificate, although this is not a requirement in many countries.

The consequences are anyone caught not carrying their V5 with them are potentially serious. You may be required to leave your motorcycle, or have it confiscated until you can prove it is yours by obtaining the V5 document. I have been stopped three times at random police checkpoints in mainland Europe (France, Spain and Croatia) and each time I was able to leave within minutes after showing my documents. Others were not so fortunate!

My suggestion is to always carry a copy of your V5 with you at all times, and don't forget it when just out for a quick ride when abroad.

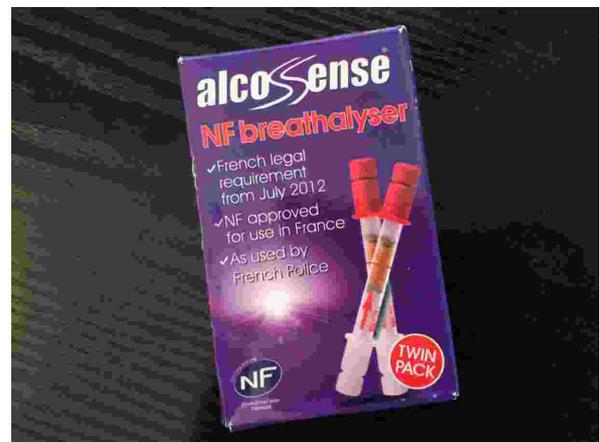
3. They cancelled the need to carry disposable breathalysers in France, didn't they?

This is perhaps the one law that shows how farcical French law-makers can be.

It used to be the case that all drivers and riders were required to carry two disposable breathalysers and there was a fine for not doing so. Then, in response to the uproar this created, they removed the fine, but critically, they did not remove the requirement to carry the two disposable breathalysers. That is still a legal requirement!

So, there is no financial penalty for not doing so, but you could be delayed by a French police officer if you are not carrying the two disposable breathalysers. That delay could be considerable if the police officer wanted it to be.

My recommendation is carry two disposable breathalysers anyway. They are very cheap and take up a tiny amount of room.



4. Motorcycles don't need to carry a warning triangle, right?

That is correct.

5. Do I need a GB symbol on the back of my bike?

Absolutely yes. That can either be an integral part of your number plate, or a separate sticker.

We would suggest that everyone complies with this simple law. If you don't, then you are giving the police a reason to pull over and check everything else about your bike and to check you are complying with all other laws.



6. The hi-vis laws seem to be changing a lot in France, so what is the current situation?

The previous French proposals that every rider must at all times wear a motorcycle jacket incorporating reflective areas have been scrapped.

This has been replaced with the same law that applies to car drivers and this is far more sensible. Both riders and pillion riders must now carry on their motorcycle a hi-vis vest or jacket and this only needs to be worn at the roadside in the event of an incident or breakdown. You do not need to wear hi-vis when riding.



The consequences of not carrying one per person is a fine and as these hi-vis vests fold up so small, it is silly not to carry them.

7. Can I have speed camera alerts on my gps or phone?

In France, no.

In 2012 the French government brought in new laws that prohibit drivers / riders from carrying devices capable of detecting speed cameras and this includes devices able to warn or inform of the location of speed cameras such as a gps system or mobile phone.

We recommend that when in France, you disable the speed camera warnings on your sat nav/ gps. The fine for using such a system can include fines of up to €1,500, confiscation of the device and of the vehicle.

According to the AA, in addition to now banning all devices capable of warning drivers of speed camera locations, the French government is installing around 400 new fixed speed cameras and is taking down road signs indicating the location of existing fixed speed camera sites.



If you thought that drivers of UK registered vehicles can get away with speeding in France because the French authorities cannot send speeding fines to British motorists, you were right, but that changed in May 2017.

8. What is the change in the speeding law that applies from 7 May 2017?

In 2011 Britain opted out of a cross-border enforcement directive on road safety and this made it impossible for EU police forces to track down British drivers caught on speed cameras in mainland Europe.

But from 7 May 2017 that opt-out will no longer apply and police in other EU countries will be given the right to access British motorists' details from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

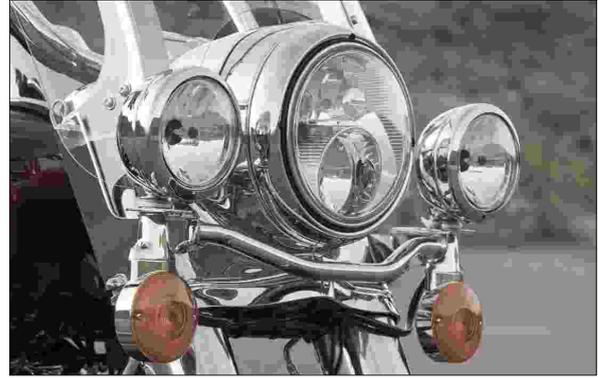
Other offences also included in the cross-border enforcement directive include not using a seatbelt, drink driving, using a mobile phone and ignoring red lights or other stop signals.



9. Do I have to carry a spare set of bulbs in France?

There is lots of divided opinion on this one. You will find many websites saying this is a legal requirement and most of these are businesses selling spare bulb kits, but the reality appears to be somewhat different.

I can find no law, or reference to any law, saying it is a legal requirement to carry spare bulbs, but there are French laws saying you are not allowed to drive a vehicle with a broken bulb. So, if you are on a country lane on a Sunday afternoon and a bulb has blown, it is against the law to move your bike, even if you are looking for somewhere to buy a replacement.



So, by implication, you should have a spare bulb set with you just in case, so that you can change your bulb and carry on with your journey.

If you are going to do that you might as well get some spare fuses for your bike as well and carry those too. I always carry both when riding in Europe.

10. Do I need headlight deflectors on my bike?

This is a difficult question to answer as it depends on the make and model of your bike.

The issue here is some motorcycles are manufactured with straight beams that neither deflect to the left or the right. For example, Harley-Davidson Fat Bob's, Street Glides and all bikes with Daymaker headlights have straight-beams and so it is pointless fixing a headlight deflector to those bikes.

For other models, you do need headlight deflectors. Check with your dealer!

11. Do I need reflective helmet stickers on my helmet if riding in mainland Europe?

This is another unclear situation and is really difficult to answer because of confusion between French laws, European laws and British laws.

For French nationals, the law is very clear in that they are required to have four reflective stickers on their helmets.

Article R431-1 of the French Highway Code applies without distinction to all riders and passengers traveling on roads in France to have such stickers.

But European law says helmets must comply with the European country they were purchased in and the UK government does not require motorcycle helmets to have reflective stickers, unlike France.

So, one law says yes, you do need them and another law says no, you don't. This is a real mess, leaving a UK rider to decide for themselves whether to apply these reflective stickers or not. Of course, if stopped by a French police officer who believes they are required, you may have to pay a fine anyway as you will not be able to debate the finer points of European versus French law at the roadside.

My recommendation? Personally I hate the look of them, so I don't have them on my helmets, but it is really up to you. I personally have never been stopped or questioned about this and a quick glance at the helmets of French riders at a motorcycle rally in St Tropez led me to believe this law is disregarded by the majority of riders in France.

The fine for not having them is €135.

12. Can I use ear buds to listen to music when riding?

In a large number of European countries, this is illegal.

In France, it is currently (2017) legal for motorcycle riders to have in-helmet speakers providing they don't go into the ears.

In certain countries (certainly in Spain) it is illegal to use bike-to-bike or rider-to-pillion communications systems that have in-helmet speakers or ear-buds.

13. What laws are peculiar for riding in Belgium?

Motorcyclists riding in Belgium, including foreigners, must wear protective clothing, i.e.: gloves, jacket with long sleeves, trousers with long legs or overall, and boots protecting the ankles.

14. What are the Crit'Air laws in France and do they apply to me?

Several cities in France have recently introduced a new scheme for controlling environmental pollution from vehicles. This scheme is called Crit'Air and it applies to all vehicles (including British cars and motorcycles) wishing to use those cities.

The purpose of the Crit'Air scheme is two-fold. First to stop people from using the most severely polluting vehicles and second to raise money to help pay for anti-pollution measures. While some may see this as yet more French driving laws designed to frustrate the motorist, it is important that you understand what the new laws are, so you do not fall foul of them.

For a full and detailed explanation of the Crit'Air laws, please see guide number 14 at www.tour1.co.uk

