

## **IV. DRIVING IN FRANCE**

**CAVEAT: There is no provision in U.S. law for intercession by foreign embassies on behalf of their citizens who wish to circumvent U.S. established procedures in procuring drivers licenses. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates do not intercede with the French authorities on behalf of Americans seeking driving test exemptions and driver's licenses.**

### **A. Driving License**

The following information for U.S. citizens driving in France was provided to the Embassy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. French regulations distinguish between persons in France on short tourist or business trips (less than 90 days) and those who are here as longer-term residents (more than 90 days).

If you are a temporary visitor in France, you may drive with a valid U.S. (State) driver's license. In addition to having your U.S. driver's license, visitors are advised (but not required) to carry an International Driving permit, or attach a French translation to their U.S. driver's license.

If you are a resident of France (holder of a carte de séjour or carte de residence), you may drive in France with a valid U.S. (not International) driver's license for a one-year recognition period, beginning on the date of validity of the first carte de séjour (exception for students who are allowed to use their driver's license for the duration of their studies). In addition to having your U.S. driver's license, residents are also required to attach a French translation done by a sworn translator (traducteur expert-jure).

Persons with valid driver's licenses, issued prior to their first entry into France as a resident, from the states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Hampshire, Kansas, Michigan, South Carolina and Kentucky may directly 'exchange' their state driver's licenses for French permits. This is because Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Kentucky offer a reciprocal privilege of exchange for persons holding French permits.

**-If you have a driver's license from one of these 13 states: Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Hampshire, Michigan, Kansas, South Carolina, Kentucky, Delaware, Ohio and Virginia,** apply for the French driver's license (permis de conduire) in your city of residence at least three months before the expiration of the one-year recognition period, to allow sufficient time for the required formalities (Beyond this time, the exchange will not be possible). Go to the Prefecture de Police.

1. Form to request the driver's license (available at the Prefecture)
2. The U.S. Driver's license with sworn translation in French. (For married women, if maiden name or married name does not appear of the driver's license, statement or official document showing both names). Some prefectures may also require a notarized translation.
3. Proof of current address: Statement of domicile or electricity bill or rent receipt.
4. Carte de séjour with photocopy of both sides;
5. Two (2) passport size photographs;
6. This service is free of charge.

**-If you DO NOT have a driver's license from one of these 13 states**, you must take the written and driving portions of the French licensing examination after one year of residence in France. Although there is no required number of lesson hours, the driving exam must be completed with a dual command car. As a consequence, you will have to go through a driving school. Special sessions are organized for people who do not speak French very well. In order to make the written test easier for non-French speakers, there is a possibility that you can be assisted by a translator, who may be a friend or relative.

### **B. Replacing expired, lost or stolen U.S driving licence**

The Embassy is not authorized to replace expired, lost and stolen U.S. driver's licenses. Only the Department of Motor Vehicles in the driver's home state can perform that service. If you have lost your driver's license or had it stolen in France, immediately report it to the commissariat of police having jurisdiction over the area where the loss or theft occurred. The commissariat will issue a Receptisse de Declaration de Perte ou de Vol de Pieces d'Identité ("Acknowledgment of Declaration of Loss or Theft of Identity Documents").

This receptisse will generally cover the lack of a driver's license for a few weeks while a replacement is being obtained. Monday through Friday, except on French and American holidays.

### **C. How to obtain an International Driver's Licence**

The American Automobile Association (AAA) issues International driver's licenses in the United States. Request an application from the American Automobile Association, 1000 A A A Drive, Heathrow, Fl. 32746-5063. Return the completed application to the same address with a photocopy of your valid U.S. driver's license, two passport-size (2 x 2 inches or 5 x 5 cms) photographs and a check (U.S. banks only) or International money order for \$10.00 payable to the AAA. The International driver's license issued by the AAA is valid for one year.

An International driver's license is only valid for use in France by U.S. citizens who are here temporarily (less than 90 days). The International Driving Permit is translated into the nine official languages of the United Nations, including French and English and serves as a translation to be used in conjunction with the visitor's valid driver's license. It can be useful in emergencies such as traffic violations or auto accidents, particularly when a foreign language is involved.

**NOTE:** This can only be considered as a translation in many languages, and cannot be separated from the U.S. driver's License. Longer-term residents must comply with the requirements set forth above under "Driver's License".

An International driver's license **cannot** be obtained in France.

**INSURANCE:** An unlimited third party liability insurance policy is compulsory for all automobiles entering France. Whether the owner accompanies the automobile or not, the vehicle must be insured. As proof of insurance, the owner must present an international motor insurance card (yellow if the policy is purchased in France, green otherwise) showing that the vehicle is insured in France. A temporary insurance policy is available from the vehicle insurance department of the French Customs Office (la douane) at the point of entry (border-crossing or seaport).

These policies can have a validity of eight, 15 or 30 days. For those who wish longer-term or additional insurance, we have a list of English-speaking insurance companies in Paris. (Included in the guide, see index)

#### **D. Motor vehicles**

**General Information:** Foreign-registered automobiles entering France by road or ferry are not normally documented by the French Customs at the point of entry. Vehicles shipped to France are treated differently. The shipping company will issue a *declaration d'admission* by French Customs at the seaport which is delivered to the owner with the car.

The French Customs Office decides if U.S. license plates can be used in France or if French plates (plaques d'immatriculation) are required. In general, cars imported for less than three months can keep their U.S. plates; those brought in for more than three months need French plates. After having cleared their vehicles through a French port of entry, Americans who plan to reside temporarily or permanently in France should consult the local Customs Office to establish the status of their vehicles. In Paris, the address is: French Customs Office (Bureau de Paris Douane, Tourisme), 11, rue Leon Jouhaux, 75010 Paris (Tel: 01-40-40-60-35).

In addition to license plates, imported automobiles should have a nationality plate (plaque de nationalité) mounted near the rear license plate. These plates (usually an adhesive plastic disk) can be purchased at most auto accessory stores. An American using U.S. license plates should mount a "USA" disk.

Once an imported vehicle has been processed through the French Customs Office in Paris or elsewhere, the most practical way to document the vehicle or, if necessary, to register it (obtain a certificat d'immatriculation, often referred to as carte grise) and get license plates is to apply to: Automobile Club de l'Ile de France and Normandy, 14 Avenue de la Grande Armée, 75017 Paris (Tel: 40-55-43-00). The Automobile Club has offices or representatives in most cities and larger towns in France, but motorists outside of Paris should contact the regional offices in major cities to document their vehicles.

**Tourists:** Foreign tourists may bring a car or motorcycle into France duty-free, and operate their vehicles with foreign license plates and a nationality disk. No other documentation is required as long as the vehicle is exported within three months. Americans who buy a car in France for tourist use and export without paying the French sales tax (T.V.A.) will be authorized temporary "TT" license plates by the French Customs Office for a period of six months only.

**Temporary Residents:** Temporary residents (holders of cartes de séjour temporaire) are exempted from payment of customs duties on cars they import if they can show that they will stay in France less than one year and that they have a permanent residence outside of France. An incoming resident must have owned the vehicle at least six months before coming to France, and have resided outside of France for at least one year to qualify for duty-free status.

**Long-Term Residents:** Americans residing in France (holders of three-year carte de séjour de resident ordinaire and the ten-year carte de séjour de resident privilégié) are not entitled to customs exemptions on imported motor vehicles. They must pay customs duties, register the vehicle, and equip it with French license plates.

It must be also shown that the vehicle has been registered and all taxes and duties paid in the country from which the vehicle is being imported. In addition, the owner of a car accorded duty-free status must give assurances that the vehicle will not be sold or used by someone else in France for at least one year from the date of authorization of duty-free status.

Some categories of foreigners may be granted duty-free entry of cars for more than a year. All questions of exemptions (franchise douanière) and extensions of exemptions should be referred to the French Customs Office.

## **List of Customs Offices and Automobile Clubs in the Consular regions**

### **Brittany**

#### **Ille et Vilaine (Rennes)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
Rue de la Frébardière BP 59  
35135 Chantepie

Tel: 02 99 30 06 30  
Fax: 02 99 51 33 86

Automobile Club de l'Ouest  
40 bd de la Liberté  
35000 Rennes

Tel: 02 99 79 11 11  
Fax: 02 99 79 15 99

#### **Finistère (Brest)**

Centre Régional de  
Dédouanement  
14, quai de la Douane BP 60711  
29229 Brest CEDEX 02

Tel: 02 98 44 35 20  
Fax: 02 98 44 40 95

Automobile Club de l'Ouest  
9, rue Siam  
29200 Brest

Tel: 02 98 44 32 89  
Fax: 02 98 44 91 13  
E-mail: [aco29@lemans.org](mailto:aco29@lemans.org)

#### **Morbihan (Vannes )**

Centre Régional de  
Dédouanement  
18 av Gontran-Bienvenu, ZI du Prat  
BP CP 37  
56037 VANNES Cedex

Tel: 02 97 01 36 00  
Fax: 02 97 01 39 09

Automobile Club  
61, rue Marechal Foch  
56100 Lorient

Tel: 02 97 21 03 07  
Fax: 02 97 21 91 42 5

### **Côtes d'Armor (Saint Briec)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
ZAC du Plateau, 2 av du Chalutier sans piti  
BP 320 – 22193 Plérin

Tel: 02 96 74 75 32  
Fax: 02 96 74 57 41

Automobile Club,  
6 place Duguesclin  
22000 Saint Briec

Tel: 02 96 33 16 20  
Fax: 02 96 33 05 81

### **Loire Region**

#### **Pays de la Loire (Nantes)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
3 impasses du Bélem BP 78410  
44184 Nantes Cedex

Tel: 02 40 58 55 09  
Fax: 02 40 58 61 42

Automobile Club  
6, bd Gabriel Guist'hau  
44000 Nantes

Tel: 02 40 48 11 11  
Fax: 02 51 82 26 12

#### **Maine et Loire (Angers)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
4, av Joxé BP 3623  
49036 Angers Cedex 01

Tel: 02 43 49 97 40  
Fax: 02 41 41 15 59

Automobile Club  
7, place de la République  
49100 Angers

Tel: 02 41 88 40 22  
Fax: 02 41 20 00 49

#### **Mayenne (Laval)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
55, rue du depot BP 2235  
53022 Laval Cedex

Tel: 02 43 49 97 40  
Fax: 02 43 49 97 58

#### **Sarthe (Le Mans)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
117, rue de l'Angevinière BP 21054  
72100 Le Mans Cedex 1

Tel: 02 43 39 18 39  
Fax: 02 43 77 18 60

Automobile Club  
60, av Général Leclerc  
72000 Le Mans

Tel: 02 43 14 23 49

### **Vendée ( La Roche Sur Yon)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
185, bd du Marechal Leclerc BP 333  
85008 La Roche Sur Yon

Tel: 02 51 62 31 25  
Fax: 02 51 46 23 28

### **Lower Normandy**

#### **Calvados (Caen)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
151, cours Cassarelle  
14120 Caen

Tel: 02 31 35 46 29  
Fax: 02 31 35 46 39

Automobile Club  
20, av du 6 juin  
14000 Caen

Tel: 02 31 85 47 35  
Fax: 02 31 85 88 50

#### **Orne (Alençon)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
Z.A.T. du Londeau BP 753  
61041 Alençon

Tel: 02 33 80 31 00  
Fax: 02 33 80 31 05

#### **Manche (Saint Lô)**

Centre Régional de Dédouanement  
1, place Sainte-Croix BP 240  
50010 Saint Lô

Tel: 02 33 57 68 50  
Fax: 02 33 57 17 80

### **Sales and transfert of ownership**

The sale of a car imported duty-free must be processed at the French Customs Office. Both the buyer and the seller must execute a title transfer request (demande de transfert). The seller must also complete a bill of sale (certificat de vente). Foreigners must present their passports as well as all ownership documents.

A vehicle in temporary, duty-free status in France can be sold to another non-resident without payment of customs duties and taxes if the car is exported from France before expiration of the duty-free period. Only one such duty-free transfer can be made for any single vehicle. Customs duties and taxes must be paid by the seller to the French Customs Office on any car sold to a resident of France. The seller must give the customs certificate (certificat de dédouanement) to the buyer as proof that customs duties have been paid on the vehicle.

After obtaining the approval of the Customs Office, a foreign buyer must register the car at the Prefecture of Police or at the automobile club of their choice (see above). The registration of the vehicle should be processed as quickly as possible (within two weeks) after the Customs Office formalities are completed. An American planning to sell a duty-free vehicle would do well to inform the Paris or local Customs Office of their intentions and to confirm that the circumstances of the sale pose no customs problems.

#### **F. French specification**

To use a car imported from the U.S. to France for more than 6 months, you need approval from the 'Service des Mines' of the Prefecture.

#### **G. English speaking driving schools**

All driving schools on this list have at least one English-speaking instructor, although their fluency may vary. The consulate assumes no responsibility for the professional ability of the listed persons or agencies.

#### **Brest**

Auto-Ecole Luco 02 98 44 81 60  
Monsieur Yves Luco  
39, boulevard Montaigne 29200 Brest

Ecole de Conduite Française Roger Roudaut 02 98 68 19 83  
24, place Napoléon III  
29200 Brest Bellevue

#### **Lannion**

Ecole de Conduite Française 02 96 37 47 57  
1, rue de Kermaria [ecf.lannion1@aliceadsl.fr](mailto:ecf.lannion1@aliceadsl.fr)  
22300 Lannion

#### **Le Mans**

Ecole de Conduite Française Centre Atlantique 02 43 21 41 40  
Monsieur Schroll [ice.lemans@ecf-cerca.fr](mailto:ice.lemans@ecf-cerca.fr)  
39, rue Eichthal  
72000 Le Mans

#### **Morlaix**

Ecole de Conduite Française Manche West 02 98 62 13 52  
20, rue de Paris [ecf\\_morlaix@msn.com](mailto:ecf_morlaix@msn.com)  
29600 Morlaix

## **Rennes**

Auto-Ecole Les Almadies 02 99 53 56 46  
Monsieur Charles Duchêne  
30, avenue Henri Freville  
Centre Commercial Les Almadies  
35200 Rennes

Auto-Ecole de la Tour d'Auvergne 02 99 30 33 36  
20, boulevard de la Tour d'Auvergne  
35000 Rennes

Ecole de Conduite le Hérisson 02 99 63 11 22  
Monsieur Luc Perez  
29, rue Guillaume Lejean  
35000 Rennes

## **St Brieuc**

Ecole de Conduite Française 02 96 61 31 99  
8, rue du 71ème RI  
22000 St Brieuc