

HOW DO YOU IMPORT

A CLASSIC CAR INTO THE UK?

I guess a number of readers have pondered this question when viewing 'bargain buys' on the Internet. I too have thought about the viability of importing a T Type, especially when the exchange rate has at times been highly favourable for UK purchasers. However, that's as far as it has gone until early September 2009.

It was a 'Ys to the North York Moors' event in late August 2009 that once more got me thinking about the whys and wherefores (puns unintended!) of Y Type acquisition. It was quite by chance that I noted a YT for sale on the bulletin board of the MG Enthusiasts' website. In fact there were two – one for auction in Texas and another in New Hampshire, on the eastern seaboard of the US. I enquired about both – the former was a left-hand drive, the latter right-hand. I contacted Paul Barrow, the Y Type Webmaster, to ask him if he had an e-mail address for the seller, which he did and kindly forwarded.

I began to get interested and contacted David Pelham, the MGCC Y Type Register's Publicity Officer, whom I knew well and had imported no less than three Ys into the country. He read through an e-mail that I was intending to send to the vendor and added a few more queries that I ought to raise.

This was early September and, within a week, several e-mails had been exchanged between Bill Burnham (the owner) and me. It really seemed a good buy; I phoned him a couple of



Strapping the YT down in readiness for the journey to its new home.



The freshly imported YT complete with white wall tyres.

to start negotiations! I talked things through with Scott and asked him if it was possible for him to look the YT over for me. He said he was travelling through to Boston and, as Bill had been happy for me to get anyone to examine the car, I gave both of them contact numbers.

A few days later I received a report from Scott saying it was a good buy; the only downside was that the upholstery was in poor condition, which I already knew about. This convinced me and I phoned him, thanked him for his time and asked him what I owed him. He replied that the pleasure was all his and he refused to take anything – so, so kind.

Paying for the car

This is the most difficult stage and needs care and attention. The choice that I made was based entirely on trust and it worked well. However, I think that I was very lucky and I would recommend taking great care in ensuring that you are entirely happy with the product you are purchasing. The key point is that both the vendor and the buyer are fully satisfied with the process to be used.

It would be worthwhile seeking the advice of your shipper and/or bank to agree on the best method of payment. In my case I confirmed with the vendor that I was a novice to this form of transaction and he admitted that it was new to him. What we agreed was that I would pay a deposit (in this case \$1,000) with two further payments. The first upon receipt of a satisfactory vehicle report and the balance prior to the car being picked up by the carrier.

However, in the US, vehicle owners do not have a log book as we do but a *Title* to the car. This includes the name and address of the owner and, when it is sold, the same details for the purchaser and the price paid. In New Hampshire, the state requires the full balance to be paid to the vendor prior to his surrender of Title. This is managed by the shipper and his agents in the US.

The maxim of 'buyers beware' underpins the whole process of purchase and it is absolutely crucial that you are entirely at ease with this.

Useful lessons – prior to export

Arrange for the vendor to take photographs of the car, particularly the bodywork as this is where scrapes and marks to the paintwork can occur. Although the shipper's agent always checks the car prior to lifting onto the low loader and provides a copy, you should ask the seller to forward this.

times and we agreed a price. This is when the fun started and this is the process that I followed.

Talk to someone in the know

Both David and Paul had imported cars, though in Paul's case from the UK to the US. They had some very useful knowledge about shipping companies and what stages that were needed to go through. David mentioned Kingstown Shipping, who are based in Hull. Mark Cowley and Steve Shores (from KS) provided an excellent service and at the outset gave me an indication of the costs of importing the car. They provide this service worldwide and have had considerable experience and expertise in knowing how the system works. What is of interest is that the travel estimates are based on the local currency, and, in the US, these were remarkably competitive. Kingstown Shipping clarified the type of shipping arrangements that they could offer. There are two options: 'Roll-on-Roll-off' (RoRo) which is the same arrangement as on a Cross Channel Ferry or Container Storage. The former is cheaper but the latter is more secure and is double the cost. If you were purchasing a non-runner then it would certainly have to be containerised. Mark from KS pointed out that providing

you were insured then for a runner RoRo would be quite acceptable as containers have been known to be dropped!

Classic cars which have an 'historic interest' and that includes rarity, ownership by someone famous, a racing pedigree and so on, may be subject to a reduced level of import tax of around 5%. This is a matter that you have to take up with the Club Historian or Registrar of the model that you are intending to import. Therefore, you need to become a member of the club appropriate to the car you are interested in, if you are not already. More of this later.

Buying unseen

However good photographs are they can never give you a full picture. The obvious answer is to get someone to look at the car and preferably someone who is knowledgeable about the model you are intending to purchase. The Registers are the starting point and it is amazing just how helpful individuals are. Paul mentioned his namesake, Scott Barrow (not related), who lives in Massachusetts, and gave me his e-mail address and phone number. I was reminded that New England is five hours behind BST, a point to remember as dragging someone out of bed at 2.30 in the morning is probably not the best way



My new acquisition all registered and ready for life in the UK.

I sent the photographs to the insurance company in case of a claim being necessary, together with the agent's report.

Ensure that any spares, tools or equipment that you have discussed and established will be with the car are in fact provided – an e-mail outlining and gently reminding the seller is valuable. Keep a back-up of all your correspondence so that if there is a problem then you can clarify exactly what both parties have agreed. The whole process from the shippers confirming a collection date to arrival at the port of entry into the UK takes around six to seven weeks.

Importing the car

It is worthwhile contacting the DVLA (see details below) who provide a handy leaflet INF 106 'How to import your vehicle into Great Britain (GB)'. This is a good synopsis of the process.

I found that getting your car legally into the country is exciting. Though I doubt that seasoned importers would share that emotion! I was informed by Kingstown Shipping that the car was due to be collected from the vendor on October 1 2009, four weeks after I had started the ball rolling. During that time I had been busy with the shippers and HM Revenue and Customs.

If you can prove that the car that you are importing is of historic interest, you can claim reduce VAT. Like it or not, any object imported is liable to VAT.

'Historic interest' – could include rarity, racing pedigree, associations with an important event of or individual – and is best dealt with by the car club that you belong to. If they are able to verify your claim then arrange for them to forward you a letter, on headed paper, confirming this and written by the appropriate individual – the Registrar for example.

Whilst this will confirm your claim, it does not necessarily follow that Revenue and Customs will necessarily allow you a reduction in import taxes and VAT. Therefore, any supporting information that you can provide will help your case. You will need to complete a C 384 form *Private Motor Vehicles – Application for release on payment of Customs Duty and VAT as applicable* – and forward it to your shippers. This seeks the particulars of the vehicle, its condition and which country you are obtaining it from.

The key form that allows you to set out the case for reduced tax is known as *Binding Tariff Information (BTI)*. You can obtain it by contacting HM Revenue & Customs in Southend-on-Sea. Their address is: *HMRC Customs & International, Tariff Classification Service, 10th Floor North East, Alexander House, 21 Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS99 1AA. Tel: 01702 366077 Fax: 01702 367342 E-mail: tariff.classification@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk, website: www.hmrc.gov.uk*

I was very impressed with the response of C&E who turned my application round in three working days. This should be forwarded to your shippers, so that they can factor this into their dealings with Customs.

It is wise, though not mandatory, to get insurance cover for your new purchase. There are specialist companies that deal with this and your importers may recommend a firm. You need to cover the vehicle from day of collection through to your collection from the port. I would suggest, and it may be asked for, that you forward some photographs of the car.

Arrival at port of entry

Your shippers will inform you of the anticipated date of arrival of the ship and the berth location. However, I would recommend that you curb your enthusiasm as much will depend on the weather. I was given November 14 as the ETA, but this was pushed back by three days.

Collecting your car

Your car cannot be picked up and driven home on the public highway as it will not be licensed. Arrange for a carrier or use your own trailer. Ensure, where you are going, that you have the necessary ID and the details of where you are collecting the car from, which will be supplied by your shipper. It sounds obvious but often folk forget these simple requirements.



Should you be importing a car that has been previously registered in the UK your Registrar ought to be able to find the details for you and the original registration number. His letter confirming date of production and former number plate may enable you to 'get back' the old number. However, if it has been re-allocated then you will only get an age-related registration. You will also need to state which DVLA centre you wish to attend. I would recommend that you send the information recorded delivery.

You will be sent a date and time to take your car to your appointed DVLA centre and your personal documents – passport and utility bill – will be returned with your appointment details.

It is important to stress that you will need to take the car on a trailer or low loader, as the appointment letter makes it quite clear that the vehicle to be registered 'must not have any wheels touching the public highway'.

When you report to the office they will have an appointed area for the car to be viewed. It's nothing sinister, just a cross-hatched area with up to six parking spaces. The DVLA officer will look at the vehicle and confirm that the details that you have submitted are correct and ask to see the chassis/MIN plate.

Within 5–10 working days you will receive your registration mark, a tax disc, your MOT Certificate, which will have been changed to include the new registration, and your insurance certificate.

You will be issued a **V948** 'Number Plate Authorisation Certificate', which you will need to take to your number plate supplier. The supplier will need this together with original documents – a driving licence / or passport and a utilities bill to prove your identity and your address.

It's as simple as that!

Jerry Birkbeck

You will have your first chance to examine and drive your purchase when you are handed the keys. I am not sure what the process is as far as opening a container is concerned but I guess it is likely to be more protracted than a simple roll-on-roll-off. Take a camera with you and check the vehicle over to confirm if any damage has occurred. The date and time on the photographs is important to show where and when the information was recorded.

The Title Documents will be sent to you by the shippers following the vehicle passing through customs.

Getting the car registered

Talk to your current vehicle insurance company prior to collecting the vehicle. They will ask for the chassis/MIN number and a valuation. It is sensible to take this cover out with effect from a couple of days prior to collection from the port. Alternatively, arrange for the shipping insurance to extend their cover from the port to your home. You will still need regular vehicle insurance of course!

Prior to getting your vehicle on the road you will need to have an MOT. It is important to ensure that your car is taken to the Test Station on a low loader or trailer as you cannot drive the vehicle on a public highway, even if it is insured.

You will need to take your chassis/VIN number with you as if the car has never been registered in the UK before

there will of course be no knowledge of it. It's important that there is consistency between the numbers used. Apparently the Americans use any means of vehicle identification, which may or may not be the chassis number. On the YT they had chosen the engine number! So ensure that when you provide the information to the Tester that he does in fact have your chassis number. Don't worry that there is no registration mark as this will be added by DVLA.

Telephone or e-mail DVLA and request an 'import pack' which will include the forms that you need. You can get an 'import pack' from: www.direct.gov.uk/motoringforms or from DVLA Customer Enquiries by phoning 0870 240 0010.

You will need to complete application form **V55/5**, this is in a generic format. It looks a little overwhelming at first sight (though the **V335/5** leaflet that comes with it will help) and I phoned the DVLA in Swansea who were very helpful and 'fast tracked' me through the 50+ questionnaire. Send this together with the following, which have to be originals:

- a valid passport to confirm your name
- a utilities bill to confirm your address
- a valid Certificate of Insurance
- Customs Form C&E 386
- a valid MOT Certificate
- a letter from your Register confirming the vehicle's date of production
- a cheque for £55.

Acknowledgements:

*Paul Barrow; Scott Barrow; David Pelham, Public Relations Officer MGCC Y Type Register; Mark Cowley, Kingston Shipping Limited; Ferry Berth, King George Dock, Hull HU9 5PS
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