



“I looked like a learner driver on a Sunday morning industrial estate, flailing away like I’d never even been in a car before”

To celebrate his new status as a French citizen, **Ian Moore** treats himself to a left-hand drive car

For over two years now I’ve managed, through almost choking self-discipline, to avoid mentioning the ‘B’ word. But certain things have occurred, because of ‘B’, that can no longer go unsaid.

The whole *chambres d’hôtes* venture for one, the need to be properly in the French tax system the driving force there. Tax, and the concern over my regular France–UK commute. But more than that, for two years now I have sought to become French.

I don’t mean just donning a beret, eschewing car indicators or urinating brazenly at the roadside – but proper French. A French citizen. The reasons for this are many and compelling and all ‘B’ related, but now, after two years of being pummelled daily by bureaucracy and circumstance I have emerged, bloodied and dazed certainly, but French. And with that comes a number of responsibilities.

Not giving up baguettes for starters. The French, ahem we French, are currently applying for the baguette to have World Heritage Status. We take the thing that seriously. But chomping three times daily on world heritage for 14 years has taken its waistline toll, so I’m reluctantly betraying my new motherland and giving them up. In compensation, I’ve booked tickets for a famous French singer’s concert this month. It’s about give and take.

I’ve also bought a left-hand drive car. At great expense I might add too. Second-hand cars in the UK are much, much cheaper than their French equivalents and the temptation to import therefore is strong, but no, not this time. It’s left-hand drive for me, though the transition hasn’t



been a smooth one. Maybe this sums up the difference between the English and the French better than any other metaphor, but by and large, parking in the UK is an ordered process. The British see the white lines of a parking space and take a certain national pride in putting their vehicles equidistant between the two. There are exceptions to this obviously, and the outcry that greets these hooligans serves as a reminder of how seriously car parking is taken in Britain.

The French though, see the white lines of a parking space not even as a rough guide, but more the symbols of oppression and power and therefore something not just to be ignored, but to be completely trampled upon. I have stood in supermarket car parks often, sometimes in admiration, regarding a car that on the surface may look like it’s been abandoned but has been so carefully placed as to be in four spaces at once.

Anyway, I had always assumed it was the inbred sense of French rebellion, but I was wrong. There’s me, for years now, raising a militant fist salute to the car parking French radicals and it turns out that it’s less to do with insurgence, and more to do with simple spatial awareness.

Left-hand drive cars just don’t work. Most people are right-handed and the brain simply cannot calculate how to park a left-hand drive car. Well mine can’t anyway.

First day out, and there was no one else in the car park, but I just could not get the thing straight. I looked like a learner driver on a Sunday morning industrial estate, flailing away like I’d never even been in a car before.

I went at it with some gusto but even after half an hour of trying, the car was still going in at an odd angle, comically so. Reverse, forward, at speed, slowly with stealth, absolutely nothing made my attempts any straighter. Eventually, I just got out of the car and took a picture of it on my phone.

“What are you doing?” My wife asked, not unreasonably.

“I’m going to use it as the picture on my French *carte d’identité*,” I said. “I mean, look at it...” I was almost bursting with national pride as it covered two spaces. “I’m more French than I thought.” **LF**

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