

Motorbike Red Tape 101

So there you were in the pub when you decided that you want to feel the wind in your hair once more. You have watched “Easy Rider” , had the mid life crisis , and now you want to have the vintage bike you used to have as a kid because your dad was right. Secretly you have visions of it being the babe magnet it used to be and you want to turn the wife into a “18 year old Biker Chic” complete with tight leathers.

Perfectly normal male reaction. But the world has moved on and your budget is limited. There is really 2 ways of approaching this. You have lots of money, buy a restored fully working road legal bike with paperwork that just needs insuring. And your away. Or more likely you are going to have to find it in a barn somewhere or buy it on Ebay. What you buy is going to need spare parts, likely a respray and the engine has seized either through use or by being stood for so long, and don't even mention the tyres or cables. While you have dreams of restoring in your shed to its former glory, chances are with shortage of spares and professional costs being high, you are going to have to make compromises. If your lucky you can find a manual on line or a club dedicated to that make. But you have one hurdle to cross first and that the “Red Tape” known as the DVLA. I always feel that's its good to get the paperwork in order first as often you have to jump through hoops and it can be time consuming.

When we bought the Peugeot Bima, it was advertised as being made in 1960 but it had no paperwork with it. Its also had 2 engines. So the truth was we could not be sure of exactly what we had really purchased. Our problems were compounded by the fact that the bike was originally imported from France in the days before the present NOVA system was introduced. French mopeds of the period rarely needed number plates and tax is paid based on the frame number to the local French authority in the district ridden. In April 2013 the UK Government introduced the NOVA system (Notification of Vehicle Arrival) this puts the onus upon the purchaser to notify the HMRC within 10 days of the arrival of any vehicle into the UK and to ensure that any duty is paid or risk a hefty fine. This does not apply to vehicles under 49cc. Our Bima is 48.5cc and therefore did not need the hassle of notification but in most cases any foreign vehicle will need a Nova declaration. But we will come back to this point later.

The DVLA are not experts on historic vehicles identification and therefore they accept the opinion of selected authorised groups who are more knowledgeable. This is in the form of a document known as a v65c and accepted by the DVLA as proof of identification. In the case of the Bima we contacted the East Anglia Cyclemotor Club (EACC) but other clubs are authorised to identify vehicles. They required a form to be filled by a 3rd party not related to us verifying our details along with clear photographs of the frame number and engine number and a full picture of the vehicle. It should be remembered that the frame number never changes where as engines do. It is that frame number cross referenced against existing records that is being certified and proof of the bikes age.

We should remember that the DVLA has the final word in all respects of issuing vehicle registrations. They made a decision irrespective of Customs and Excise stating "All Foreign vehicles will need a valid Nova Declaration before a registration document will be issued". Any argument with them is pointless as any foreign application without a NOVA or uk application without a supporting V65c will be returned. So with our Bima we found ourselves in the catch 22 situation of not having to make a NOVA legally but having to make one anyway to satisfy a 3rd party. The problem then was going pointlessly through the NOVA system.

Armed with your NOVA number and having identified the machine with your v65c you are finally able to fill in the V5c document to apply for an "Age Related" number plate which will be allocated by the DVLA in about 4 weeks if you have filled the form in correctly and they can find the NOVA number on the system. For this there is a cost. So on top of the outlay for your pride and joy you are now looking at about £100 to make it legal.

Whats the Hassle my bike came with a Number Plate

So having read the above your probably laughing because your pride and joy arrived with an original number plate attached on either the front or back or in a box of bits. Your confident you can get a replacement log book for £25 and not go through any of the hassle above. Well you might be lucky. But once again our friends at the DVLA have worked their magic. Some point in the early 1970s as the system was going computerised there was a requirement placed on all owners to ensure their vehicle were registered (and pay tax). On a

designated cut off date all allocated number plates not registered were cancelled and no longer valid. It made the new computerised DVLA wonderful but many machines hidden in barns and sheds or laid up in gardens no longer wanted or if the owner did not want to pay tax on the vehicle for whatever reason allowed the registration to elapse. So just because it has a number plate does not mean you are safe. Then you are forced to re-register the machine as above. The DVLA do try and allow the original number to be retained if they can but it is possible under the age-related scheme that your cherished original number has been reallocated. When we bought the Mobylette AV48 we got a number plate and a quick check online and a phone call verified the machines number was still current and retained. We were lucky but don't think a number plate is proof of anything. It might just come with the box of bits you bought.

Back Light Blues

The boys in blue regularly frequent biker meets. At the bike rally at Cassington you can bet that will just coincide with a Thames Valley initiative on road safety and they are going to set up speed cameras and pull over bikers. Im all in favour of road safety and conforming to the law. While most of the officers are good sports there are a few over zealous ones and minor things will always be found. Many owners will tell you how they have been pulled for having show plates or non legal sizes of number plates. Normally vintage runs don't get much at attention but we heard of this one with an imported French mobylette. All continental vintage bulbs are yellow and under French law the light must only illuminate enough to be seen in the dark. So they tend to be simple domes or red squares. But under UK law the back light is required to also illuminate the rear number plate as well. You are torn between keeping it original or conforming to the law. Most vintage MOT inspectors turn a blind eye but they don't have to and of course over a certain age they don't require MOT tests anyway. Imagine the surprise of a friend of mine to be booked for having an illegal back light. We tend to change these lights to UK Wipac lights for this reason and of course we should remember that all UK vehicles on the road need a legal number plate. Under recent changes you need to present a log book and have the makers code or postcode on the plate. On the internet are a number of manufactures who produce "Show plates" which are fine for vintage Showgrounds but not for the road and the police are now clamping down on those on the road. Its just something to think about.

My Bike does not need an MOT and is exempt from Road Tax

Now we could all go on about Brexit and Europe and the good and the bad. Remain or leave is a personal choice but if your bike was built before 1960 you did not need to have an MOT test or pay for tax. From May 2018 to bring us inline with Europe this date was extended to 1978. Which is great news. Many bikers will tell you that you don't need tax as its exempt but this is a myth. You still have to tax your vehicle as normal but you don't have to pay the duty. That is different to a lot of peoples perception. To tax it you still need a DVLA log book and the red tape and you still have to apply for tax. So it's a red tape exercise again. A lot of bikers fall fowl of this when stopped by the police trot out the no tax myth but the reality is a fine for having no valid tax. Just because your bike cant pass the modern MOT emissions standard and the modern test does not mean it's a bad idea to put it in. An independent check may spot something that could save your life. I wonder now many bikers are riding vintage machines with cracked tyres barely legal because they are odd sizes or hard to find?

Final Thoughts

Restoring motorcycle is a pleasurable hobby and rewarding. Sometimes full of frustrations and hurdles. But there is nothing better than riding that restored machine at shows and telling people about the trials you have had getting it back on the road or riding it on organised rallies. But we must remember they are old ladies and tend to break down and fail from time to time. The brakes are not as good and they don't have indicators in many cases, and die up hills. But the law is the law. Safety to ourselves and others is paramount. This is a light-hearted look at some of the problems we have encountered and the quirks that we have come across. Hopefully you wont fall into some of the holes we have. The law changes all the time so check with the DVLA or join an association who can guide you. But most of all enjoy and have fun.