

Buying a new car? Vehicle tax rates have changed



Vehicle tax rates are changing for cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA from today. These changes do not affect cars registered before 1 April 2017 – but their rate of tax has increased today in line with the Retail Price Index.

If you're thinking about buying a new car or motorhome, read on because this will affect you.

For the last 12 months we've been working hard to make sure that you get the facts about the changes before you buy a new car.

We've been busy communicating this message on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) since last November and have updated GOV.UK information about the changes. Our press office has been issuing press releases to national, local and specialist publications.

In January, we launched a digital advertising campaign to new car buyers with simple messages driving people to GOV.UK to read the facts. As a result of all our combined digital communications, almost 700,000 people have visited the information.

We've been [blogging regularly](#), as well as putting messages on our printed literature. Over at our contact centre we have an automated telephone service to quickly answer your questions. This has been really effective so far with almost all of the calls relating to the changes using the service.

We've also been working closely with our stakeholders in the motor industry to help them get ready behind the scenes for the new rates. This includes updating the existing first registration service, creating a specially designed toolkit to use with their customers and running webinars in January

and February.

So if you are thinking about buying a new car or motorhome from today, you're probably aware of the changes by now. But make sure you have a look at [new vehicle tax rates](#) information to see how it affects you.

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[If Britain needs a new party, we'll only find out after Brexit](#)

In this week's *New Statesman*, [George Eaton's cover piece](#) is a call to arms for 'liberal Britain' to find some vehicle – any vehicle – for opposing Theresa May's Conservatives whilst Jeremy Corbyn is busy irradiating Labour.

Remarkably, he revealed that "a close ally" (often, but not always, code for "the man himself") of George Osborne has been going around pitching the idea:

"A week after the EU referendum, the Liberal Democrat leader, Tim Farron, was taken by surprise when a close ally of George Osborne approached him and suggested the creation of a new centrist party called "the Democrats" (the then chancellor had already pitched the idea to Labour MPs)."

Further down we find Anna Soubry (quelle surprise...) basically saying that she's on board as soon as someone can get it off the ground: "If it could somehow be the voice of a moderate, sensible, forward-thinking, visionary middle way, with open minds – actually things which I've believed in all my life – better get on with it."

Such talk will surely gladden the hearts of men such as Stephen Daisley, who has [in the Spectator called](#) for a caucus of 25 or so patriotic Europhiles to resign the Conservative whip and give the legislature control of the Brexit process (although they have yet to muster to many rebels on even a single vote).

Nonetheless the challenges to setting up a new party are formidable. Set aside the hurdles erected by our electoral system – they've been overcome before, as any Liberal will tell you. Ask instead: what would a new party actually be for? Who would it serve?

British party names usually denote a philosophy, like 'Conservative' and 'Liberal', or a sectional interest such as 'Labour' or 'Scottish National'. 'Democrats' basically describes everybody, and so doesn't really describe

anybody.

Such a bland name speaks to the fact that it's far from clear what the various bits of the ancien régime are supposed to unite around. They may have all found themselves on the same side during the Brexit referendum, but that doesn't mean that there aren't real differences between them. Liberalism can only claim so much political territory – to supplant Labour a new party would have to reach out left or right, and that's where the problems kick in.

An obvious answer to the sectional interest point might be 'the 48 per cent', but it can't be stressed enough that this just [isn't a bloc of coherent interests](#) on which to build anything so permanent as a party, let alone a wholesale realignment of the party system. Nor are the 52 per cent. If you doubt it, just see how [the latest NatCen research](#) is exploding the myth of a united and outraged 'Remain Scotland'.

The referendum seems to have set something in train, certainly, but apart from a period of Tory hegemony it's not yet clear what that is. As Tony Blair once put it: "The Kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again." But they may not settle soon enough for Osborne and co.

It seems probable that any new party, should one emerge, would be much better for coalescing once the fault-lines of post-Brexit British politics are clear, rather than being cobbled together on the fly to conduct a Europhile rearguard action during the negotiations. A successful new party must be forward-looking; one created to 'hold the Government to account on Brexit' would be fundamentally nostalgic.

There's certainly space for a larger liberal party, now that the liberals who until recently ran all three of the major parties may need to settle for just the one. But actual liberalism is very rarely a mass-market product and it's not clear why that tendency will result in anything other than a somewhat restored Liberal Democrats.

But you never know. British politics seems to divide itself up into eras defined by the lifespan of whichever party isn't the Conservatives, punctuated by periods of Tory dominance as their opponents find their new shape. We see that pattern between the fall of the Liberals and the rise of Labour, and between the last 'Old Labour' administration and the rise of New Labour.

No party rules forever, and it's more likely than not that when this Conservative administration does leave office it will bequeath it to a new-look opposition of one sort or another. But just as you couldn't see the Attlee Government from the 20s, or the Blair one from the 80s, we probably can't see that new movement from here.

Public gaining acceptance of organ donation



People pay tribute to organ donors at a public cemetery in Shanghai on Friday. The event was held to remember organ donors and promote public understanding of organ donation. [Photo/China Daily]

Nearly 170,000 people had registered as organ donors in China by the end of last year, an event to remember organ donors in China was told on Friday in Shanghai.

The ceremony was also meant to promote public understanding of organ donation.

In March 2010, the Red Cross Society of China and the former Ministry of Health started the organ donation system, encouraging citizens to voluntarily donate organs after their death as a way to extend another's life.

Remarkable achievements have been made over the past seven years, and now the system has become a major channel for organ donation, Wang Ping, vice-president and secretary-general of the society, said at the event.

Officials said public understanding of organ donations and support has significantly improved over the years, and the number of people registering for organ donation is also on the rise. So far, about three in every 1 million people have registered.

A total of 4,080 organ donations were made in 2016, with 11,296 organs being donated, an increase of 47.5 percent over 2015.

Also last year, 104,538 people registered to become an organ donor, three times more than in 2015.

The event also noted that the development of the organ donation system is still in its initial stages, and varies in different areas. In the future, more policies will be made to support the system's long-term development.

At the event, Huang Jiefu, chairman of the China National Organ Donation and Transplantation Committee, was recognized for his special contribution to China's organ donation work.

[90-year-old woman survives 4 days with 6 duck eggs](#)



90-year-old woman survives 4 days with 6 duck eggs. [Photo/Video printscreen]

Before being found and rescued by local police, a 90-year-old woman in Chongqing survived in the forest for four days, equipped with only six duck eggs. The woman, surnamed Zhang, became disoriented after losing her way home.

Zhang lives in Nanbin, Chongqing municipality in southwestern China. She became lost while returning home from a fair held in a nearby county on March 20.

Her son, Ma Zewu, reported his mother missing on the evening of the second day of her absence, after finding no trace of the elderly Zhang. Upon receiving the alert, local police organized a rescue team, but failed to find Zhang immediately due to heavy rain.

On March 23, police used security camera footage to spot Zhang near a factory. Tracing her trail, they narrowed her possible location to a 2-kilometer stretch of road, between the factory and a bee farm. In the end, Zhang was found in a bush in the evening.

Though she was weak, her mind was still clear. She was later sent to the hospital.

According to Zhang, she lost her way after changing routes to avoid a vicious dog.

Despite spending three nights in the forest, she said the six duck eggs helped her to make it through. While Zhang is hardly the first person to survive in the wild when equipped with food and drink, it is something of a miracle for a 90-year-old to do so for four days, according to Zhang's doctor.

Cyberspace haunts ancient tomb rituals



Tomb sweeping in Qinghua Festival [File Photo]

QR codes are part of daily life for most people. Short for "quick response" code, they are machine-readable labels that allow us to add new WeChat friends, pay bills with smartphones and order food in restaurants, among a myriad of other easy functions.

They have become so ubiquitous that some people joke QR codes will one day replace tombstones, allowing people to scan a code by mobile phone and access the names and achievements of ancestors that used to be engraved in granite.

Actually, it's no longer a laughing matter.

The annual Qingming Festival, or traditional tomb-sweeping day, falls on Tuesday this year, and QR codes are appearing in graveyards across China.

The matrix bar codes come in various forms, such as stickers, bronze plates or plastic tags. They cost up to 3,000 yuan (US\$436). Scanning a code leads to a memorial page honoring the dead.

Many graveyard companies operate online memorial pages, where one can also give virtual flowers, burn virtual candles and buy virtual gifts for the dead, either for free or for a few cents. So far, the new trend hasn't really caught on much.

Some companies are also offering live streaming services for those who cannot get to cemeteries for Qingming this year. Staff clean the tombstones, bow to them and place flowers on graves for absent clients who can watch the ritual via live streaming video on mobile phone apps.

Needless to say, all this digital intrusion into what is an old and revered festival in China is stirring up a bit of controversy. Some Chinese netizens say that the new practices are fitting substitutes for those who cannot make it to graveyards and that they promote a cleaner environment because less traditional paper money is burned at tombs. Others say online tomb-sweeping services are crass and lack respect.

"The QR code service really ties in well with a more ecological approach to funerals because it is much smaller than the typical tombstone," the Zhejiang Province Funeral Association said at a recent press conference, recommending the service.

The association staff said they are actively promoting alternative funeral services, like burying the ashes of loved ones under trees or in flower beds, or throwing them onto waterways or into a brisk wind.

Government subsidies of around 1,500 yuan are given to those who chose not to buy a plot of land to bury their dead. Land is becoming scarce.

All the newly fangled ideas don't sit well with traditional views about how the dead should be treated. Many people are afraid that alternative funeral services will mark them as disrespectful toward elders who have always been afforded a peaceful plot for their souls to rest in peace.

Many also worry that the absence of a large tombstone will rob them of a focal point for paying their respects and burning paper money to honor ancestors.

"The bronze QR code tag is small enough to fit in a flower bed, so people will know where their relatives are buried," the funeral association staff explained. "We hope it will help some people consider alternative funeral options."

China has traditionally been an agricultural economy, where the land long played a significant role in the lives and deaths of people. For many Chinese, the first thing to do after making some money is to return to their hometowns and build new houses.

Most still believe that the soul needs a piece of land to rest for eternity and for the others to visit and pay tribute.

"We Chinese always say, 'You find peace after you are buried under the soil'," says Peter Kuang, a 36-year-old software engineer who has been doing

tomb-sweeping services every April for the past 10 years.

“I am not superstitious enough to believe that there is an afterlife or that the soul really needs a plot of land, but I don’t think it’s necessary to challenge old traditions that others in my family still believe in.”

He adds, “A piece of land and a tombstone are still considered necessities. Being there in person is also crucial. You go there, you burn your paper money, you kneel down and you say your prayers – not because ancestors really hear you but because you are showing them respect.

“We have lost so many traditions,” Kuang concludes. “The tomb-sweeping ceremony is almost the last sacred rite left. It feels ridiculous to just click a button and count that as respect paid.”

Indeed, modern development and the digital revolution have led many people to rue the passing of old traditions in Chinese holidays, especially Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Nowadays, many people think of the Mid-Autumn Festival only in terms of eating mooncakes and of Spring Festival as just a weeklong break to go on a holiday.

Qingming Festival valiantly clings to old traditions, like burning fake money and other paper gifts for the dead. But with pollution becoming a hot-button issue, some cities have banned such gift-burning at graveyards and are urging residents to forsake their cars to avoid huge traffic jams.

In Shanghai alone, it is estimated that more than 8 million people will travel to suburban graveyards over the three-day Qingming holiday.

“It has become almost as bad as Spring Festival,” says Zhang Yuan, a 27-year-old migrant from Anhui Province, who works in Shanghai. “It’s harder to get back home when there are only three days for Qingming. I would prefer not to go, but my parents worry that we will be criticized by other relatives if I don’t show up.”

When he suggested that he might participate in tomb-sweeping via digital technology, his parents were outraged.

“They were furious,” he says. “They would have killed me via mobile phone if that were possible.”