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Traffic and vehicles

BRIEFING

Unit overview

- alpha** describing vehicles, vehicle registration plates, and the international radiotelephony alphabet
- beta** vehicle registration, makes of vehicles, Interpol's stolen vehicle database, and giving directions,
- Charlie** car parts, vehicle checks, vehicle problems, explaining traffic offences, rules and regulations, stopping a vehicle
- delta** driving licences, driving offences and penalties, checking documents

alpha

This section introduces the students to the type of language they will need to describe different types of vehicles, vehicle colours and registration plates. Being able to describe and identify vehicles is a skill relevant to many areas of law enforcement, so this language should have a direct, practical value for the majority of students. The vocabulary for describing 'real' modern car colours is taught with useful moderating adjectives in order that students when describing a blue vehicle, for example, will be able to distinguish between, for example, a light blue, a dark blue or a metallic blue car.

Vehicle registration plates are plastic or metal identification plates attached to vehicles. Most governments around the world require registration plates to be fixed to both the front and the back of the vehicle with the exception of motorbikes which may only have a plate at the back of the vehicle. The colour and style of the plates will vary depending on where the vehicle is registered and under what category (e.g. private, commercial, etc.). Registration plates allow law enforcers to check information kept on national databases which describes the vehicle: the make, model, colour, year of manufacture, engine size, etc, as well as the Vehicle identification Number (VIN), also known as the chassis number, and the name and address of the vehicle's registered owner. In some countries the vehicle registration plate stays with the car when it is sold, in other countries, the registration plate can be moved from one car to another. This means that whenever you buy a car, you

always have to register it again (not just change the name of the owner) even if the car has had a previous owner.

The international radio telephony alphabet is widely used internationally by the armed forces in civil aviation, for example in communication between air traffic controllers to pilots, and by the UK police. Being able to use it confidently, for example, for talking about car registration plates, will be a useful international communication skill for students, whatever their background.

Most law enforcers who go out on patrol get involved with traffic and vehicles in some way so this unit has a very wide range of applications. However, many countries do also have specialized traffic and / or motorway police, for example, the Police Traffic Department in the UK who are not only concerned with catching speeding motorists but also with vehicle crashes, accidents involving pedestrians, checking the safety standard of road vehicles, escorting over-dimensional or dangerous loads, pursuing suspects and road safety education. The exact responsibilities of traffic police units vary greatly. For example, in Germany where there is dense traffic but no speed limits on many of the country's motorways many states have a special Autobahnpolizei section in addition to the usual traffic police, the Verkehrspolizei. The officers in these units are specialists in traffic law and are required to be expert drivers.

bravo

Car theft is one of the most common crimes in the richer countries of the world. According to the FBI, in the USA a car is stolen on average every 26.4 seconds with the likelihood of having a car stolen being greater in cities than in more rural areas.

There are two main kinds of car theft: firstly, theft for car parts, in which the car is broken up and its parts reused. The parts are often sent by container ship to African countries and so these stolen vehicles are rarely recovered. The second reason cars are stolen is for resale. This can further be divided into two categories: easily re-sellable generic cars, such as the Toyotas and Volkswagens, and luxury cars, such as Mercedes and Audis.

Especially in Europe, with its relatively small countries and large amount of borders, vehicle theft and resale, especially of luxury vehicles, is a highly organized and efficient process: for example, a car that is stolen in Italy will be taken to a workshop in that country where its

identity will be change. It will get a new registration plate, false registration documents and the VIN (chassis) number will be manually changed. The car is then driven to another country by a courier who delivers it to the next section of the gang.

In this section, students will read about Interpol's automated search facility stolen motor vehicle (ASF-SMV) database. Additionally, in some European police authorities in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Austria, have set up a joint European vehicle identification database in cooperation with certain car manufacturers to combat car theft. Many countries have their own national database of stolen cars. In Italy this is even made available to the public via the internet so that someone wanting to buy a second-hand car can check to see whether it is stolen before he or she buys it.

charlie

Law enforcement officers are very likely to have to deal with traffic and/or vehicle offences committed by tourists at some point in their career, so being able to explain to foreign drivers what they can't or mustn't do or that they have to pay a fine could easily be one of the main ways in which the students need to use English.

Apart from speeding, jumping red traffic lights and illegal parking, the most common driving offences worldwide are dangerous or aggressive driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, and (where illegal) using a mobile phone while driving.

However, what is considered an offence in one country may not be in another, so it is necessary for motorists to find out about regulations before they drive abroad as law enforcers do not consider ignorance as an adequate excuse for breaking the law. In many Western European countries (including France, Spain and Italy), for example, it is a legal requirement to keep a reflector vest in your vehicle for the driver to wear for increased visibility in case of an accident or any other reason which might necessitate him or her to leave the vehicle at night. Police are allowed to fine motorists who do not carry them in their cars, even if they have driven from a country where this is not yet a legal requirement. Most countries require that motorcyclists must wear helmets and car drivers must wear seatbelts, but the laws regarding passengers and seatbelts vary from country to country, as does the use of mobile phones while driving, or having alcohol in the car (even if you are not drinking it). The age at which a child may sit in the front seat of a car also varies from country to country: in the UK children are allowed to sit normally in the front of cars if they use the correct restraints, whereas in France children under the age of 10 cannot be seated in the front seat, unless they have a special rear-facing seat.

delta

Most countries around the world require drivers to pass an official test before they are issued with a driving licence permitting them to drive certain (restricted) types of vehicles. In Europe, people are usually able to drive from the age of 17 or 18. In some US states, the legal age is as young as 14. The credit-card-style plastic driving licence with photo (similar to the US driving license) is now the standard within Europe; however some drivers still hold older, non-standard paper licences. The issuing bodies vary between countries. In the UK, licences are issued by central issuing body based in Swansea in Wales, whereas in other countries licences are issued (and taken away) by local authorities. Many countries operate a points system. For each offence committed, a certain amount of points are added to the driving licence. If a specified number of points is reached, the driver may lose his driving licence for a set period of time. Again, penalties and fines for similar offences vary greatly from country to country as does the method of payment. On-the-spot fines are common in some parts of the world; others favour payment by cheque or bank transfer.