



European Consumer Centre France

Young drivers in France

Papers

- ◆ **The minimum age for driving in France is 18 years.** Children must be at least 10 years old to sit in the front seat. Under 10 years, they must be seated in the rear and, as in the front, use a seat belt, or an approved child seat.
- ◆ **It's compulsory to carry your driving licence, car registration papers ("carte grise") and insurance documents.** EU driving licences or International Driving Licences are accepted for driving in France.

Speed limits

- ◆ On the French roads generally your speed is limited to:
 - 50 km/h in built-up areas
 - 90 km/h outside built-up areas
 - 130 km/h on highways, 110 km/h when raining
 - 110 km/h on expressways, 100 km/h when raining

Penalties due to speeding have been reduced but only when the offence is up to 20 km/h over the limit. However, the penalty has increased for speeding from 50 km/h over the posted limit (for more details, see the table below). These new penalties have come into force since 8th December 2004.

Offences	Fines		
	reduced*	on the spot fine	increased**
< 20km/h outside built-up areas	€ 45	€ 68	€ 180
< 20km/h in built-up areas	€ 90	€ 135	€ 375
≥ 20 km/h and < 50 km/h	€ 90	€ 135	€ 375
≥ 50 km/h	determined by a judge. € 1500 maximum		

* when the fine is paid within 3 days

** when the fine is paid after 30 days

- ◆ Please note! In France, there are **fixed radar traffic detectors** all over the country which photograph vehicles not complying with the speed limits. The positions of these radar controls are indicated with this sign. A list of their locations is available on the site of the Ministry of Transport:

www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr



◆ For German drivers: an agreement has just been concluded between France and Germany. **German motorists not respecting the speed limits in France will receive the notification of their fine sent directly to their home.**

◆ **If you exceed the speed limit, you may be fined from 45 € to 1500 €.** Be aware also that, depending on the speed, your licence as well as your vehicle can be confiscated (for speeds equal to, or exceeding 50 km/h over the limit).

◆ **If you wish to object to a fine:** contact the Police court located in the area of the Police or Gendarmerie which reported the infringement.

Traffic rules

◆ Priority to traffic coming from the right applies, unless there is a road marking indicating that you have priority.

Safety

◆ **Safety belts are compulsory for all the occupants of the vehicle** that is to say for both front- and rear-seat passengers. There must be one safety belt per passenger. In the event of a police check, there will be a fine of €150 for anyone not wearing a safety belt.

◆ **Mobile telephones may not be used while driving,** unless you are using a "hands free" system. In the case of a police check, you may be fined up to 35 € and two points on your licence for an infringement.

◆ **From the 1st of July 2008 on, car drivers in France will have to have in their car a warning triangle and a reflecting jacket permitting a better visibility in case of breakdown or accident.**

The non respect of this obligation can be fined with 90 €. As from the beginning of September, this measure might also be applicable to cyclists who will have to wear it permanently when cycling by night outside agglomerations.

However, the decree making this rule mandatory hasn't been published yet.

◆ French authorities have developed a campaign to encourage drivers to **use their dipped head lights outside built-up areas even in the daytime. This is not a compulsory measure.** For the moment it is just a test since it was proved that having the lights on was a way of preventing accidents.

Alcohol and drugs

◆ France has very strict rules concerning the drink driving; **the legal blood alcohol limit is 50 g/l of blood.** If during a police check, your level of alcohol is found at between 0,5 and 0,8 g, you may have to pay a fine of up to 135 € and may be endorsed 6 points of your driving licence.

◆ **If the level exceeds 0,8g/l, the punishment incurred is 2 years in prison, a fine of 4.500 €, and your licence endorsed with 6 points.**

◆ **The Police also have the power to search for drugs.** The smallest trace of illegal drugs can result in punishment. If banned narcotics are detected, the penalty could include 2 years in prison, 4.500 € fine and 6 points.

◆ **If the blood alcohol level exceeds the legal limit, and the presence of drugs is detected, the penalty could include 3 years in prison and €9.000 fine.**

◆ Note: If you are resident in France, and driving on an EU or foreign licence, and points need to be added, you will have to exchange your licence for a French one.

Traffic accident

◆ **If you are involved in an accident in France,** your insurance should cover any injury or damage that you may cause to another party and may include cover of any legal costs that may be incurred. Please check details with your insurer before travelling to France.

◆ **Your agent should provide you with a green card** ("carte verte") which must be displayed in the car windscreen. This serves as proof of valid liability insurance and is accepted throughout Europe in countries which are signatories of the Green Card System. It is not mandatory to have a Green Card when travelling within the EU if you bring your certificate of insurance. However, a Green Card can serve as easily recognisable proof of third party insurance.

◆ **The insurance agent will also provide an accident report sheet** - the "constat amiable d'accident" - which should always be kept in the car.

◆ **In the event of an accident with no serious injuries, and if both drivers agree on the facts, there is no obligation to contact the police,** however all parties must still complete the accident report in order to benefit from insurance.

Toll Roads

◆ A highway "autoroute" on which tolls are charged is indicated usually by a blue sign "péage". Green signs indicate "routes nationales" on which no toll is charged. Generally, no toll is charged on sections of the "autoroute" in the neighbourhood of larger cities.

◆ When arriving at the toll, follow the green crosses or CB sign. The orange-coloured sign "t" indicates that the way is reserved for vehicles having paid in advance to the highway company. Vehicles such as Lorries, caravans or campers have to take the right-hand side of the toll; toll booths situated on the left are reserved for cars only.



◆ When you enter an "autoroute", at the first toll station, you will take a ticket from the gate machine. The price is based on the distance travelled and category of the vehicle (car, camper, caravan, lorry ...etc). Automatic toll machines, as well as toll stations with personnel, take credit cards or coins and give change; and, if required, receipts. Visa and MasterCard are among the cards accepted at the toll stations. You do not have to sign a receipt when you use a credit card. Note, however, cards which rely on direct computer communication with a bank, such as maestro or electron, are not accepted.

Petrol/Fuel

◆ **Generally fuel is more expensive along the "autoroutes" than at supermarkets.**

FR	EN	DE
Sans plomb 95 ou 98	Unleaded gasoline 95 or 98	Bleifreies Benzin 95 oder 98
Gazoile GPL	Diesel fuel LPG	Diesel Kraftstoff LPG

◆ **Major credit cards are accepted.** Generally you can pay at a booth, or by inserting your card into the machine near the pumps but please be aware that especially the small 24h petrol stations do not accept all foreign credit or debit cards at the automatic machine at the pump.

◆ **The "constat amiable" is to be filled out at the scene of the accident;** it is purely a statement of facts not an establishment of blame. But do not sign any paperwork if you do not understand it, it can be used as evidence. Information required includes: place of accident, names of witnesses, names of drivers with driver licence details, and details of the insurers. If more than two cars are involved, a separate "constat" form should be completed with each party. Try to be as precise as possible in the description of the accident.

◆ Both parties then sign the completed document. **If a driver refuses to sign the form, make a note of the registration number and take the details of any witnesses or police officers.**

◆ Once the form has been successfully filled in, you have five days to return it to your insurer. If neither driver has a "constat" form available then the report can be done by letter.

◆ **If it is a serious accident, and you need to be hospitalised, the authorities will deal with the paperwork on your behalf.** If you are not hospitalised, but feel the consequences of a shock etc. get a medical certificate stating your injuries.

◆ **In case of an accident in France, as a general rule, French law will apply to determine responsibilities and compensation of undergone damages.**

◆ If you are not responsible for the accident, the directive 2000 / 26 / EC of May 16, 2000 allows you to demand a compensation in your country of place of residence.

◆ **Your insurer, or yourself, should contact the representative of the opposite insurance company in your country.** Every European insurer indeed has to appoint a competent correspondent in the other member states. You should receive an offer of compensation in the three months of the demand. If you have difficulties to find the coordinates of this interlocutor, you should contact the body created for that purpose in your country.

◆ **If the accident was caused by an uninsured or unidentifiable car,** you are entitled under Community law to compensation from the motor vehicle guarantee fund of your country.

Parking in France

◆ **Pay-meters:** Parking-meters ("horodateurs") are common throughout France. In larger cities and especially in Paris, these parking-meters are increasingly often operated

with special credit cards available in French "tabacs" (specially licensed tobacconists indicated by a distinctive red shop sign). Otherwise be sure to have enough currency! Unless indicated otherwise, parking is free of charge from 7pm to 9am and on weekends, public holidays, and during the whole of August. Smaller towns often offer free parking from noon to 1.30pm. The tariff and time limit are written on the machine.

- ◆ Important: illegally parked vehicles may be wheel-clamped or towed.

Car rental

- ◆ If you rent a vehicle, you should know that it is always the paper contract which you sign in the agency when picking up the car that prevails. This is especially true for prior bookings made via Internet. Therefore you should always verify that the final contract includes all the options which you prior selected on Internet. Do not hesitate to take time to read again the contract, to ask questions on the coverage of insurances signed etc.

- ◆ Have a close look at the car and report immediately any damage, bump etc. you discover.

- ◆ Another advice: ask for the opening hours of the agency, to be able to return the car in person. If you leave the vehicle on the parking of the company outside the opening hours, you can be held responsible for damages caused to the vehicle.

If you, as a foreign consumer, are feeling mistreated by a French professional, the European Consumer Centres (ECCs) will be pleased to help you to find an amicable settlement of the dispute. You can find further information and a complete list of all ECCs under: http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/redress/ecc_network/index_en.htm

ECC France (French/English/German)
+49 7851/991 480 as well as 0820 200 999 for calls
from France for only 9 Cents per minute

