

POVs

in Japan

Whether you purchase a Japanese-specification vehicle and drive it for the duration of your tour or buy an American-specification vehicle and have it shipped back, owning a car while stationed in Japan will cost you.

For starters, due to the strict and costly environmental/emission control standards imposed by the government of Japan, service members cannot ship a Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) manufactured after March 31, 1976 unless they obtain a special waiver from the Commander U.S. Forces Japan or component commanders (embargo doesn't apply to motorcycles).

And since permission isn't granted to the majority of service members PCSing to Japan, service members often purchase a car once they arrive in the country.

However, the option of buying a vehicle can get complicated because specifying a car to meet either Japanese or American environmental/emission control standards will be very costly, if not in fact cost prohibitive.

Furthermore, there are certain disadvantages to owning an American-specification car in Japan. The roads tend to be much smaller than American roads, the Japanese drive on the left-hand side of the road, and parking is limited. In addition, maintenance and repair parts for vehicles made outside of Japan are very expensive.

So, we'll start with the simplest option: purchasing a Japanese vehicle and reselling it on the local Japanese market when the tour is complete. This will save the service member from having to convert the automobile to meet either Japanese or U.S. standards.

Tim Daniels, General Sales Mgr., Exchange New Car Sales, the company that operates the new car sales program through the Exchange, advises service members to purchase a used car for their tour in Japan because "It can cost as much as \$3,000 to \$5,000 to modify [a new American-made vehicle] to meet Japanese standards."

A good, reliable used car will cost approximately \$1,000 to \$5,000 from a local dealer. Additional costs will include Japanese and U.S. insurance, taxes, registration, base inspections, license plate fees, etc., all of which can total as much as \$1,000.

The second option to service members is to purchase a Japanese car while in Japan, but instead of reselling it before leaving Japan, have the car modified to U.S. specifications upon its arrival in the U.S.

However, according to the U.S. Customs Service, nearly all vehicles purchased overseas will require modification that "may be so extensive and costly that it may be impractical and even impossible to achieve such compliance." In fact, nonconforming vehicles "must be brought into compliance, exported, or destroyed."

If you choose this option, ask the local Transportation Officer for a copy of Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC) message 261400Z FEB 99.

Also, keep in mind that:

- The service member is required to have a "valid" contract with an Import Independent Commercial Importer/Registered Importer (RI) to bring the vehicle into compliance with U.S. standards to ship a non-conforming POV to CONUS. (See page 8 of the MTMC "Shipping Your POV" booklet (found on the MTMC web address below).
- POVs cannot be converted to U.S. standards outside CONUS. Only those ICI/RIs authorized by the Department of Transportation and Environmental Protection Agency are permitted to perform this work and certify its compliance with U.S. laws.
- Any transportation costs for the movement of non-conforming POVs which exceed those applicable for the movement of conforming POVs under the entitlement for POVs are the responsibility of the service member. Service members should inquire about this at the transportation office of their applicable service.



Photo provided by Exchange New Car Sales

Car photos below provided by Volvo



A third and more expensive option is to purchase an American-specification car from a local Japanese dealer or a franchised dealer, then have it delivered or commercially shipped to you in Japan and converted to meet Japanese standards for the duration of the tour. When the tour is over, the service member may then restore the car to its original U.S.-specification condition for shipment back to the U.S.

Volvo can deliver a new U.S.-specification Volvo to service members in Japan, but the additional cost to use the car in Japan is approximately \$4,500, said a Volvo representative. The majority of Volvo's customers preorder their new U.S.-specification Volvo for delivery to their next duty station in either the U.S. or Europe.

Furthermore, the U.S. Customs Service warns consumers to be skeptical of claims by a foreign dealer that a vehicle meets U.S. safety, bumper and emission standards or can readily be brought into compliance. They further state that it is "unlikely that a vehicle obtained abroad meets all relevant standards."

The following steps should be taken before purchasing the American-specification car:

First of all, in order to ship a vehicle back to the States on the government's dime, the service member must first have an entitlement on his PCS orders to do so. Otherwise, the responsibility of the shipment back lies with the service member.

Secondly, the service member is responsible for determining if the vehicle will meet Department of Transportation (DOT) safety, bumper and theft prevention standards and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) emission requirements.

To be sure your car will pass U.S. emissions requirements and safety standards, the following items must be present:

- A Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), usually located inside the driver's side door, under the hood on the metal firewall behind the engine, or on the windshield. If the 17-digit VIN begins with a 1 or 4, the vehicle was built in America.
- A plate indicating that it meets DOT standards. This is usually located on the inside of the driver's door.
- A sticker certifying that the vehicle meets EPA standards. This should be on the radiator, firewall or in the engine compartment.

Purchasing a vehicle overseas and having it shipped to the U.S. does not relieve you from paying all taxes on it. It is true that you can ship a vehicle back to the States under the Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs), and incur no duty or shipping taxes. However, you will still be responsible for state sales tax (varies by state) when you register the car. Your legal office or local Department of Motor Vehicles can provide more information regarding this.

Although a lot of customers purchase American-specification cars in Japan, Daniels said his DoD-sanctioned company "cannot and will not ship [new American-made vehicles] locally."

Instead, companies such as Exchange New Car Sales and Volvo, provide another option. You can purchase your vehicle in advance while you are in Japan for pick up at a local U.S. dealership when you return to the States. This affords you a price guarantee (the car can be ordered up to 15 months in advance) and extra consumer protection, Daniels added.

For more information on shipping your POV to and from Japan, consult your sponsor, transportation office or the Military Traffic Management Command's website at <http://baileys-mtmcwww.army.mil/property/default.htm>.

