

Riddle over whether Clooney paid **£100,000** duty on his fiancée's **£415,000** diamond engagement ring when she flew into Heathrow

Anything to declare, George?



MYSTERY: George Clooney's fiancée Amal Alamuddin arrives at Heathrow Airport from Los Angeles and, inset, her £415,000 engagement ring

By Charlotte Griffiths

GEORGE Clooney's engagement could be a taxing affair, with the actor possibly having to cough up £100,000 to the British taxman for Amal Alamuddin's £415,000 engagement ring.

Amal was seen wearing the seven-carat emerald-cut ring as she went through customs at Heathrow on May 13.

However, travellers such as human rights lawyer Amal, 36, who arrive in Britain from a non-EU country, have to pay customs duty and import VAT on all goods that exceed the stated allowances,

And duty for a diamond ring like Amal's would be 2.5% of the total value, more than £10,000, plus import VAT of 20% of its value.

That would leave George owing the taxman close to £94,000.

Infuriatingly for the couple, if George had bought the ring in America, and brought it into Britain himself before giving it to Amal, no duties would be payable – a potentially costly mistake by the actor and director.

Last night, his spokesman refused to disclose whether Amal stopped to pay the tax at the airport or whether she was planning to settle up later, saying: 'I have no idea of the validity of your story and I



WHIRLWIND ROMANCE: George Clooney and Amal Alamuddin in April

have no intention of even addressing it.' Amal also wouldn't be drawn on the subject.

A revenue spokesman said: 'Bringing in goods bought from outside the EU, whether in person or through the post, could attract customs duty or import VAT. Customers should check the current

limits on the HMRC website.'

It's not the first time celebrities have seemingly broken the rules surrounding the import of valuables to Britain.

Victoria Beckham was caught out in 1998 when she was asked to pay a £3,000 bill after failing to declare the £50,000 engagement

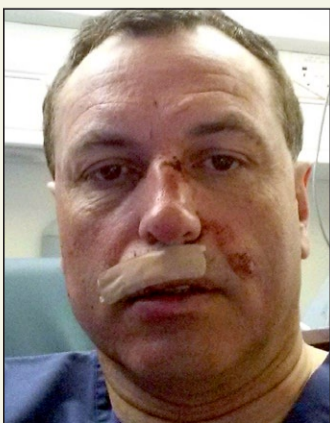
ring she bought for David while in the US. She paid up but had the money refunded to her after an apparent breach of confidentiality.

Cherie Blair had her own run-in with customs in 2003 when she became the subject of an inquiry into pearls worth thousands of

pounds brought back from a trip to China.

Amal had flown into Heathrow Airport from LA where she had been celebrating her engagement with friends, including Cindy Crawford.

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CLOSE CALL: Paul Earley

Lucky escape for GAA pundit in cycle crash

By Eamon Donoghue

GAA pundit Paul Earley was rushed to hospital after cycling into the back of a parked van during a charity cycle race this week.

The 49-year-old Sky Sports presenter had his head down as he climbed a hill on his bike and did not notice one of the support vans pull over onto the hard shoulder in front of him.

Mr Earley was taking part in a Race the Rás fundraising event on Thursday and was travelling at around 20kph when the accident happened. He suffered several injuries including compressed discs and a deep cut through his lip. He also had to undergo immediate plastic surgery for facial injuries.

He credits a new cycle helmet he bought last

weekend for €100 with saving his life.

Mr Earley told his Facebook friends on Friday his 'injuries include compressed discs resulting in severe neck pain, broken tooth and deep cut through my lip and mouth.

'After (Thursday) I can't overstate the importance of getting a good quality properly fitted helmet,' he wrote.

The former TV3 and Setanta sports presenter was in the fourth stage of the charity event which he has helped run for four years.

The former Roscommon All-Star footballer

said: 'I was in the hard shoulder with my head down going up the hill, just looking three or four yards ahead as you do climbing a hill.

'Our support van pulled in on the hard shoulder in front of me and I crashed head first in to it.

'But thankfully the helmet saved me and there was no spinal or bone damage.'

The Race the Rás event also attracted other former GAA stars such as RTÉ pundits Tomás Ó Sé and Eamon O'Hara.

Last week Louth Fine Gael TD Peter Fitzpatrick suffered a broken hip in a charity cycling accident. He also credited his helmet with preventing far more serious injuries.