Advice from The Motor Ombudsman – easy checks to avoid MoT test failure

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The Motor Ombudsman tells us…

(All words and photographs from The Motor Ombudsman).

- March is typically one of the busiest months for MOTs, as cars bought at the time of the first new vehicle registration of the year, come due for the annual test
- Before putting their vehicle on the ramp, drivers are being urged to keep an eye out for five defects that are often simple to spot, and quick to repair, spanning tyres to wiper blades
- Some pre-MOT fixes can take mere minutes, and cost just a few pounds

London, 17 March 2026 With an estimated 2.5 million MOTs set to take place across the UK in March[1] – typically one of the busiest months of the year for the legally-required annual check, drivers are being urged by a motoring expert to not overlook five defects that are

often simple to spot, and quick and cost effective to fix before their vehicle goes on the ramp for the mandatory test.

The latest guidance comes as many of the nation's repairers report that a growing number of motorists may struggle to afford routine maintenance this year against a backdrop of strained household budgets, resulting in easily preventable faults turning into more costly repairs and heavy fines if left to linger.

To help drivers prepare ahead of the MOT, which applies to cars once they reach three years of age, The Motor Ombudsman is highlighting five key areas that shouldn't be ignored:

1. Tyres in poor condition
   Tyres are often one of the biggest causes of MOT failures. Bulges, cuts, or tears, as well as sidewall damage and a tread depth below the legal limit of 1.6mm, are all frowned upon in the eyes of testers, meaning a fail is on the cards.

   It's not just the MOT that's at risk, because driving on illegal tyres can also cost motorists up to £2,500 per wheel, and add three points to a licence if their vehicle is found to have defective rubber.

- Typical time and cost to fix by a garage: From 30 minutes / Around £60 and upwards per new tyre

2. A daytime running light not working
   Daytime running lights (DRLs) found on the front of a car are another valuable safety feature, as they're designed to make a vehicle stand out more during daylight hours. Cars fitted with DRLs from 1st March 2018 are the ones testers will look out for. If one of the two lamps isn't working, and the light is not white in colour, this will be classed as a reason to fail the MOT. In fact, cars will also forfeit a pass for any other headlight or rear bulbs that have blown.

- Typical time and cost to fix by a garage: Up to around 30 minutes / from about £60 for an

investigation into a faulty daytime running light

3. Damaged front wiper blades
   Wiper blades performing at their very best are vital to keeping the windscreen clean and unobstructed. If testers see blades that are missing or not clearing the screen that a driver cannot see out of safely, this will be classed as a major defect.

- Typical time and cost to replace by a garage: Around two minutes / From about £30 per pair of blades

4. Cracks and chips in the front windscreen
   Windscreens are divided into distinct 'Zones', and Zone 'A' is one of the most critical, as this is the area directly in the driver's line of sight. If damage or a chip larger than just a centimetre is found in this section of the front screen, the chance of a pass quickly disappears, and a repair and retest will be needed to see the car be classed as roadworthy. A damaged windscreen can equally see owners incur a penalty of £2,500 and three points due to poor visibility.

- Typical time and cost to fix by a garage: Around 45 minutes and about £60 for a chip repair, extending to in the region of 90 minutes / from about £250 for a full windscreen replacement

5. A faulty windscreen washer system
   A quick look under the bonnet before going for an MOT can quickly reveal whether the windscreen washer reservoir (often filled with a blue-coloured liquid) is topped up – essential for clearing away dirt and grime. Washer systems not working or providing sufficient fluid to clear the windscreen, will result in an instant failure, and can also lead to a fine of £100 and three points if caught on the road.

- Typical time and cost to top up windscreen washer fluid: Around five minutes and from £2
- Typical time and cost to fix by a garage: Around one hour, and from about £130 for a new windscreen washer pump

"Spending just a few minutes walking around the car in advance of an MOT can help drivers quickly identify if something doesn't look quite right", says Rebecca Pullan, owner at The

Motor Ombudsman-accredited Carmaster Garage and MOT station.

Nipping any issues in the bud is vital to preventing simple problems from becoming more serious and costly later on, and it can be the difference between a straightforward pass and an unexpected MOT failure, meaning unforeseen time off the road for drivers."

To view vehicle retailers that are committed to The Motor Ombudsman's Motor Industry Code of Practice for Service and Repair, visit www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org/Business-Finder.

[1] Source: Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA)

