



WHEELS-ALIVE!

www.wheels-alive.co.uk

Complaints made to The Motor Ombudsman about used car buys hold steady in 2024

Published: February 18, 2025

Author:

Online version:

<https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/complaints-made-to-the-motor-ombudsman-about-used-car-buys-hold-steady-in-2024/>



WHEELS-ALIVE!

www.wheels-alive.co.uk



A new Insight Report from The Motor Ombudsman shows that just under half (40%) of disputes submitted by customers were about a secondhand vehicle bought from a retailer.

The Motor Ombudsman tells us...

(Photograph and all words from The Motor Ombudsman).

A new Insight Report from The Motor Ombudsman has shown that just under half (40%) of disputes submitted by consumers in 2024, were about a secondhand vehicle purchase from a retailer

- Petrol and diesel models were the source of 91% of used car complaints, with electric



vehicles

accounting for only 4% of new cases, reflecting the current profile of the UK's used car parc

- The biggest driver of secondhand car disputes was in relation to the failure of an engine in its

entirety or one or more components (58%). This was followed by dissatisfaction with the level

of customer service provided by a business (17%)

- To bring their dispute to a close with a retailer, nearly a third (29%) of consumers were ideally

seeking an outright rejection of their vehicle as a preferred outcome

London, 18 February 2025:

A new Insight Report from The Motor Ombudsman has shown that disputes

in relation to buying a used car from a retailer, accounted for just under half (40%) of all the new cases

opened by customers in 2024. This figure mirrors the trend seen by the Ombudsman's independent and

impartial Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service during the previous two calendar years (i.e. 41% in

2023, and 38% in 2022 respectively).

Furthermore, despite the volume of motoring complaints rising on an annual basis, driven most likely by

the increased cost-of-living pressures on consumers, a higher number of used cars changing hands, and

greater awareness of The Motor Ombudsman as a free-of-charge point of assistance for motorists,

disputes in relation to secondhand cars bought from a business, continued to represent less than 1% of all

used vehicle transactions in the UK last year. This points to an overall high rate of



satisfaction amongst
car owners with their purchase.

With the used car parc continuing to be dominated by petrol and diesel-powered vehicles, which currently have the lion's share of the market, as used EV demand gathers pace, 91% of complaints made by consumers about their vehicle were in relation to these models, followed by a hybrid (5%), and a pure battery electric variant (4%).

From around 16,300 used car disputes logged about a business in 2024 under The Motor Ombudsman's Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)-approved Vehicle Sales Code, which covers the sale of both new and older cars, 58% of these stemmed from an issue with a vehicle's engine – either due to an individual component, or because of a total failure of the powertrain, thereby needing replacement in its entirety. Examples of concerns reported by car owners, included snapping timing chains, blown turbos, coolant leaks, and spark plug failures.

The second most prominent reason for consumers to register their unresolved dispute with The Motor Ombudsman, according to the latest data, was the level of customer service delivered by a retailer during the car buying experience (17%). Buyers expressed their dissatisfaction due to factors, such as businesses not honouring agreements made at the time of sale, missing documentation at the point of



handover, and vehicle histories differing to what had been initially disclosed by the seller.

The vehicle's bodywork and fixtures (7%) were also cast into the spotlight by customers during the past year - the third biggest driver of complaints in relation to a used car. Instances which were brought to the fore, were namely tailgates leaking water into the boot area, blistering and flaking paintwork, and faulty safety latches on bonnets causing a driver hazard. Concerns regarding the transmission (4%), and electrical systems (3%), completed the top five most prominent reasons for consumers to bring a complaint about a used car to The Motor Ombudsman last year.

When it came to their ideal resolution to draw their dispute to a close, nearly a third (29%) saw an outright rejection of the car, for example in exchange for an equivalent model at no cost to themselves, as a fair outcome relative to what had happened. Over a quarter (26%) of consumers were preferably looking for a full refund for the price paid for the vehicle, whilst 18% were seeking a free-of-charge repair to rectify the problems highlighted.

To help mitigate the chance of a dispute occurring, used car buyers can take the following recommended actions as part of their research, and ahead of signing on the dotted line. They can:

- Shop around at reputable Motor Ombudsman-accredited retailers listed on the body's popular online Garage Finder (TheMotorOmbudsman.org/Garage-Finder);



- Refer to The Motor Ombudsman's Used Car Buying Guide, which offers key considerations when buying a secondhand vehicle
 - Take a look at a car's MOT history, servicing record, invoices detailing repairs, paperwork and vehicle health checks, The Motor Ombudsman's recalls database, as well as other online services to verify that there is no outstanding finance on the vehicle, and that it has not been involved in an accident; and
 - Visit retailers to test drive vehicles of interest, to listen out for any squeaks and rattles, and to assess from a practical perspective whether the vehicle meets their needs and lifestyle.
- Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, said: "Used cars can prove a cost-effective gateway to car ownership, as an alternative to ordering from new. However, for the comparatively lower price, this readily brings a degree of usage and wear from previous ownership. As our latest report has shown, the majority of issues stem from what can be found under the bonnet. This, however, may not immediately be evident to buyers, coupled with the fact that any prior issues may not have been disclosed during the purchase process."

Bill added: "Consumers doing thorough research and due diligence to reduce the chance of detriment later on down the road is paramount, to find a trustworthy retailer, and because used cars offer differing levels of history and condition. What's more, if something should go wrong after getting the keys, it is important



that consumers give the seller the opportunity to put things right in the first instance, before turning to an impartial third party, such as The Motor Ombudsman, for help bringing a complaint to a satisfactory resolution for both the customer and the business.”

The Motor Ombudsman’s Insight Report on used car purchase disputes can be viewed at [useful-information/industry-insights](#).

To view The Motor Ombudsman’s Motor Industry Code of Practice for Vehicle Sales, visit [consumers/our-codes-of-practice/vehicle-sales-code](#).

About The Motor Ombudsman

The Motor Ombudsman is the independent and impartial Ombudsman dedicated solely to the

automotive sector, and self-regulates the UK’s motor industry through its comprehensive Chartered

Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)-approved Codes of Practice. Thousands of businesses, including

vehicle manufacturers, warranty product providers, franchised dealers and independent garages, are

accredited to one or more of the Codes, which drive even higher standards of work and service, and

give consumers added protection, peace of mind and trust during the vehicle purchase and ownership experience.

For more information on The Motor Ombudsman, visit www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org.