Dodgy diesel cars – or dodgy information? A little light is shed…

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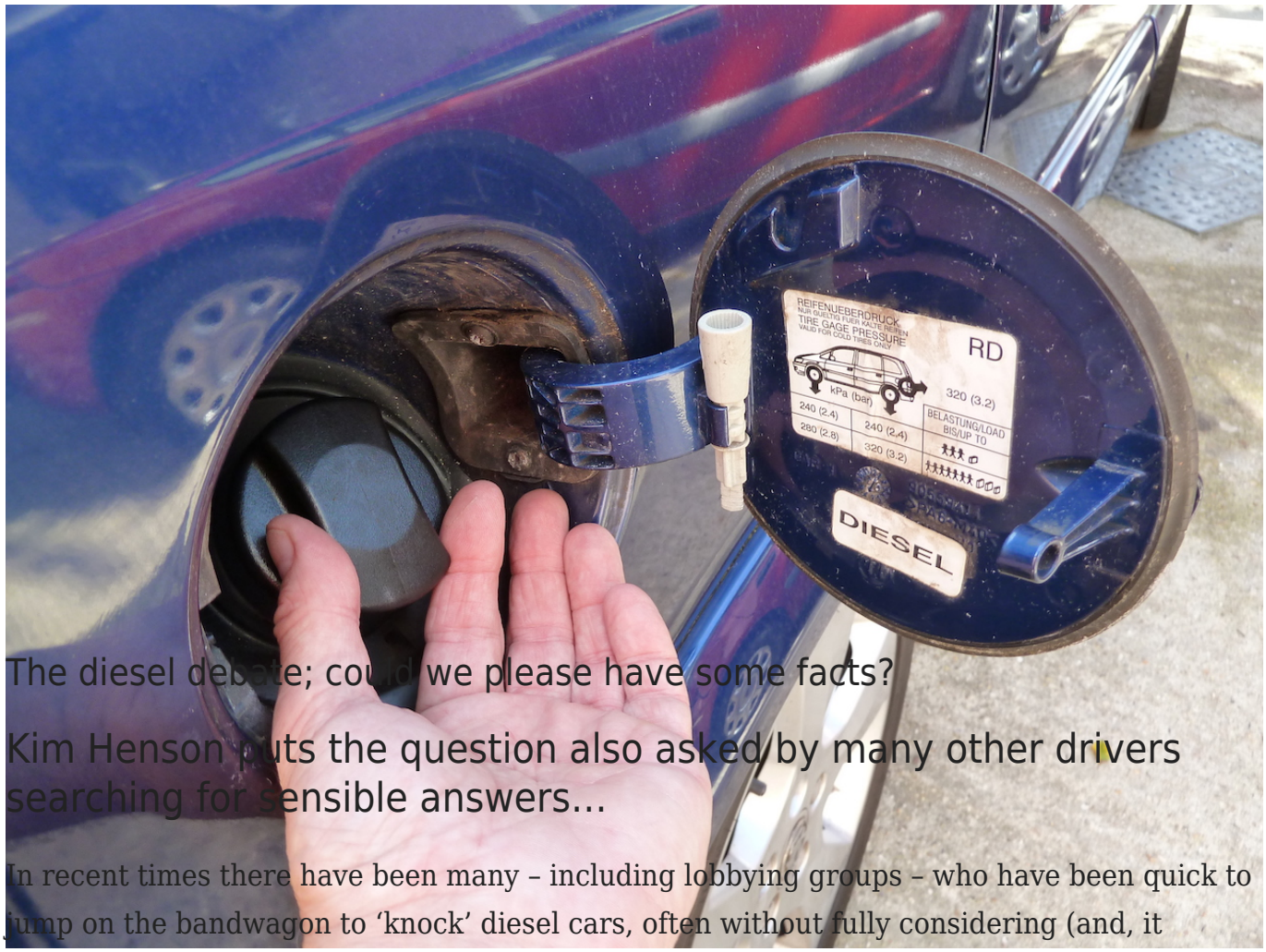

The diesel debate; could we please have some facts?

Kim Henson puts the question also asked by many other drivers searching for sensible answers…

In recent times there have been many – including lobbying groups – who have been quick to jump on the bandwagon to 'knock' diesel cars, often without fully considering (and, it seems, perhaps/probably not even taking the trouble to find out…) the facts.

Yes, it is true that diesel emissions (Nitrogen Oxides or NOx/particulates) can cause serious health problems in people, and of course this is undesirable. It is also true that pollution

levels in large towns/cities can be especially awful, and injurious to humans and animals. On a personal note my own son lives and works in London and the air quality there is very often 'terrible'… on those days he can be badly affected by it. So he, I and most people I suspect, would be delighted for this situation to be improved.

However, the blame is often put entirely on diesel-powered cars plus, by implication, and in many respects unfairly, on the drivers who use them…

We have covered this subject before on 'Wheels-Alive' (please click HERE to read the item we published on 1st March 2017), and, as indicated previously, there is much more to the debate than the simple, blanket 'Ban diesel cars' cries we hear so often.

Well, this morning (10th April 2017) the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) has issued a statement putting their side of the story. Admittedly this is a trade body representing the interests of the motor industry (so of course their overall aim is to sell more vehicles!). Therefore, as with all information put out by such bodies, it is a good idea for us motoring writers and members of the public alike to treat the contents with some caution if not scepticism.

However, here at Wheels-Alive we feel that some interesting, well-considered and useful points have been made in the SMMT's statement, with many of them not brought to light or even mentioned in the 'Just ban diesel cars' approach so often covered in the press, TV, radio and social media.

So, to help you judge for yourselves, here is what the SMMT says…

SOME FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DIESEL

This March, British car buyers registered almost a quarter of a million new diesel cars – an all-time high. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) reveals why they are so popular – and the important role they can play in helping improve air quality in towns and cities, and in tackling climate change.

1. In 2016, a record 1.3 million new diesel cars were registered in the UK, up 0.6% on the previous year – a trend that's continuing in 2017. In March, more businesses and consumers chose a new diesel car than in any other month in history, with almost a quarter of a million leaving showrooms. (Note: According to SMMT figures, 1,285,160 new diesel cars were registered in 2016; 244,263 new diesel cars were registered in March 2017).
2. Diesel is critical to reducing CO2 emissions, which in turn is tackling climate change – diesel cars emit, on average, 20% lower CO2 than petrol equivalents. In fact, since 2002, diesel cars have saved 3.5 million tonnes of CO2 from going into the atmosphere. (Note: This information was included in the SMMT New Car CO2 report 2017).
3. Almost one in every two new cars registered in the UK is a diesel, with buyers valuing their high performance and low fuel consumption. On average, diesels use 20% less fuel than like for like petrol models, and with diesel drivers typically covering 60% more miles, lower fuel bills are essential.
4. More than 99% of the UK's 4.4 million commercial vehicles are powered by diesel and they transport people, essential goods and our emergency services over 61 billion miles every year. Without them, life would be much harder.
5. Advanced diesel technology has virtually eliminated emissions of particulate matter, with 99% of these soot particulates captured by special filters fitted to all new diesel cars since 2011. Around half of diesels on the road now boast a DPF.
6. The latest Euro 6 vehicles are the cleanest in history – and light years away from their older counterparts. As well as special filters, they also feature clever technology that converts most of the NOx from the engine into harmless nitrogen and water before it reaches the exhaust.
7. Euro 6 technology works. Real world tests using a London bus route show a 95% drop in NOx compared with previous generation Euro 5 buses. In fact, if every older bus operating in the capital were replaced with a Euro 6 version, total NOx emissions in London would fall by 7.5%. (Note: This Euro 6 information comes from Transport for London Bus Fleet Audit, January 2017; TfL Air Quality Consultation, October 2016. Transport Emissions Roadmap, September 2014. Source: Transport for London).
8. The latest Euro 6 cars are classed as low emission for the purposes of the London Ultra Low Emission Zone due to come into force in 2019, meaning drivers of these vehicles will be free

to enter the zone without charge.

9. Contrary to recent reports, diesel cars are not the main source of urban NOx. In London, gas heating of homes and offices is the biggest contributor, responsible for 16%. While road transport as a whole is responsible for around half of London's NOx, diesel cars produce just 11%, although concentrations will vary at different times depending on congestion. Keeping traffic moving is the key to keeping emissions low.
10. In September this year, a new official EU-wide emissions testing system will come into force. This will involve, for the first time, on-road testing to better reflect the many and varied conditions involved in 'real-world' driving such as speed, congestion, road conditions and driving style. This will be the world's toughest-ever emissions standard.
Mike Hawes, SMMT Chief Executive, said, "Euro 6 diesel cars on sale today are the cleanest in history. Not only have they drastically reduced or banished particulates, sulphur and carbon monoxide but they also emit vastly lower NOx than their older counterparts – a fact recognised by London in their exemption from the Ultra Low Emission Zone that will come into force in 2019. Some recent reports have failed to differentiate between these much cleaner cars and vehicles of the past. This is unfair and dismissive of progress made. In addition to their important contribution to improving air quality, diesel cars are also a key part of action to tackle climate change while allowing millions of people, particularly those who regularly travel long distances, to do so as affordably as possible."

VERDICT

The diesel debate will, of course, continue, but at Wheels-Alive we feel that it's good to hear and consider ALL sides of the story. (Particularly interesting for many is item 9 in the SMMT statement, "Contrary to recent reports, diesel cars are not the main source of urban NOx"…).