Drivers cutting back on vital vehicle maintenance/repairs, to their cost, says The Motor Ombudsman

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Author:

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Ignoring essential work on vehicles can result in safety compromises and huge costs in the long run.

The Motor Ombudsman tells us…

• Motor Ombudsman poll shows nearly seven in ten UK garages are set to see car owners

skipping essential repairs this year in a bid to save money

• Ignoring warning lights can turn into ‘wallet frights’, as delaying fixes can lead to higher bills

and compromise safety

• Around 40% of repairers expect customers to abandon cars this year should work prove too

costly

London, 06 January 2026. Motorists could unknowingly be putting their own safety and finances at risk by

delaying essential repairs to their cars. At a time when consumers are once again facing rising bills as the

new year begins, the latest annual poll of car garages and workshops across the UK by The Motor

Ombudsman – an expert on all things motoring, has revealed that nearly seven in ten (68%) expect

drivers to skip doing vital work on their vehicles as a quick way to save money. This is a slight rise from

the figures of 61% seen in 2025, and 53% in 2024, laying bare the continued strain on

household budgets.

However, delaying repairs, no matter how small, can lead to more costly bills later down the line. For

example, putting off having a timing belt replaced – a vital component for ensuring the smooth running of

an engine, can turn a typical bill of around £600 into a worst-case scenario of complete engine failure,

which carries an average bill of £5,400 – a cost nine times greater than what it should have done.

Furthermore, ignoring squealing or grinding noises from the brakes, and not changing the pads (typically

£266 for a set of two per wheel), may not only escalate into needing more of the braking system replaced,

such as discs and calipers – carrying a combined £700 bill a wheel, but postponing such an important

safety fix equally poses a danger to life, as stopping distances can be vastly reduced, especially in bad

weather.

Similarly, shunning changing tyres in poor condition and with tread lower than the legal minimum of

1.6mm – costing on average £94 per corner, can impact handling and safety, and result in a

fine of £2,500

and three points on a driving licence for every tyre that's sub-standard.

Rebecca Pullan, owner of The Motor Ombudsman-accredited Carmaster Garage, explained: "While it may

be tempting to keep driving and leave repairs until a major fault becomes obvious, by then the problem

could be prohibitively expensive, or even too difficult to resolve, possibly rendering a vehicle unusable.

"Avoiding repair bills might feel like a tangible saving in the short term, but it often proves a false economy.

That's why it's important to visit a trusted and reputable garage at the first sign of trouble, and to tackle

issues early on before they escalate into something much more serious."

In light of drivers holding on to their cars for a lot longer – now an average of 9.5 years – an all-time high,

the findings from latest study also showed that nearly four in ten (38%) vehicle repairers across the nation

expect drivers to abandon their cars and to leave them behind at garages if repair costs prove too expensive to keep them running.

This is a rise from 28% when compared to what was forecast for 2025, reinforcing how car ownership can hang in the balance in the event of a bill proving unpalatable.

Lastly, to compound an economic backdrop of increasing household bills, the research also highlighted

that over half of garages (55%) are set to grapple this year with the challenge of not passing on rising

costs, that they themselves are having to contend with, when handing over invoices to customers.

Rebecca said: “Cars are complex machines, and carry an ongoing financial commitment to keep them

legal and roadworthy. Things can of course go wrong out of the blue, especially as drivers are not

changing cars so regularly nowadays.

“This is why it’s so important that money is put aside and to have a separate pot ‘at the ready’ to help pay

for any unforeseen repairs, alongside regular recommended routine maintenance, such as servicing and

MOTs. Owning a car is one of the biggest household bills, meaning budgeting is key.”



Rebecca Pullan at Carmaster Garage also offers the following top tips to help drive down the burden of

costly repair bills:

1. Put time aside to carry out regular basic checks, including tyre pressure and condition, and fluids

levels, such as oil, to ensure that they meet vehicle manufacturer-recommended levels;

2. Contact an accredited repairer listed on The Motor Ombudsman's Business Finder;

(TheMotorOmbudsman.org/Business-Finder) in the event of any dashboard warning lights

illuminating, and

squeaks and rattles arising, as this can indicate something may be wrong and require immediate attention;

3. Keep an eye out for free vehicle health checks at Motor Ombudsman-accredited businesses to stay

on top of any issues before they escalate into ones which may be more significant;

4. Consider a service plan to help spread the cost of routine maintenance and avoid the burden of

paying a yearly lump sum; and

5. Take a look at extended warranties offered by a Motor Ombudsman-accredited provider to help

protect against having to pay for costly mechanical and electrical problems.

To view the businesses that are accredited to The Motor Ombudsman’s Service and Repair Code, visit

www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org/Business-Finder.