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Garages identify the five most delayed aspects of car maintenance by customers, in a Motor Ombudsman study

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The Motor Ombudsman tells us...

(All words and images from The Motor Ombudsman).

- A survey of vehicle repairers across the UK by The Motor Ombudsman has revealed the five

most delayed areas of vehicle maintenance by customers when it comes to caring for their car

- As financial pressures on households mount, over half of those polled (56%) have seen

motorists readily putting off essential repairs in a bid to save money

- Replacing the engine timing belt tops the most overlooked area of vehicle



maintenance (79%),

**where an original bill costing hundreds can run into thousands, should
manufacturer**

recommended intervals not be adhered to

**• Forgoing oil changes (72%), not replacing worn tyres (58%), leaving oil leaks
unresolved**

**(49%), and shunning brake pad replacements (39%), were the other principal
repairs left to**

linger by consumers

London, 22 April 2025: A survey of independent garages and franchise dealer workshops
by The Motor

Ombudsman, has revealed the five most deferred aspects of vehicle maintenance by car
owners, and

where potentially expensive bills can be avoided. Over half of the vehicle repairers (56%)
polled stated

that they had seen consumers readily putting off essential repairs in the past year*, as
households faced

mounting pressures on their finances, and cut back in the face of rising bills.

According to nearly eight in ten respondents (79%), the study by the Ombudsman for the



automotive

sector showed that not having the engine timing belt replaced at the required manufacturer-recommended

intervals (typically at every 60,000 to 100,000 miles) is subject to the most delay by consumers. Costing

£600 on average to change, the cambelt is a component which is vital for ensuring the smooth running of

an engine. Avoiding making the swap in line with the prescribed schedule can result in significant engine

damage, or even cause complete failure. Engine replacements can carry an average bill of £5,400

according to those surveyed, a cost nine times greater than the original scope of work for changing the

belt.

Cited by 72% of survey participants, the second most common aspect of vehicle maintenance likely to be

postponed by owners is not having the engine oil and filter changed (a cost of around £150) if required

between annual services, for example, due to higher-than-average mileage, where this vital fluid is

replaced. Driving with oil beyond its recommended lifespan can see it thickening and



collecting dirt and

grime, leading to reduced engine efficiency, overheating, or a complete seizure, ultimately rendering a

vehicle unusable.

Furthermore, over half of the repairers surveyed (58%) explained that tyre replacements are also shunned

to cut corners when it comes to household budgets. However, this can carry costly safety and financial

consequences. This is namely, that driving on rubber which has worn below the legal minimum tread

depth limit of 1.6 mm, affects performance and grip. Similarly, having tyres in such a condition equally

risks a fine to the owner of £2,500 and three penalty points on a driver's licence **per tyre**, extending to

£10,000 and a possible ban if all four are found to be in the wrong. This is in comparison to a much

smaller average replacement cost of £94 per tyre (or under £400 for all four), based on the findings of the

study.

Mirroring the impact of not having oil changed, leaving an engine to seep oil, and not having adequate



lubrication, can result in damage to components and eventual starvation, causing a complete engine

breakdown, and leading to its full replacement. Furthermore, in the extreme case, oil may also catch fire if

it leaks onto a hot exhaust. According to the latest Motor Ombudsman study, 49% of vehicle repairers

have reported customers delaying fixing a leak, which costs around £355 to rectify – a small price to pay

relative to the potential bill if this is left to fester.

Rounding off the top five most delayed aspect of owners caring for their car, as stated by just over a third

(39%) of repairers, is not changing brake pads (costing an average of £266 for a set of two per wheel)

when they have been identified as worn – with squealing or grinding noises often being the tell-tale signs.

Not taking a car into a garage for spent pads to be removed may not just escalate into needing to have

more of the braking system, such as discs and calipers, replaced later down the line, but is also a danger

to life, as stopping distances can be greatly reduced, especially in adverse weather conditions.



Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, said: “As households

across the country continue to grapple with the strain on their finances, and an increasing cost of repair

when it comes to their car, our research has painted a stark picture of how vehicle maintenance can be

left behind to make savings in the short-term, as well as how costs can mount up significantly if small

problems are left to escalate into something much more serious.”

Bill added: “Planning ahead to budget for any unforeseen expenses is vital, because neglecting any kind

of repairs may not only cause significant long-term damage to vehicles, but also lead owners to breaking

the law, and compromising their own safety and that of others – all coming as a result of not acting with

the right level of urgency to address concerns.”

Rebecca Pullan, Managing Director at The Motor Ombudsman-accredited Carmaster Garage in

Harrogate, North Yorkshire, explained: “If a car is still usable, and a problem is not immediately visible, it

may prove an inviting prospect to continue driving and delay incurring any repair bills until



a much bigger

problem is apparent, by which time the issue may be either be too expensive to rectify or too late to fix. As

tempting as it may be to avoid paying out for repairs, this often proves a false economy, and we are

therefore reinforcing to motorists that it's absolutely crucial to visit a garage as soon as they identify

something may be wrong, to nip any issues in the bud there and then."

Take action to help yourself and minimise costs

In light of the survey findings, The Motor Ombudsman is highlighting the five following steps that car

owners can proactively take to help drive down the likelihood of costly repair bills:

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

such as oil, to ensure that they meet vehicle manufacturer recommendations;

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

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

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



3. Look 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 taking out a service plan to help spread the cost of routine maintenance and avoid the

burden of paying a yearly lump sum; and

5. Extended warranties offered by a Motor Ombudsman-accredited provider can help protect against

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/Garage-Finder.

*The sum of frequently (42%) and very frequently (14%) in terms of how often vehicle owners delay essential maintenance and repairs.

About the survey data

The Motor Ombudsman survey saw **125** service and repair businesses respond online between **06th and 13th March**

2025. See the Industry Insight Report with the full survey results at:

www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org/useful-information/industry-insights



Top Five

MOST DELAYED REPAIRS BY VEHICLE OWNERS

- 1** Replacing a timing belt
- 2** Changing the oil and filter
- 3** Replacing worn tyres
- 4** Fixing an engine oil leak
- 5** Replacing worn brake pads

The classification comes from the results of a Motor Ombudsman-commissioned survey of vehicle repairs carried out between 06.03.2025 - 13.03.2025.



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