MoT exemption for classic vehicles – clarification on current rules

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Department for Transport MoT exemption criteria for Historic vehicles – by Dave Moss.

On 10th March 2026 the Department for Transport issued a new version of its guidance

leaflet detailing when historic vehicles are exempt from MoT. Although there has recently been a consultation which included questions about MoT test exemptions, and the new guidance is described as “an update”, the new document doesn’t include any significant changes to the general arrangements which have now been in place for some time. However you should still check carefully for a potential MoT requirement before returning any historic or classic vehicle of any type to the road.

Principal details in the new guidance are briefly reviewed below, The full document, which includes links from specific sections to provide more details on each subject heading, is available at

historic-classic-vehicles-mot-exemption-criteria/historic-classic-vehicles-mot-exemption-criteria–2

Overall Exemptions from requirements for MoT testing:

- In general, a vehicle described by the DfT as a” vehicle of historical interest” will not need an MOT if:
  it was built or first registered more than 40 years ago;

  no substantial changes have been made to the vehicle.

  It is necessary to formally declare that a vehicle is exempt from the requirement for an MoT when an application is made to tax it. Vehicles must be taxed (or SORN) even if its classification as an historic vehicle means there no payment is required to “tax” it.

- Whatever the age of the vehicle, it must have an MOT if it…
  has been substantially changed;

  is a type or model of vehicle still in production;

  is a large vehicle being used commercially;

has a registration number with a ‘Q’ prefix;

is a kit car constructed from components from different makes or models;

is a reconstructed classic vehicle (as defined by DVLA);

is a kit conversion, where a kit body, chassis or monocoque is added to an existing vehicle, or vice versa.

- If it cannot be confirmed there has been no “substantial change” to a vehicle, then MoT exemption cannot be claimed.
- If a vehicle is being used on public roads, it must be roadworthy, and insured, whether it is exempt from MoT or not.
  What counts as a substantial change:

- In general, a vehicle alteration is a ‘substantial change’ if the technical characteristics of main components have changed.
  In this context the DfT classifies the “main components” as:

  the chassis;

  the monocoque bodyshell;

  the axles and running gear;

  the engine.

- There are some exceptions that do not count as substantial changes to the main components.
  The following types of changes are acceptable, and mean that a vehicle would still be exempt from the requirement for an MOT:

Changes made during production or commercial use;

Changes that can be shown to have been made to vehicles of that type during production, or within 10 years of production, are also acceptable;

Changes made to commercial vehicles that reflect modifications made when the vehicles were in commercial use are also acceptable;

If parts to repair or restore a particular vehicle are no longer available:

- Changes made to preserve a vehicle where original-type parts are no longer reasonably available are acceptable. This includes changes to:
axles or running gear to improve efficiency, safety or environmental performance;

the chassis – replacements of the same pattern as the original;

monocoque bodyshell (including sub-frames) – replacements of the same pattern as the original;

engine – alternative cubic capacities of the same basic engine, or alternative original equipment engines – if the number of cylinders is different, it is typically (but not always) regarded as non-original equipment.

Large goods vehicles

- Unless they are substantially changed, large goods vehicles are exempt from testing if they:
were first used before 1960;

are currently used unladen.

Note: A small number of pre-1960 large goods vehicles may still require testing.

- Large goods vehicles (vehicles more than 3.5 tonnes) or buses and public service vehicles (with 8 or more passenger seats) used commercially require a valid MOT certificate if:
  the vehicle has been substantially changed;

  it is a large goods vehicle and is used when laden or towing a laden trailer.

  If a goods vehicle has never been tested, you may apply for a first test using a VTG1 application form.

- ## Other buses and public service vehicles:

  Buses and other public service vehicles used commercially are exempt if they are pre-1960 vehicles – unless substantially changed;

  Buses that are not public service vehicles, but over 40 years old are exempt if they meet the definition of a ‘vehicle of historical interest’.

  Other MoT testing exemptions:

- ## Some older large vehicles have very specific exemptions, for instance:

  steam-powered vehicles are fully exempt;

  lorries over 3.5 tonnes – are exempt from the metered emissions check.

- ## Expert advice

  The DfT advises that The Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC) has published a list of historic vehicle specialists who can help you understand if your vehicle is exempt.