The Motor Ombudsman marks a decade of the Vehicle Sales Code

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Driving high standards in the automotive sector, The Motor Ombudsman marks a decade of the Vehicle Sales Code.

They tell us...

- Unveiled ten years ago, the Vehicle Sales Code became the first ever Code of Practice in the automotive sector to cover the sale of new and used cars by UK retailers
- The Code offers a set of commitments to drive high standards in the provision of vehicles to motorists by accredited sellers at the point of purchase
- Over the last decade, the CTSI-approved Code has consistently accounted for the largest volume of annual contacts and new cases within The Motor Ombudsman's Code of Practice portfolio, with around 500,000 and 40,000 recorded respectively since September 2016
- Thousands of car retailers across the UK are accredited to the Vehicle Sales Code, with

consumers benefiting from access to The Motor Ombudsman's free and impartial dispute resolution in the event of complaints remaining unresolved
London, 01 September 2026 As the new '76 registration arrives across the nation's forecourts, The Motor Ombudsman is marking a decade of its Motor Industry Code of Practice for Vehicle Sales driving high standards in the automotive sector.

Launched in September 2016, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)-approved Vehicle Sales Code became the only Code of its kind to cover the sale of both new and used cars by independent businesses and franchised dealers, and saw the creation of a portfolio of four different Codes of Practice, which spanned the customer vehicle purchase and ownership experience.

The Vehicle Sales Code was unveiled in response to used cars being one of the most prominent and growing sources of consumer detriment when buying goods, especially where there was a significant investment at stake. This was coupled with an ever-increasing number of enquiries received by The Motor Ombudsman's predecessor in relation to the purchase of a second-hand vehicle – driven by rising consumer awareness of legal rights and channels for redress following the introduction of the Consumer Rights Act and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) legislation in 2015.

The coming together of these significant factors spurred the need in a self-regulated automotive sector for a set of commitments to drive up standards in the sale of vehicles for the benefit of both motorists and businesses, and to have a clear channel for the impartial resolution of complaints by an expert body focused solely on motoring disputes.

The Vehicle Sales Code lays out a series of commitments for vehicle retailers to adhere to across a wide range of areas. Followed by thousands of franchise dealers and independent used car outlets across the UK, these commitments, which have evolved in line with new technologies and changing buying behaviour, oversee a number of 'promises' throughout the vehicle sales journey. They include:

- The use of clear and accurate advertising to consumers;
- Transparent pricing;
- Easy-to-understand documentation and deposit terms;
- The provision of vehicle provenance checks;
- The supply of accurate information; and
- The effective and fair handling of complaints.

Furthermore, the Code outlines that, should a complaint not be resolved directly between a consumer and an accredited business, motorists are to be signposted to an independent and impartial ADR body for assistance bringing their complaint to a fair and swift conclusion. With the arrival of The Motor Ombudsman in November 2016, this gave consumers a completely free-of-charge route to have their dispute with an accredited business reviewed for the first time, from the point of submitting a case, through to receiving a final decision.

Over the past decade, and against a backdrop of persistent cost-of-living pressures, the popularity of used cars, growing awareness of The Motor Ombudsman as an authority in the sector, and AI-generated search results increasingly signposting consumers to the Ombudsman, the Vehicle Sales Code has consistently been subject to the largest share of annual consumer contacts and new cases across its four Codes of Practice.

This sustained demand has seen The Motor Ombudsman handle nearly 500,000 contacts from motorists about vehicle purchases, with around 40,000 escalating into new cases since 2016. Disputes have predominantly stemmed from issues surrounding the quality of used cars at the point of sale, as well as the level of aftersales support provided by retailers. In 2025 alone, more than 100,000 Vehicle Sales Code contacts were received for the first time in a single year, breaking yet another record for the organisation, and further highlighting the inherent need for dispute resolution in this area.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, said: “The Vehicle Sales Code was introduced at a pivotal moment for the automotive sector, when consumers were becoming increasingly aware of their rights, and when there was a calling for best practice guidance covering the sale of used vehicles in particular. A decade

on, the Code remains highly relevant, providing accredited businesses with a clear framework that sets the bar high, whilst giving motorists all-important reassurance at one of the most significant points in the vehicle ownership journey."

Bill added: "The Vehicle Sales Code will continue to remain a cornerstone of our work in helping to drive high standards across the automotive sector. As the market continues to evolve, from changing consumer preferences, to ongoing advances in technology, we look forward to working closely with accredited businesses and wider industry stakeholders to ensure the Code remains relevant, robust and effective in delivering fair and impartial outcomes for all parties."

To view The Motor Ombudsman's Motor Industry Code of Practice for Vehicle Sales, visit www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org/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.