The Motor Ombudsman records a small increase in the number of EV complaints in the second quarter of 2023

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A small rise in the number of consumer complaints about electric vehicles has been noted by The Motor Ombudsman.

They tell us:

(All words and images from The Motor Ombudsman).

• Electric vehicle (EV) complaints submitted by consumers to The Motor Ombudsman rise in the second quarter (Q2) of 2023 to 291, versus the total of 273 recorded between January and March this year (Q1)

• Customer service and purchase issues continued to dominate the concerns raised by consumers, making up nearly a third of those reported between 01 April and 30 June

• Complaints about range discrepancies halved from 12% in Q1 2023 to 6% in Q2 2023 as a proportion of disputes

• On-board vehicle charging systems generated the least amount of problems in the second quarter of 2023, at just 5% of disputes submitted to The Motor Ombudsman

London, 19 July 2023: The Motor Ombudsman, the Ombudsman dedicated to the automotive sector, has reported a small rise in the volume of complaints submitted by consumers about an electric vehicle (EV) during the second quarter of this year. Between 01 April and 30 June 2023, motorists logged a total of 291 cases with The Motor Ombudsman's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service, surpassing the previous tally of 273 in the first quarter, highlighting the continued positive overall ownership experience for the majority of EV buyers and owners. The latest increase may be put down to a greater number of consumers getting behind the wheel of pure battery-driven models, and the cost of living crisis driving more individuals to recoup financial losses, as pressures on household budgets continue to build.

Consumer concerns in relation to the customer service received from a business, and at the point of buying an electric vehicle, continued to be the main source of discontent during the past three months, accounting for 31% of complaints logged by motorists (down slightly from 32% in the first quarter of this year). Examples of issues raised by consumers, included delays to scheduled delivery dates, cars arriving for handover with the incorrect specification due to parts shortages, orders being cancelled without customer authorisation, pre-agreed part-exchange values being changed, and vehicles being registered with the incorrect owner details. Post-purchase issues stemmed from, amongst other factors, service bookings and recall work appointments not being honoured, and the supply of replacement parts being held up for repairs.

Mirroring the first quarter of 2023, the vehicle chassis and motor area was responsible for causing a fifth (20%) of electric vehicle disputes. Dissatisfaction resulted from braking issues, such as failures of the regenerative system, stuck calipers, and wheel trims bending from brake heat. Electric traction faults also caused tyre blow outs, whilst problematic motors have led to vehicle breakdowns, spurring the submission of complaints to The Motor Ombudsman.

With vehicles increasingly reliant on electronics and software to stay on the move, problems arising in this area accounted for 14% of issues reported about EVs in quarter two. Faults between the high- and low- voltage systems, and boot lids unlocking themselves, were amongst the concerns reported by vehicle owners. On the subject of apps, which are commonplace on EV interfaces, glitches prevented vehicles from pre-heating and charging, and consumers being unable to register vehicles to activate some user functions.

The exterior of EVs saw a greater proportion of complaints in the second quarter at 10%, than in the first three months of the year (6%). Problems with the paintwork and finish, such as differing shades on bumpers and door handles to the rest of the car, and missing protective coating on delivery, were amongst examples cited by customers. Blocked bonnet drainage slots causing internal water damage, failures of the dynamic headlights, and faulty bonding on wheel arches causing leaks, were also some of the difficulties brought to the fore by consumers during the last quarter.

On to the interior, and concerns in this area have witnessed a positive quarter one to quarter two fall from 10% to 8%. These spanned from aesthetics-related problems, namely worsening indentations appearing in the base of leather seats, and scratches on gear selectors, to chipped infotainment screens in new cars. In terms of cabin systems, these have also generated an element of discontent, due to the likes of digital radio failures when the cimate control is on, digital dashboard screens going blank whilst driving, and personal memory seat preferences not being stored.

Although they continue to make up a very small proportion of EV disputes overall, batteries have driven a slight rise in complaints, from 4% in Q1 to 6% in Q2, which was mainly the result of hardware faults. In contrast, falling back from 12% of complaints in the first three months of 2023, to just 6% in the second quarter, has been in relation to the delivery of actual versus advertised range – a key requirement for EV adopters. Whereas complaints relating to distance travelled on a full charge were much more prevalent at the beginning of the year, as the country experienced periods of colder weather, these have subsided with the arrival of spring and summer. However, cases remain from customers deeming to have been mis-sold their vehicle, as their usage has not achieved manufacturer-quoted range figures from their perspective.

Lastly, issues with on-board vehicle charging hardware were subject to the fewest number of complaints between March and June at 5%, although these rose slightly from Q1 (4%). Instances reported pertained to the inability to rapid charge, and charging flaps locking in a closed position.

From the individuals who submitted an EV complaint during the past three months, a full refund (16%), the rejection of a vehicle (16%), and compensation (16%) emerged as the preferred resolutions for consumers to help bring their dispute to a close. In addition, for those motorists who attributed a monetary amount to their desired outcomes, the average value equated to £12,550, down from the £13,000 figure recorded during the first three months of 2023.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, said: “What our latest quarterly data analysis is showing, is that despite the volume of complaints starting to creep up, these still account for less than 1% of overall contacts received every quarter, therefore posting an encouraging picture that the majority of EV owners and buyers are enjoying what is a positive experience, with no major causes for concern.

The level of service delivered by businesses, and problems encountered at the point of purchase remains a key sticking point for motorists, but there are small signs this is beginning to improve. We will of course continue to keep a close eye on trends that emerge through the rest of this year, so as to keep industry and consumers informed about what we are seeing on the ground.”



To read The Motor Ombudsman's thought leadership paper on EV complaints seen in the first six months of 2023, which has been launched today, visit thought-leadership-papers.

For more information, visit The Motor Ombudsman's dedicated Electric Vehicles (EV) Resource Hub at electric-vehicles.