The Motor Ombudsman reports the highest quarterly volume so far of EV complaints

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The first three months of 2023 saw the highest quarterly volume of EV complaints to date, according to The Motor Ombudsman.

They tell us:

• A total of 273 complaints about electric vehicles (EVs) were submitted by consumers between January and March 2023 – the most seen to date about EVs in a single quarter by The Motor Ombudsman's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service

• March – a typically busy period for new car registrations, was also the first time that The Motor Ombudsman recorded more than 100 complaints about pure battery-driven cars in a calendar month

• Although disputes are increasing in line with the rising ownership and number of zero emission models on the market, EVs continue to make up a very small proportion of the thousands of consumer contacts received overall by The Motor Ombudsman every quarter

London, 18 April 2023: The Motor Ombudsman, the Ombudsman dedicated to the automotive sector, has recorded the highest quarterly volume of consumer complaints about electric vehicles (EVs) during the opening three months of 2023. A total of 273 disputes were logged during the first quarter of this year, compared to 104 for the same period in 2022, reflecting the ever-increasing demand for pure battery-driven models by today's motorists. Furthermore, in March alone – one of the key periods for new car registrations, 115 complaints were received from consumers about EVs. This marked the first time that The Motor Ombudsman's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service had witnessed in excess of 100 contacts about an electric car in a single month.

Mirroring the trend seen in the last two calendar years, customer service and a consumer's experience at the point of buying an electric car, drove the majority – nearly a third of complaints (32%) about EVs in the first quarter, up from 27% in Q1 2022. Examples of dissatisfaction that resulted in motorists bringing their complaint to The Motor Ombudsman, included cancellations and delays for the delivery and handover of new vehicle orders, incorrect vehicle specifications at the point of delivery due to parts shortages, and the miscommunication about the provenance of a vehicle when it was sold. For those who encountered purchase issues, around 70% were in relation to a brand new car, with the remainder originating from the acquisition of a used model.

For the first quarter of 2023, the vehicle chassis area was responsible for causing around a fifth (21%) of electric vehicle complaints – the same proportion as Q1 2022, with sources of discontent stemming from problems with the brakes, suspension and wheels. Range gained greater prominence in the opening three months of this year at 12% (versus 6% in Q1 2022), with many EV owners reporting that they were unable to travel the distance on a full charge quoted by a retailer or manufacturer – a problem that was accentuated due to reduced battery capacity in colder weather during winter.

Accounting for 10% of disputes in Q1 2023 (a slight rise versus 7% for Q1 2022), interior and cabin systems issues were the fourth biggest cause of consumers referring their EV complaint to The Motor Ombudsman between January and March. Aesthetics-related problems, such as defective seat trim, and scratches on the centre console and door handles on a new car, where amongst the snags raised by customers. Similarly, vehicle owners expressed concern about failures of in-car equipment, such as faulty USB ports, climate control interfaces, heating, and in-car microphones, preventing the use of such features.

Electrical and software glitches plagued 9% of those who submitted complaints about an electric car between January and March. Vehicles not recognising keys, apps not working due to software malfunctions, and electrical problems causing safety system failures, were all amongst the issues highlighted in case submissions during the past three calendar months.

In regards to the exterior of the car (making up 6% of EV disputes reported since the start of 2023), vehicles sold with broken door latches, automatic wing mirrors locking in the closed position, overspray paint on the door sill, and grazes on the alloys at the point of handover, were just some of the difficulties raised by consumers with The Motor Ombudsman last year.

Vehicle charging problems, also at 6% of complaints in the first quarter, were principally orientated around failures of the main charging unit within the first months of ownership, and the inability for the vehicle to charge to its potential due to software issues. Post-purchase frustrations originating from batteries, included them going flat or draining too quickly, but were nevertheless responsible for the smallest number of concerns, at just 4% of issues reported since the start of 2023.

Out of the individuals who submitted a complaint in relation an electric vehicle during the first quarter, a full refund emerged as the most desired resolution for 27% of consumers to help bring their dispute to a close, followed by compensation (17%) and the rejection of the vehicle (16%).

Furthermore, for those motorists who attributed a monetary amount to their preferred outcomes, the average value equated to £13,000, a marked rise from from the figure of £10,800 recorded in Q1 2022.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, said: “Reflecting the trend seen during the past two years, the level of customer service provided by a business and a consumer’s experience at the point of buying an electric vehicle were the most notable elements of discontent during the first quarter of 2023. Furthermore, expectations that a consumer’s car should achieve the quoted range for a full charge was also one of the main talking points, with greater variations in the actual figures being achieved becoming more noticeable in the cooler temperatures that we experienced since the turn of the year.”

Bill added: “It is clear that the volume of complaints about EVs is steadily rising in line with the upward trajectory in sales on the approach to 2030. Although there are common trends that we are identifying and feeding back to industry in terms of the types of problems being raised by consumers, these continue to remain a very small minority amongst the thousands of complaints that are handled by our dispute resolution service every month, which is encouraging.”



The infographic below shows how the figures worked out:

For more information, visit The Motor Ombudsman’s dedicated Electric Vehicles (EV) Resource Hub at www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org/electric-vehicles.