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The Motor Ombudsman urges drivers to check their vehicles as children return to school

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As children return to school this September, The Motor Ombudsman encourages drivers to be top of the class in terms of vehicle checks...

They tell us:

(Photograph and all words from The Motor Ombudsman).

The Motor Ombudsman urges drivers to be top of the class for vehicle checks as the nation goes back to school.

With the end of the summer holidays, and the arrival of the new academic year, The Motor Ombudsman is highlighting a series of checks that vehicle owners can undertake before heading out on the school run to stay safe and legal on the road

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- The 10 key checks highlighted for consideration include, belting up, examining the condition of tyres, lights, and wiper blades, topping up oil to recommended levels, and ensuring that all vehicle documentation is valid and up-to-date.



- For those needing ad hoc or routine repairs, The Motor Ombudsman's intuitive online [Garage Finder](#) lists all independent and franchise car retailers across the UK that are accredited to the Service and Repair Code.

London, 03 September 2024: As the new academic year begins, The Motor Ombudsman is highlighting ten handy checks to help vehicle owners prepare for the return to the school run. Performing these often simple, but essential checks is crucial to ensuring the safety of those in the car and that of fellow road users, and to helping prevent unexpected breakdowns when out on the road.

Seat belts are vital to safety and to staying legal

Before setting off, ensure that all seat belts, front and back, are in good working order, and that car seats for younger passengers are of the right size and are fully secured in place in line with manufacturer guidance. In accordance with the law, it is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that all occupants below the age of 14 are correctly belted up before hitting the road. Similarly, over 14s are personally responsible for ensuring that they are wearing a seat belt, with the penalty for not doing so also being up to the sum of £500.

Consult The Motor Ombudsman's Garage Finder for vehicle maintenance

The Motor Ombudsman's intuitive online Garage Finder (TheMotorOmbudsman.org/Garage-Finder) is a quick way to find a local and reputable independent or franchise repairer that is accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Service and Repair Code, and is committed to delivering a high standard of work and service. It also means that, should you encounter an issue down the line with work that has been carried out, and have a complaint that cannot be resolved directly with the workshop in the first instance, you can call on The Motor Ombudsman's free and impartial Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service for independent and impartial help concluding the dispute.



Have valid documentation before turning a wheel.

Before leaving home, it is a requirement for all vehicles to have valid insurance and MOT certificates, and to be taxed (with the exception of fully electric cars). In the same vein, it is imperative that your car is serviced in line with the full and interim intervals stated by the vehicle manufacturer to help keep your car running as it should. Furthermore, having a complete service history that meets the prescribed schedule is often a condition for making a warranty claim in the event of a mechanical or electrical issue.

Oil should be topped up to recommended levels.

Alongside the replenishment of other fluids, such as coolant, it is vital that oil is topped up to the recommended level, to keep the engine in an optimum condition. Similarly, the correct lubricant should also be used, as modern cars often require specific types, meaning pouring in the wrong grade of oil can lead to serious mechanical problems and costly repairs.

Out on a charge.

If your car has been parked up for a prolonged period whilst you have been away, it is recommended that you go out for a 20- to 30-minute drive to allow the battery to charge up again, to reduce the risk of any unwanted time out on the school run. Similarly, if driving an electric vehicle, plug in the car ahead of time, so that the battery is fully replenished when getting behind the wheel, helping to avoid any delay to the start of the school day.



Lights should be in their element.

As the academic year starts, and with sunrises getting later and sunsets becoming earlier, it is important to make sure that all front and rear lights are working before setting off, as well as fog and indicator lamps. If you're not confident doing it yourself, and it is safe to do so, take your car to a Motor Ombudsman- accredited garage to have any defective bulbs changed by a qualified mechanic.

Replace any worn-out wiper blades.

Before taking to the road, check your front and rear wiper blades for signs of wear, such as streaking, smearing, or squeaking noises. If they are failing to clear the windscreen effectively, which may equally result in an MOT failure when a car is tested, it is time to replace them with the correct specification for your vehicle's make and model. Consult your owner's manual, or a professional, if you're unsure which blades to choose, or how to swap them for new ones.

Under-inflated tyres can prove costly.

If a car has been stationary for a prolonged period of time, tyre pressure can be lost, which can cause uneven wear and increased fuel consumption. Top up the air pressure in all four tyres to the vehicle manufacturer-recommended levels, which can often be found on the driver's side door frame or in the handbook. You can use either a home tyre inflation kit, or provided you can get there safely, you can visit a nearby fuel station forecourt that has an air machine. As well as running at the right pressures, tyres must also have the correct tread depth (i.e. at least 1.6 mm across the central three-quarters of the tyre), and be free of any defects, bulges and cracking.



Never ignore any dashboard warning lights.

Warning lights on the dashboard are visible indicators alerting you to any potential issues, spanning the need for minor maintenance, to the onset of serious mechanical problems. Addressing any illuminated amber or red symbols promptly, which are often outlined in the car's handbook, can help avoid costly repairs and ensure your vehicle remains safe and reliable. If the latter appear, have your car checked by a Motor Ombudsman-accredited garage as soon as possible to avoid potential accidents and further damage to critical components, such as the engine.

Seeing the road up ahead is vital.

Having full clarity of the road ahead is essential to safety. As well as ensuring that all wiper blades are in good working order, check at the same time, that the windscreen reservoir is topped up with screen wash, and that all washer jets are working properly to keep your view unobstructed, particularly in adverse weather conditions, where dirt and grime can obscure the line of sight.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, explained: "The return to school after a well-earned break can be an exciting, yet busy time to get kids fully prepared and ready to go for the new term. However, just as crucial is having a well-maintained car, which helps make for safe and stress-free school runs, and is one less thing to worry about in the transition back to the daily routine following the holiday period."



Bill added: "Our checklist of ten areas to look out for are a handy aide-memoire for drivers, but of course ensuring your car is consistently in optimum condition should be high up on the 'to do' list all-year-round. This guarantees the safety of all vehicle occupants and other road users, and of course, drives down the risk of any unwanted breakdowns."

Rebecca Pullan, Managing Director at The Motor Ombudsman-accredited Carmaster Garage in Harrogate, said: "Prevention is always better than cure. By staying on top of routine maintenance and addressing small issues promptly, you can keep your vehicle running smoothly and avoid those big- budget fixes that comes with them. This is especially pertinent for those who are dependent on their car as the sole mode of transport to get kids to and from school."

To view The Motor Ombudsman's dedicated information resources on vehicle maintenance, visit

[useful-information/motoring-advice/vehicle-maintenance](http://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/useful-information/motoring-advice/vehicle-maintenance)
