

SECOND
EDITION

A GUIDE TO BUYING AND SERVICING YOUR FIRST CAR



**Put yourself in the driving seat when
choosing a car, garage or retailer**



TheMotorOmbudsman.org

Dear new driver,

Passing your test and getting behind the wheel of your first car is often an exciting time.

This handy reference guide has been designed by The Motor Ombudsman to help make the process of buying, servicing and repairing a vehicle even easier.

We hope you find it useful.

Yours sincerely,



Bill Fennell
Managing Director and Chief Ombudsman



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.



Contents

1

Buying a new or used car

- Buying a new car
- Buying a used car

2

Buying a car from a franchised dealership or an independent vehicle retailer

- Buying a car from a franchised dealership
- Buying a car from an independent vehicle retailer

3

Buying an electric, hybrid or petrol / diesel car

- Electric cars
- Hybrid cars
- Petrol / diesel cars

4

Buying a manual or automatic car

5

Buying a car online

6

Finding and choosing a local garage or car retailer

- Finding a business online
- Finding a business offline

7

Going on a test drive

8

Resolving a complaint about a car purchase or service / repair

9

Handy checklists

- Handy Buying Checklist
- Handy Servicing Checklist

1. Buying a new or used car

Whether your first car is brand-new or used (i.e. second hand), is really a matter of personal preference and the budget you have available. Each have their benefits and drawbacks, which will now be explored.

New car registrations

For the sale of new cars in England, Scotland and Wales, there are two vehicle registration changes every year (Northern Irish plates carry a different format).

The first plate change happens on the 1st of March, where the year is introduced after the first two letters on the registration e.g. GU22 for 2022.

The second change occurs on the 1st of September, where the number starts with a 7 after the first two letters e.g. GU72. The number 7 will apply to all plates up until 2030, when the 80-registration series will be introduced.

The above format does not apply to [personalised / cherished plates](#), where you have free reign in terms of choosing your preferred combination of letters and numbers in-line with your requirements, budget and what's available to purchase at the time.



Benefits and drawbacks of buying a new car

Benefits of buying a new car

- ✓ You are registered as the first owner on the vehicle's logbook (V5C)
- ✓ You can choose the colour and specification of the car, as well as the very latest model and technology
- ✓ The vehicle should be in perfect factory condition on handover
- ✓ The price of the vehicle can include some added perks, such as a new car warranty lasting several years
- ✓ There are often different finance packages available to help fund the purchase of the car
- ✓ There is no need to pay for an annual [MOT](#) until the vehicle's third anniversary of being registered
- ✓ A new electric vehicle (EV) may be eligible for a UK [government grant](#)
- ✓ The car is likely to meet the requirements of driving in a [Clean Air Zone](#) or Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) at no cost (e.g. in [London](#))

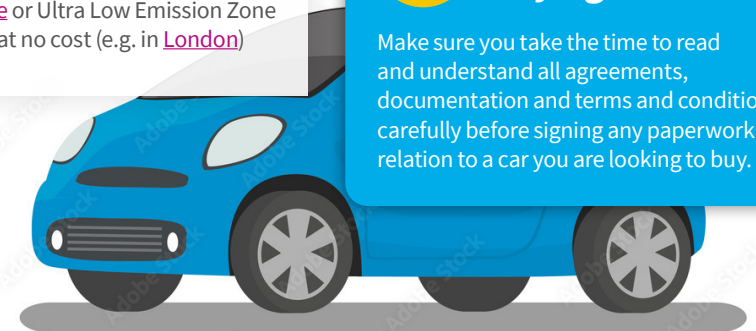
Drawbacks of buying a new car

- ✗ It can sometimes be more expensive than buying an equivalent model second hand
- ✗ Order times can vary by make and model, so you may have to wait a few weeks or months to receive the car, especially if there has been a prolonged disruption to supply (e.g. due to semiconductor chip shortages)
- ✗ The car will be subject to a drop in value (known as depreciation) from the moment you take ownership of it
- ✗ The insurance may be more expensive than when buying a used car



Top tip when buying a car

Make sure you take the time to read and understand all agreements, documentation and terms and conditions carefully before signing any paperwork in relation to a car you are looking to buy.



Benefits and drawbacks of buying a used car

Benefits of buying a used car

- ✓ It may be cheaper to buy an older model or an ex-showroom demonstrator vehicle
- ✓ The actual car is often available to test drive and purchase
- ✓ If you feel nervous about having a new car, you can start off with a vehicle that has already taken a few knocks and scratches whilst your confidence at the wheel continues to grow



Top tip when buying a used car

It's always worth taking someone along that knows what to look out for in terms of the condition, faults or issues, or enlisting the services of a qualified mechanic to take a good look at the vehicle before buying it.



Drawbacks of buying a used car

- ✗ When looking for a car, you only have a choice of what's on the market at that particular time
- ✗ The car may have already been subject to significant mileage and wear and tear
- ✗ If buying a used electric vehicle (EV), there may be a reduction in the capacity of the batteries to charge and range compared to when it was new
- ✗ The new car warranty period supplied by the manufacturer may have expired, meaning there would be an added cost if you choose to take out an extended warranty policy to cover mechanical failures / a sudden breakdown
- ✗ The vehicle could have been involved in an accident (an HPI Check would reveal this)
- ✗ Maintenance costs may be higher with an older vehicle compared to a new one, and is subject to an annual **MOT** from three years of age and upwards
- ✗ An older vehicle may incur charges in an Ultra Low Emission or **Clean Air Zone** due to the emissions being too high
- ✗ Replacement parts or paint colours may no longer be available for vehicle repairs if a significant time has passed since the car first went on sale

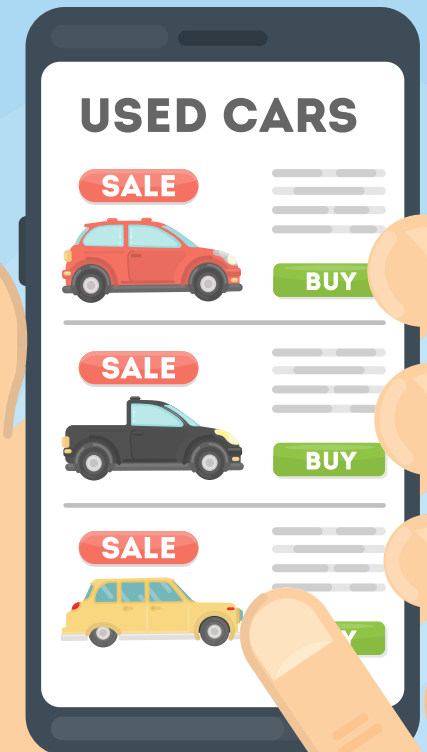
Buying a used car from a private individual



A private sale (i.e. buying a car from an individual rather than from a business) is not covered by The Motor Ombudsman's Vehicle Sales Code. Click on the green button below to view the Code.

This means that, if something goes wrong with the car post-purchase, you have fewer legal rights compared to if you had bought a car at a retailer. In addition, if it is a private sale, you are not able to bring your dispute to The Motor Ombudsman for help resolving a complaint.

[Vehicle Sales Code](#)



2. Buying a car from a franchised dealership or an independent vehicle retailer

Both franchised dealerships and independent vehicle retailers can be accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)-approved [Service and Repair](#) and / or [Vehicle Sales](#) Codes of Practice subject to meeting the necessary application criteria.

Buying from a franchised dealership or independent retailer each has its respective merits, which will now be looked at.

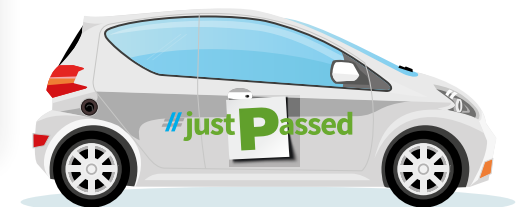


A franchised dealership

- ✓ Is a branded car showroom that has a contract with one or more vehicle manufacturers that allows them to sell its models
- ✓ Only deals with specific brands, and is therefore a specialist in their model range
- ✓ Uses vehicle manufacturer-approved parts when carrying out repairs
- ✓ Will meet all manufacturer-prescribed standards for sales and servicing
- ✓ Sells new and used cars for their nominated brand and has a direct relationship with the vehicle manufacturer
- ✓ Will have used cars that meet the manufacturer's series of required pre-sale checks (also known as Approved Used programmes)
- ✓ Can provide you with a service history that is generally considered more valuable for getting a higher value on the resale of your car

An independent vehicle retailer

- ✓ Is defined as a retailer which has no association or contract with any particular brand of car
- ✓ Is free to sell and repair vehicles from more than one brand
- ✓ Is not restricted on which make of car they can sell
- ✓ May be more neutral in their sales approach, but at the same time, may not have model and brand-specific knowledge
- ✓ May offer a cheaper range of replacement parts as they are not linked directly to the manufacturer
- ✓ Will often have a lower cost of labour for servicing and repair than a franchised dealership

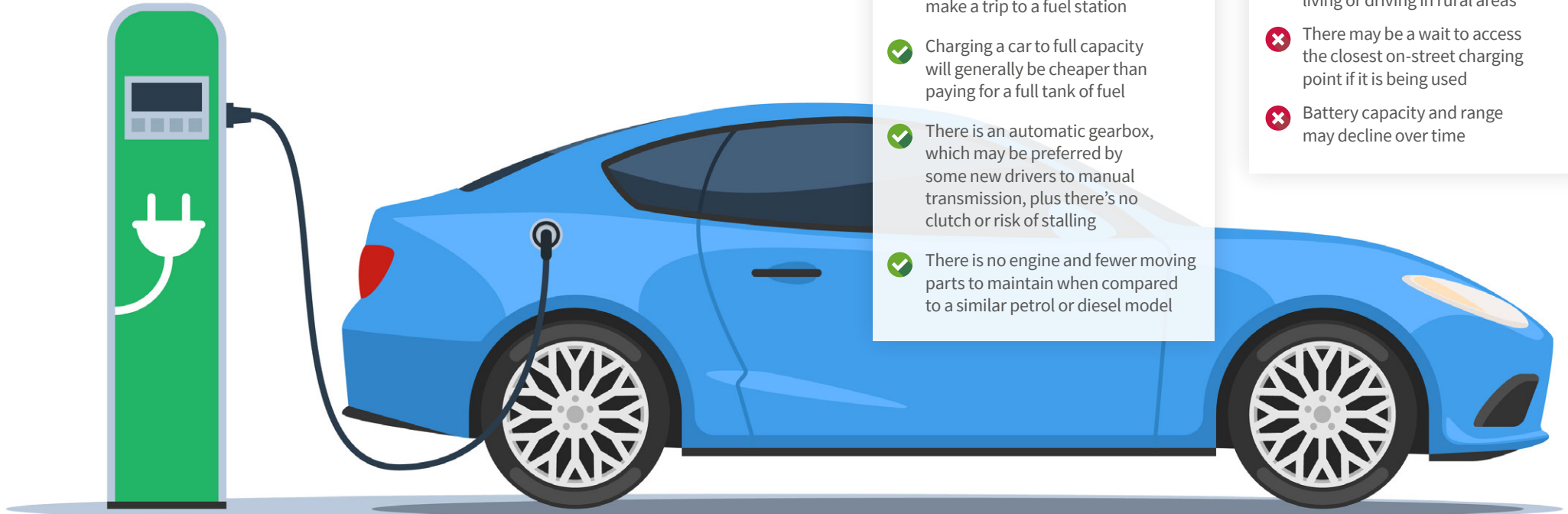


3. Buying an electric, hybrid or petrol / diesel car

With the advances made in vehicle technology, cars are now powered by different means, and have moved away from just having a petrol or diesel internal combustion engine. Which method of propulsion you ultimately choose for your car depends on your budget, needs and lifestyle.

Electric cars

An **electric car**, also known as an electric vehicle (EV) or battery electric vehicle (BEV), uses motors powered by batteries to drive the wheels, instead of an engine. Rather than filling up with fuel, an electric car needs to be charged.



Benefits and drawbacks of buying an electric car

Benefits of buying an electric car

- ✓ They produce zero emissions and are not subject to charges for Ultra Low Emission and Clean Air Zones
- ✓ They are exempt from Vehicle Excise Duty (road tax)
- ✓ They are not subject to fluctuations and increases in the price of petrol or diesel fuel
- ✓ There is the possibility to charge your car at home at your own convenience without having to make a trip to a fuel station
- ✓ Charging a car to full capacity will generally be cheaper than paying for a full tank of fuel
- ✓ There is an automatic gearbox, which may be preferred by some new drivers to manual transmission, plus there's no clutch or risk of stalling
- ✓ There is no engine and fewer moving parts to maintain when compared to a similar petrol or diesel model

Drawbacks of buying an electric car

- ✗ The initial purchase price is generally more expensive than buying an equivalent petrol or diesel model
- ✗ There is a smaller pool of used cars available to purchase compared to petrol and diesel models
- ✗ The range is often lower on a single charge than the possible mileage that can be completed on a full tank of fuel, which may be more of a consideration if living or driving in rural areas
- ✗ There may be a wait to access the closest on-street charging point if it is being used
- ✗ Battery capacity and range may decline over time

There are a few types of hybrid vehicle available, and the main ones are as follows:

A **plug-in hybrid (PHEV)** uses batteries to drive an electric motor, and petrol or diesel fuel to power an engine. As the name suggests, the batteries need to be recharged via a domestic or on-street charging point. Once the electric range runs out, the car will use the engine.

A **self-charging hybrid** offers vehicle owners the possibility to drive at low speeds on pure electric power without the need to plug in the car to recharge batteries driving the electric motors (like a PHEV). This is done automatically by the vehicle.

A **mild hybrid (MHEV)** is a car which uses a small battery to help the engine perform more economically and cut emissions, rather than allowing it to drive solely on electric power.

Benefits and drawbacks of buying a hybrid

Benefits of buying a hybrid

- ✓ Plug-in hybrids, in particular, are ideal for short commutes or journeys that can use the electric range only
- ✓ They produce lower emissions and are quieter when in electric mode compared to a car that is powered solely by a petrol or diesel engine
- ✓ They are less likely to be subject to charges for Ultra Low Emission and Clean Air Zones

Drawbacks of buying a hybrid

- ✗ A plug-in, as the name suggests, needs to be recharged when the electric range runs out, thereby offering less convenience than a self-charging hybrid
- ✗ They can be more expensive to purchase than an equivalent petrol or diesel-powered model
- ✗ Hybrids can be heavier than an equivalent petrol or diesel-powered model
- ✗ Battery capacity and electric-only range may decline over time

Despite the introduction of hybrid models and electric vehicles, there are new or used cars that are powered solely by a petrol or diesel engine.

Benefits and drawbacks of buying a petrol / diesel car

Benefits of buying a petrol / diesel car

- ✓ It is generally quicker to fill up a car with fuel than to charge an electric vehicle or PHEV
- ✓ They may be better suited to towing a large trailer or caravan
- ✓ Diesel may be more suitable for individuals who drive long distances on a regular basis in terms of the fuel economy offered by this method of propulsion
- ✓ There is a greater choice of used makes and models available compared to buying an EV

Drawbacks of buying a petrol / diesel car

- ✗ They may be more noisy than equivalent hybrid or EV models
- ✗ Fuel economy may be lower than a hybrid equivalent that can complete a proportion of mileage on electric power
- ✗ There are more moving parts to maintain compared to an EV
- ✗ You are at the mercy of fluctuating fuel prices in line with geopolitical factors, tax rates and oil prices
- ✗ Emissions may be too high to qualify for free of charge entry into a Low Emission or Clean Air Zone
- ✗ The vehicle produces higher CO2 emissions than a hybrid or electric model, and can be subject to a high rate of Vehicle Excise Duty (road tax) for larger capacity engines
- ✗ Petrol station closures or fuel shortages can affect the use of the vehicle



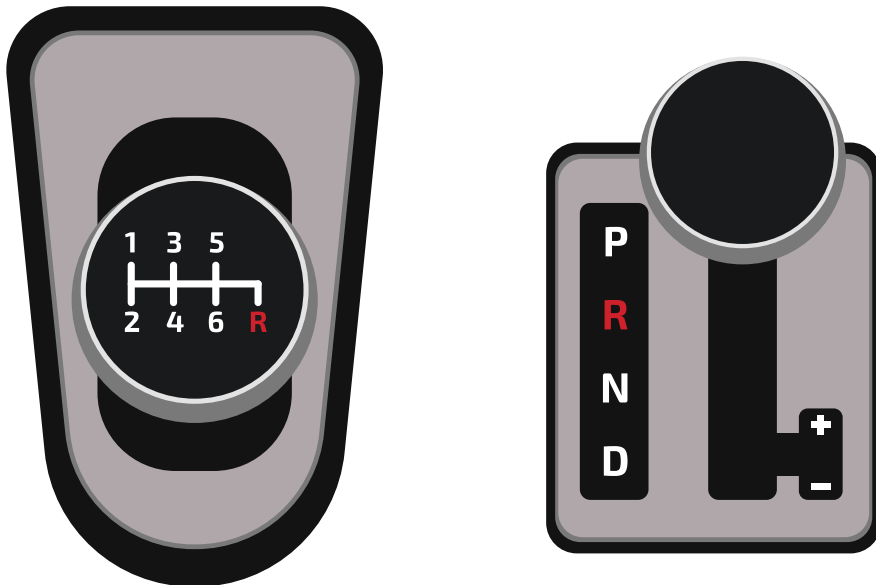
4. Buying a manual or automatic car

Driving a car with a manual or automatic gearbox depends on your personal preference, lifestyle, and what you ultimately feel comfortable with.

Manual transmission allows you to have greater control in terms of when you change gear, but can be more tiring than an automatic car when driving in built-up areas when the traffic can be more stop-start and several gear changes and clutch movements may be needed within a relatively short timeframe.

In comparison, a fully **automatic gearbox** gives you the freedom to concentrate on other driving functions and controls, as the gear changes are taken care of by the vehicle itself, plus there's no risk of stalling.

It is worth bearing in mind that plug-in and self-charging hybrid vehicles, and electric cars, have automatic transmission. Mild hybrids are those generally offered with a manual gearbox.



5. Buying a car online

The advances made in technology mean that it is possible to conduct an entire vehicle purchase transaction, from start to finish, on the internet.



Buying a new or used car without ever having seen it or test driven it, and having no physical contact with the retailer at any stage of the purchase process, including delivery, is what is known as a “[distance sale](#)”, and is subject to the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013. These are sometimes referred to as the ‘Distance Selling Regulations’, and differ from the [Consumer Rights Act 2015](#).

Benefits and drawbacks of buying a car online

Benefits of buying a car online

- ✓ The internet makes it simple to shop around and find the best deal, and saves time when compared to visiting several showrooms in person
- ✓ You can order, pay-for and organise a delivery of the vehicle from the comfort of your own home / chosen location
- ✓ The purchase can be made at your own convenience i.e. at any time of day, without being restricted to retailer opening hours
- ✓ It does not prevent you from visiting a retailer or test driving a vehicle during the purchase process, but different legislation applies to that which governs a "distance sale"
- ✓ You have 14 days to change your mind and return the vehicle for a refund if it does not meet your requirements. The refund may be subject to deductions for condition and usage

★ **Please note:** Answers to common consumer questions about buying a car online may be found on The Motor Ombudsman's [Knowledge Base](#).

Some drawbacks of buying a car online

- ✗ There may not be the opportunity to view the car that you are buying at any point during the purchase transaction, especially if it is located far away
- ✗ The car may not meet your requirements and / or comfort level if you haven't had the opportunity to test drive the vehicle prior to delivery
- ✗ You are reliant on the seller's description, photos / videos, and condition report in terms of the vehicle being purchased
- ✗ There may be less scope to negotiate on the price compared to visiting a retailer in person



Top tip when buying a car online

When buying a car online or at a physical premises, make sure you read all documentation and terms and conditions carefully before confirming acceptance of the deal being offered.

Looking to tow a trailer, caravan or horsebox?

If you are looking to tow a trailer, caravan or horsebox when you pass your test, the rules changed in December 2021. Guidance from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) can be found [here](#).

Before you tow a trailer, caravan or horsebox with a car, there are various checks that can be carried out to help stay safe and legal on the road. These include making sure that:

- ✓ The trailer is correctly coupled to the towball or pin;
- ✓ The breakaway cable is not worn or damaged;
- ✓ Tyres do not have any cuts or bulges, and are inflated to recommended levels;
- ✓ There's no damage to lights and indicators; and
- ✓ The trailer is not overloaded, and the load is distributed evenly.

For more information from the DVSA on checks to carry out before towing, [click here](#).

Drivers can get training on how to tow, whether for work or for leisure purposes, via training providers who are part of the DVSA's Trailer Training Accreditation Scheme. This covers the towing of both large and small trailers.



6. Finding and choosing a local garage or car retailer

There are thousands of garages and car retailers up and down the country, and it's likely that there will be a few just in your local area. However, how do you actually choose one? This is when it's time to shop around and to do your homework on and offline. The same applies when looking for insurance or breakdown cover.

Finding a business online

In the digital era, it's now a lot easier to do your own research, as there is so much information available on the internet. However, what should you be looking out for?

Garage finders - these are effectively search engines which list the independent retailers or franchised dealers according to a given postcode, search area or town/city, all at the click of a button.

The Motor Ombudsman's online [Garage Finder](#) is one of the most popular, as the results of the search will tell you if the business in your area is accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's comprehensive Motor Industry Code of Practice for Vehicle Sales (for the sale of new and / or used vehicles) and / or the Motor Industry Code of Practice for Service and Repair.

Customer reviews and ratings - there are plenty of sites offering first-hand customer reviews and ratings, including on The Motor

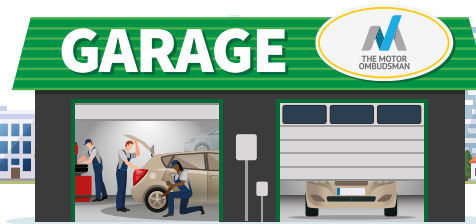


Top tip when choosing a local garage or car retailer

It's important to use a business which is signed up to one or more of The Motor Ombudsman's Codes of Practice, as it means that they have agreed to abide by Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)-approved operating guidelines, and are striving to meet the very highest of standards in terms of the level of service and workmanship offered to motorists.

Ombudsman's online Garage Finder. These are unbiased views from other motorists as to how good that particular business is when it comes to buying or servicing a car, and can be helpful when making your own judgement.

The websites of businesses themselves - can list the latest deals, offers and reviews, current cars for sale and other useful information, so this is worth a read too before visiting the seller's premises.



Finding a business offline

Word of mouth - is a powerful influencer and source of recommendation, so you can always ask family and friends about their positive experiences or any good deals they have received.

On-site visits - once you've narrowed down your shortlist, visit the retailer to get a feel for the type of business that it is, and speak to some of the staff, which will reveal their approach and level of knowledge. It will also give you the chance to have a look at some cars to help get an idea of which ones would be most suitable for your requirements.



You can find a full listing of of Vehicle Sales and Service and Repair Code-accredited-businesses on The Motor Ombudsman's online [Garage Finder](#).

7. Going on a test drive

Going on a **test drive** i.e. getting behind the wheel of the car you are looking to buy, is one of the most effective ways of finding out whether it suits your requirements and lifestyle.



Top tip when going on a test drive

When going on a test drive, have your driver's licence with you so that the business can check and take a copy of it.

In addition, bring along any accessories, such as a buggy, or sporting equipment (e.g. golf clubs), so that you can see whether they will fit. Likewise for child car seats to see whether they are compatible with the fixing points.

Some points to consider when going on a test drive

- ✓ Is the car comfortable, and can you adjust the seats and steering wheel easily to the correct height?
- ✓ Is there enough head and legroom?
- ✓ Is the boot big enough for your requirements, and how do the seats fold down (i.e. a 60-40 or 50-50 split)?
- ✓ Is there enough storage in the front and rear?
- ✓ How user-friendly are the satellite navigation and audio / infotainment systems?
- ✓ Are there any squeaks and rattles (if testing a used car especially)?
- ✓ What does the engine sound like (as this could reveal potential faults)?
- ✓ Is the gearbox shifting smoothly (if testing a used car especially)?
- ✓ What is the condition of the bodywork and tyres (if testing a used car especially)?
- ✓ Does it accelerate adequately when overtaking or on steep inclines, or does the car feel under-powered to you?

8. Resolving a complaint about a car purchase or service / repair

Unfortunately, things can go wrong when you buy or service your first car, and mistakes do happen. For example, you may not have got what you paid for, or maybe there was some work that was carried out that you hadn't previously agreed to.

So what happens if you end up in a dispute with a business?

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, everyone in the UK has legal rights when buying goods or receiving a service, which means that you have the ability to approach the business for a remedy to the problem. This won't necessarily be in the form of financial compensation.

If you have a dispute, the first and best course of action is always to speak to the business you are dealing with directly, and escalate the complaint as necessary to the right people using their own internal process.

If you can't reach an agreement, it's then time to ask the business who their appointed Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) provider is, such as The Motor Ombudsman, in order to pursue your complaint. As an impartial body, they will look at the evidence and the points of view of both parties in order to reach a fair resolution based on the facts of the case.

The ultimate objective of ADR is to avoid legal action which can often be time consuming and costly.



You can **find more information** on what to do in the event of a dispute on [The Motor Ombudsman's website](#).

9. Handy checklists

The following are some useful points to consider and questions to ask when buying a car so that you can make the best possible decision. This checklist is not exhaustive, so please feel free to ask your own questions.

Handy Buying Checklist

Questions to ask the vehicle retailer:

- ☐ Are you accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Vehicle Sales Code (for new and used cars)?
- ☐ How long have you been trading for, and do you specialise in any particular brands?
- ☐ Am I able to test drive the car?
- ☐ Are test drives accompanied or unaccompanied?

Points to consider for your own research:

About the retailer

- ☐ Do I know anyone that has bought a car from the retailer I am planning to use?
- ☐ What do online customer reviews say about the business?

About the car

- ☐ Does the price of the car fall within my chosen budget and meet my needs?
- ☐ Are there finance packages available to make the purchase more affordable?
- ☐ Does the car come with a warranty, and if so, for how long, and what does it cover?
- ☐ Is there an option to buy an extended warranty? (for used cars only)
- ☐ Is the extended warranty provider accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Code of Practice for [Vehicle Warranty Products](#)? (for used cars only)
- ☐ What does the car come with? (e.g. free insurance and accessories)

- ☐ How much is delivery?
- ☐ Does the car come with a completed HPI Check or equivalent evaluation to make sure that it hasn't been involved in an accident etc? (for used cars only)

Running costs

- ☐ What is the cost of annual insurance?
- ☐ What is the cost of annual breakdown cover?
- ☐ What is the cost of annual road tax (Vehicle Excise Duty)?
- ☐ What are the quoted fuel consumption figures (i.e. mpg)?
- ☐ What is the cost of a full tank of fuel at current prices?
- ☐ What is the cost of a full and intermediate service? Are there any servicing plans available?
- ☐ Will I need a parking permit for the car, and how much does it cost per year?
- ☐ What is the depreciation forecast based on average mileage if there are plans to sell the car (i.e. what will be worth after three or five years?)
- ☐ Are replacement parts readily available, and how much do these cost (e.g. tyres, brake discs, wiper blades, oil, etc)?

Electric vehicles / plug-in hybrids (PHEVs)

- ☐ How long does the car take to charge?
- ☐ What is the cost of charging the vehicle from empty with current electricity tariffs?
- ☐ How much does it cost to install a home charger?
- ☐ What is the range between charges?

Condition

- ☐ How much tread is left on the tyres, and is there any sign of cracking or deterioration of the rubber? (for used cars only)
- ☐ Is there any rust or significant damage? (for used cars only)
- ☐ How worn is the interior (for used cars only)?

Vital checks

- ☐ How much time is left on the existing MOT? (for used cars only)
- ☐ Does the chassis number match the one on the V5C registration document (i.e. the logbook)?
- ☐ Does the mileage match that which is recorded on the paperwork? (for used cars only)



Handy Servicing Checklist

Questions to ask the garage:

- ☐ Are you accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Service and Repair Code?
- ☐ Do you offer any pre-paid service plans?
- ☐ How much will the service cost (excluding parts)?
- ☐ How long will the service take?
- ☐ Do you offer any while-you-wait appointments?
- ☐ Do you carry out services at the weekend?
- ☐ Will you call me before carrying out any additional work?
- ☐ Do you offer a courtesy car whilst my car is in for a service, and what is the insurance excess in the event of damage?
- ☐ What is the cost of replacement parts (e.g. brakes, tyres, wiper blades)?
- ☐ Are any parts under warranty, and if so, for how long?
- ☐ Do you offer MOTs and how much do they cost?



Top tip when your car needs servicing

There is a common myth that you can only get your car serviced at a franchised dealership so that you don't invalidate your warranty. However, with [EU Block Exemption Regulations](#), as long as the parts used by an independent garage meet the manufacturer's required specifications, this will not be the case, so it's worth shopping around if you don't have a servicing agreement with a particular dealership.

Just make sure that you keep a full record of the services undertaken by an independent garage, because, if you need to make a claim under your warranty, the manufacturer may need to see it.



For more information on
The Motor Ombudsman, visit:

[TheMotorOmbudsman.org](https://www.themotorombudsman.org)

This guide has been designed by The Motor Ombudsman to assist new drivers in their decision-making process when purchasing a vehicle, service or repair, but should not be used in isolation.