

A GUIDE TO BUYING AND SERVICING YOUR FIRST CAR



**Put yourself in the driving seat
when choosing a car and garage**



THE MOTOR
OMBUDSMAN

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Passing your test and getting behind the wheel of your first car is an exciting time, but there are many choices and decisions that you need to make before signing on the dotted line. Keeping your car in good working order is just as important, so we've put together this handy quick reference guide to help make the process of buying, servicing and repairing your pride and joy even easier.

Yours sincerely,



Bill Fennell

Managing Director and
Chief Ombudsman
The Motor Ombudsman

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Should I buy a new or used car?

There's no clear answer, as it's a matter of personal preference and the budget available as to whether your first car is new or used (second-hand). Each have their benefits and drawbacks which we will now explore.

Buying new

For the sale of new cars in the UK, there are two vehicle registration changes each year. They run from March to August (the year will be on the number plate e.g. 17 for 2017), and for September to February, the '1' is substituted for a '6' e.g. 67. This doesn't apply to personalised

plates where you have free reign in terms of choosing your preferred combination of letters and numbers in-line with your tastes, budget and what's available.

Main benefits of buying new

- ✓ You can choose the colour and specification of the car as well as the very latest model and technology
- ✓ It's in perfect condition and you are the first owner
- ✓ The price of the car can include some added perks such as a warranty lasting a few years, as well as free servicing plans, fuel and insurance
- ✓ There is no need to pay for an MOT during the first three years of ownership

Main drawbacks of buying new

- ✗ It's often more expensive than buying the equivalent model second-hand
- ✗ Order times vary, so you may have to wait a few weeks or months to receive the car
- ✗ You incur the drop in value (known as depreciation) from the moment you own the vehicle
- ✗ Car tax (Vehicle Excise Duty) bands have recently changed, so it could be more expensive to tax a new car than a used one



Should I buy a new or used car?

Buying used

Main benefits of buying used

- ✓ It's often cheaper than buying the same car new, so you can get a lot more for your money and choose the age of the vehicle that you wish to buy
- ✓ The actual car is available there and then to test drive and purchase
- ✓ You can start off with a car that has already taken a few knocks and scratches whilst your confidence at the wheel grows if you feel nervous about having a new car

TOP TIP:

It's always worth taking someone along that knows what to look out for or enlisting the services of a mechanic to take a good look at the car before buying it.

Main drawbacks of buying used

- ✗ 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
- ✗ It could have been involved in an accident (an HPI Check will reveal this)
- ✗ Maintenance costs can be higher due to the vehicle being older
- ✗ It can be out of the original warranty (although dealers may offer their own as part of the purchase)
- ✗ Private sales are not covered by The Motor Ombudsman's Vehicle Sales Codes of Practice, and if something goes wrong, you have less legal rights than you would compared to if you bought a car at a garage, so this is worth keeping in mind



Do I visit a franchised dealership or independent garage?

A franchised dealership

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. They can also be appointed to act as an Authorised Repairer which means they can repair the vehicle under the manufacturer's warranty.

TOP TIP:

If you have a technical problem with a car after you've bought it, you are more likely to be offered goodwill from the vehicle manufacturer (e.g. a contribution towards the cost of the repair / the replacement of a part) if you have a service history with a franchised dealership.

- ✓ Only deals with a specific brand 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)
- ✓ Will provide you with a service history that is generally considered more valuable for getting a higher value upon the re-sale of your car



Do I visit a franchised dealership or independent garage?

An independent garage

An independent garage is defined as a motor trader which has no association or contract with any particular brand of car, and is therefore free to sell and repair vehicles from more than one make.

TOP TIP:

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 full records of the services done by an independent garage, because, if you need to make a claim under your warranty, the manufacturer may need to see these.

- Will not be restricted on which brand of car they can sell and service
- May be more neutral in their sales approach, but at the same time may not have model and brand-specific knowledge
- Can 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



Both franchised dealerships and independent garages can be accredited to The Motor Ombudsman's Service and Repair and / or Vehicle Sales Codes of Practice.

How do I find and choose a local garage?

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, but what should you be looking for?



Garage finders - these are effectively search engines which list the independents or dealerships according to a given postcode, search area or town/city, all at the click of a button. The Motor Ombudsman's Garage Finder is one of the most popular, as the results of the search will tell you immediately if the trader in your area is accredited to a Code of Practice for Service and Repair or Vehicle Sales (new and used).

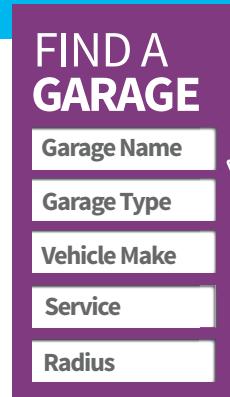


It's important to use a garage which is signed up to one of The Motor Ombudsman's Codes of Practice, as it means that they have agreed to abide by Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) - approved operating guidelines.

You can find a full listing of accredited garages on The Motor Ombudsman's website:

TheMotorOmbudsman.org/garage-finder

There are thousands of garages 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.



Customer reviews and ratings - there are plenty of sites offering first-hand customer reviews and ratings (scores) including The Motor 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 the garages 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 any premises.

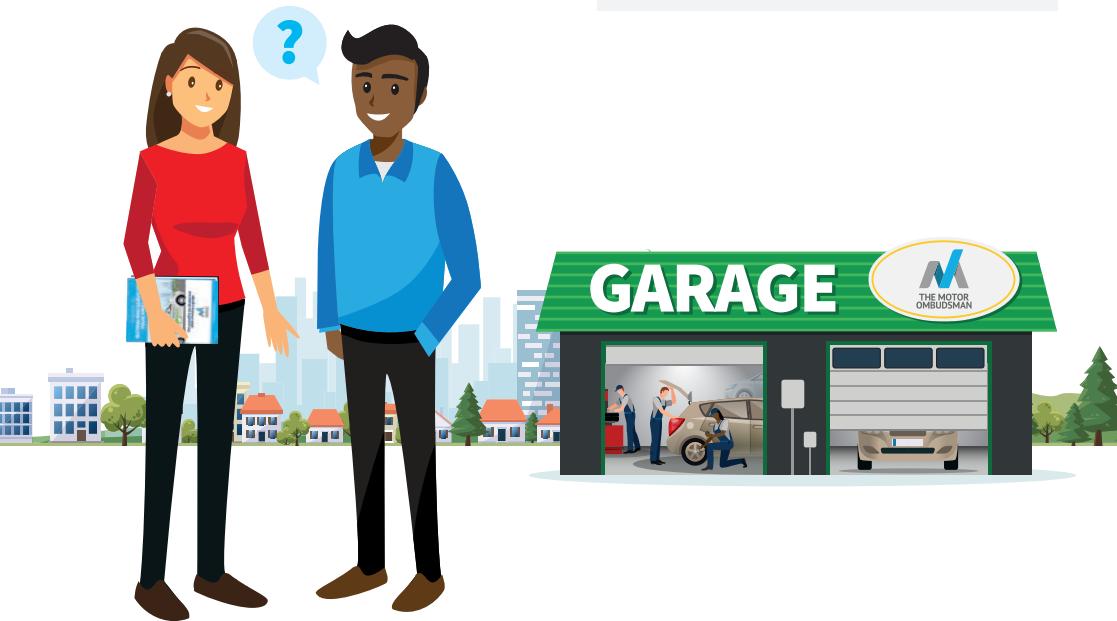


How do I find and choose a local garage?

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 garage 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.



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When you see the CTSI's purple Approved Code logo alongside that of The Motor Ombudsman, you can have the peace of mind that the business is meeting the highest of standards in terms of the level of service and workmanship.

What happens if something goes wrong after I have bought a car or had it serviced?

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 garage?

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 garage or dealership 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 garage who their appointed Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) provider is** such as The Motor Ombudsman in order to pursue your complaint. It is an impartial body that will look at the evidence and the points of view of both parties in order to reach a quick and fair resolution. 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:

TheMotorOmbudsman.org



What questions can I ask when buying or servicing a car for the first time?

Here are some useful questions to ask when buying a car so that you can make the best possible decision. This tick list is not exhaustive, so please feel free to ask your own.

Handy Buying Checklist

Questions about the garage...

- Are they accredited to a Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Vehicle Sales Code of Practice for new and used cars?
- Is the extended warranty provider accredited to a Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Code of Practice?
- How long have you been trading for and do you specialise in any particular brands?
- Do I know anyone that bought a car from the garage or dealership?
- What do online customer reviews say about the garage?

Questions about the car...

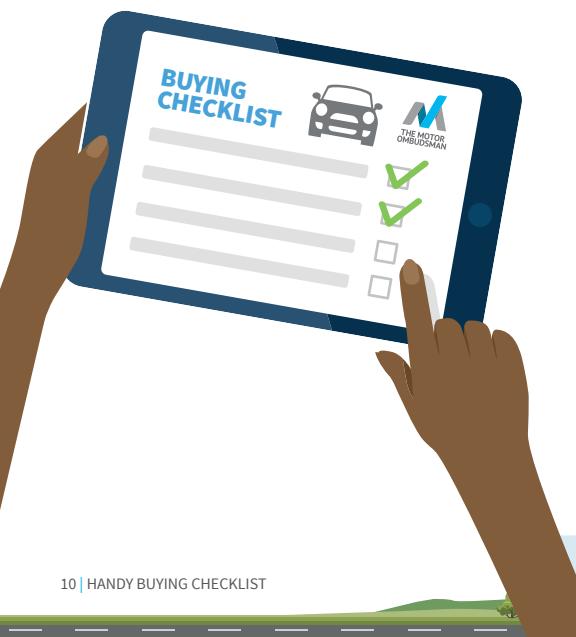
- QUESTION TO YOURSELF:** Does the price of the car fall within my chosen budget and meet my needs?
- TRY BEFORE YOU BUY:** Can I test drive it? (A MUST!)

Extras

- Is it available with any finance packages to make the purchase more affordable?
- Does it come with a warranty, and if so, for how long, and what does it cover?
- Is there an option to buy an extended warranty (used cars only)?
- What does the car come with? (e.g. free insurance and accessories)
- How much is delivery (if applicable)?
- Does it come with an HPI Check or equivalent to make sure that it hasn't been involved in an accident etc (used cars only)?

Costs

- What is the cost of annual insurance?
- What is the cost of annual breakdown cover?
- What is the cost of annual car tax (Vehicle Excise Duty)?
- 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 packages available?
- Are replacement parts readily available and how much do these cost (e.g. tyres, brake discs, wiper blades, oil, etc)?



Handy Buying Checklist (Continued)

Vital statistics

- What are the advertised fuel consumption figures (i.e. mpg)?
- How much time is left on the existing MOT (for used cars only)?
- How much tread is left on the tyres and are they in good condition (i.e. no cracking) – (for used cars only)?
- What is the condition of the brakes (for used cars only)?
- Does the chassis number match the one on the V5C registration document?
- Does the mileage match that which is recorded on the paperwork? (used cars only)
- 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?)

Other

- Is there any rust or significant damage? (used cars only)
- How worn is the interior (for used cars only)?
- What safety equipment and technology does it come with?
- Can I pair my smartphone to the car?
- If the car is electric:
 - What is the range between charges?
 - Where are the charging points?
 - How long does it take to charge?
 - How much does it cost to have a charging point installed at my home?
- Will I need a parking permit for the car and how much does it cost per year?

Handy Servicing Checklist

Questions for the garage...

- Are you accredited to a Chartered Trading Standards Institute-approved Service and Repair Code of Practice?
- 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 waiting 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?
- 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?





The Motor Ombudsman is the automotive dispute resolution body. Fully-impartial, it is the first ombudsman to be focused solely on 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.

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. Content on private vehicle sales, auctions and car supermarkets has been excluded as these do not fall within the remit of The Motor Ombudsman.

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