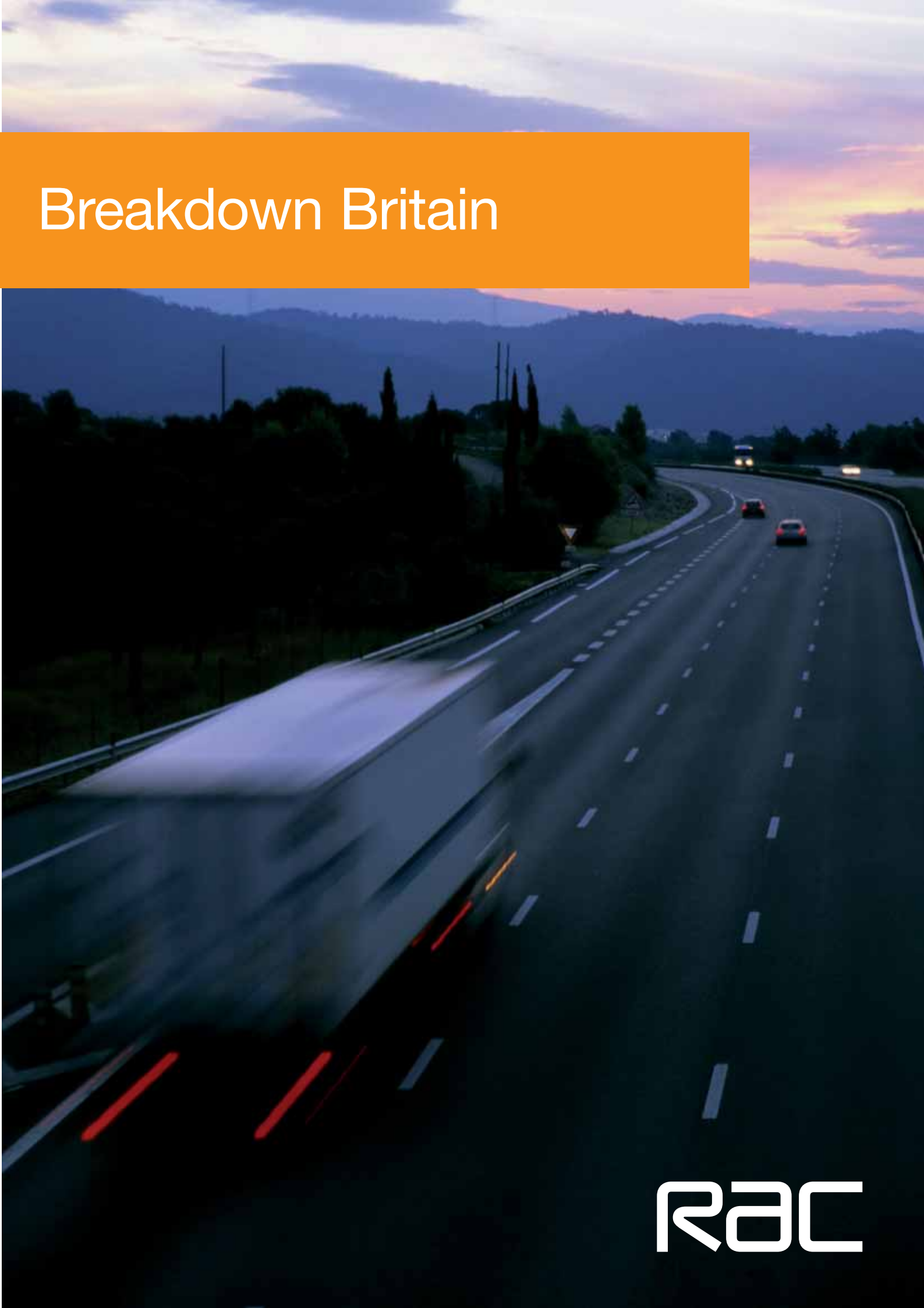


Breakdown Britain



RAC



Executive summary

This report provides the view from the road according to RAC patrols. The report focuses on why vehicles breakdown as well as considering how the modern motoring experience has altered both for the motorist and patrols.

A number of strong themes emerge from the research. According to patrols, there has been a marked and significant decline in the number of motorists undertaking basic car maintenance and this is having a strong knock-on effect on the nature of call-outs patrols respond to.

Secondly, patrols believe that technological advances in cars, ranging from accessories such as Satellite Navigation Systems to electronic engine management, have had an enormous impact on vehicle breakdowns creating confusion among motorists. In some instances, this is creating driver 'fear' where motorists are too nervous to attempt to tackle a problem themselves. In turn, this has meant that the role of patrols has changed significantly – today's patrol is just as likely to arrive on the scene of a breakdown with a laptop and diagnostic device, than with a spanner and screwdriver.

The combination of a decline in car maintenance skills and an increase in driver confusion about the working of technological features in their vehicles has also led to a rise in the number of avoidable call-outs. For example, up to 65,000 call-outs a year are classified as 'driver error' – where no fault is found by the patrols on arrival at the scene. There is also a rising number of call-outs every year for the likes of topping up windscreen wiper water and fixing CD players.

There is no one single factor responsible for the decline in car care amongst consumers, however this report explores how advancing technical complexities, an increasingly time-poor society and attitudinal changes towards manual skills have each played a part in creating a generation of motorists who are less car-savvy than ever before.

As well as examining the trends and themes for why our vehicles breakdown, the report also reveals when and where we breakdown. Using data from the research, RAC is able to pinpoint breakdown 'flash points'. This part of the report provides fascinating insight into the UK's cities and towns which experience the highest level of breakdowns, down to the actual street names that feature most highly in breakdown league tables, to the time of day, week and year when those breakdowns occur.

Foreword

by David Young, RAC Head of Roadside Delivery

As the people on the ground, RAC patrols are uniquely placed to offer real insight and knowledge into life on the road. Each year patrols attend to 2.5million motorists at the scene of a breakdown, patrols arguably have the richest understanding of the issues affecting today's motorists and the behaviours and attitudes that impact on their driving experience.

The research shows that due to less time and knowledge, many motorists fail to take adequate measures to look after their cars, and have very little working knowledge of basic car maintenance. This can lead to vehicle breakdowns which could be avoidable with a little forward thinking and pre-planning.

There are some quick and easy steps motorists can take to help keep their car at its best and avoid breakdowns. We would urge motorists to take a little extra time to read through a car manual, and carry out straightforward vehicle checks ahead of long journeys. A basic understanding of your vehicle can mean a much greater sense of safety and reassurance behind the wheel.

Methodology

- Indepth survey issued to 1650 patrols between 20th and 31st October 2006
- Results compiled by The Survey Shop between 6th and 14th November 2006
- Internal data supplied by RAC MI



Painting a picture of breakdown Britain

Chapter One

Where, when and why do we breakdown?

RAC attends over 2.5 million roadside assistance call-outs each year. **This equates to almost 7000 breakdowns in the UK every single day.** With a patrol fleet of over 1600 people on the road responding to call-outs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, RAC is able to know where, when and why our vehicles breakdown. Using information collected by its patrol fleet, RAC is able to paint a picture of 'Breakdown Britain' highlighting key times, locations and reasons for breakdowns.

This chapter provides an overview of 'Breakdown Britain' revealing the streets we are most likely to breakdown in, the time of day, time of week and time of year we are most likely to call on the organisation, and the most common reasons for those call-outs.

Breakdown Britain: Location

With just under 30,000 vehicle breakdowns a year, the High Street is the top location for breakdowns. North Streets, Church Streets and South Streets throughout the country are also close contenders but the M1 is the only specific road to make the top five with some 19,548 call-outs being made from its hard shoulder every year.

When it comes to the geographical locations of breakdowns, Croydon sets a record for the most vehicle breakdowns, with over 7500 call-outs each year. Other city hotspots include Leicester and Bristol.

Road Name	Breakdowns per year
High Street	29007
North Street	19289
Church Street	18134
South Street	17857
London Road	16333
Station Road	15846

Motorway	Breakdowns per year
M1	19548
M6	17355
M4	15283
M25	14517
M5	13661

Where?

UK Breakdown hotspots

Town/Postcode

1) Croydon (CR0)	7585
2) Leicester (LE3)	4979
3) Bristol (B16)	4973
4) Maidenhead (SL6)	4961
5) Crawley (RH10)	4850
6) Winchester (SO21)	4832
7) Harlesden (NW10)	4749
8) Brighton (BN1)	4721
9) Horley (RH6)	4703
10) Cardiff (CF14)	4491



Breakdown Britain: time

According to RAC data, a car is most likely to breakdown at 8.34am on a Monday morning, as commuters return to their cars after leaving them stationary for the weekend. Unsurprisingly, the cold weather has a significant impact on the number of breakdowns, placing extra strain on a vehicle's battery. As a result, December is the month when most breakdowns occur.

Breakdown Britain: the reasons why

While the reasons for call-outs can vary from the weird to the wonderful (see Chapter Three), by far and away the most common reasons are those associated with basic car maintenance problems such as punctured tyres and car batteries. However in almost 65,000 call-outs, no fault in the vehicle is found – making driver error the sixth most common cause of call-out .

Fault	No of breakdowns
Punctured tyre	194549
Jumpstart (flat battery)	177916
Dead battery (replacement required)	130575
Road Traffic Accident	90263
Engine fault	67881
No fault found (driver error)	64773
Alternator fault	58887
Starter Motor fault	57380
Clutch – Assembly	51969
Interior lights left on (flat battery)	48681

Time on the road

97% of RAC patrols believe motorists are spending more time on the road than ever. There are a number of reasons for this:

- More people work further from home
- Fewer children walk to school
- Poor public transport
- More people drive as part of their job
- More people make more frequent trips to out of town retail parks
- Families and friends live further apart

“RAC data throws up some fascinating insights into the where, when and why we breakdown in our vehicles. According to the information we have gathered, it's possible to predict that on a Monday morning in December at approximately 8.34am, there is a good chance that there will be a number of RAC patrols responding to vehicle breakdown call-outs in High Streets throughout the UK.”

Sam Hudson
RAC Operations Manager



Getting under the skin (and the bonnet) of the modern motorist

Chapter Two

A car is the second biggest purchase we make in our lifetime, yet fewer motorists than ever before appear to be familiar with the running of their vehicles, often displaying a lack of even the most basic car maintenance knowledge.

A resounding 90% of RAC patrols believe that basic car maintenance knowledge has declined over recent years. There is no one single factor behind this depleting consumer knowledge, however, increasingly complex technologies, a lack of time and a reluctance to tackle problems ourselves, are all contributing towards a new generation of motorists who are less car savvy than previous generations.

This chapter explores the decline in car maintenance knowledge, focusing in particular on how technological advances have altered today's motoring experiences and the effect this is having upon the relationship between a motorist and his or her vehicle.

RAC Patrols pinpoint the areas in the UK that demonstrate the least mechanical know-how.

1. SCOTLAND

2. SOUTH EAST

3. NORTH EAST

4. LONDON

5. WALES

6. MIDLANDS

7. NORTH WEST

8. SOUTH WEST

The decline in car know-how and care

Virtually without exception, patrols believe that modern motorists prefer to rely on others to fix simple car problems rather than attempt to resolve the problem themselves. Linked to this attitudinal behaviour, some 71% of patrols believe that today's motorists take less care of their vehicle. They estimate that only one in five motorists conducts the recommended tyre, oil and water checks on a weekly basis. Similarly owners are less likely to read their car manual; in fact patrols believe a quarter of all call-outs could be prevented if the owner consulted their handbook.

Hand in hand with this declining know-how goes car care. According to patrols, as many as 75% of motorists do not carry basic items such as spare water, oil, bulbs or fuses. Moreover, 88% of patrols express concern over the number of vehicles that are not equipped with a spare tyre. The fact that a punctured tyre is the most common cause of call-outs (accounting for nearly 200,000 calls every year), suggests that this lack of time and planning may be partly responsible for the high figure.



Exploring the reasons for car care decline

The view from patrols is that the decline in basic car knowledge and willingness among motorists to investigate reasons for their vehicle breakdown themselves is symptomatic of the society we live in today. With today's hectic lifestyles and a 'disposable' attitude to consumer goods, people are much less inclined to spend time trying to repair their vehicles, and often neglect to undertake basic and essential car care.

	All	London	Midlands	North east	North west	Scotland	South east	South west	Wales	Not stated
We live in a much more disposable society where people take less care of objects (e.g. throw something out if it's broken)	51%	62%	39%	47%	43%	29%	54%	50%	63%	58%
Expense of running a vehicle means people pay the minimum for parts and spares	42%	36%	32%	47%	50%	42%	48%	64%	38%	33%
Lifestyles have changed and people have much less time to look after their cars	37%	29%	39%	24%	29%	29%	43%	32%	38%	47%
Cars are more of a commodity and less of a luxury	28%	27%	36%	18%	21%	25%	28%	25%	50%	29%
People are reluctant to care for their cars themselves/think they shouldn't have to and prefer to pay someone else to do the work	20%	12%	28%	15%	17%	27%	26%	15%	27%	17%
'Fixing' and doing manual things is out of fashion (e.g. DIY)	19%	28%	13%	15%	28%	23%	25%	15%	9%	14%

Percentage illustrates number of patrols that agree

The impact of declining car know-how

There is no doubt that declining owner knowledge is a major contributory factor to many call-outs. A common driver error is misinterpreting the flashing of warning lights as being indicative of a serious problem with their vehicle. This accounts for as many as 30% of driver error call-outs. Similarly, using the incorrect fuel for the engine type is a common driver error, with 93% of patrols believing misfuelling to be on the rise.

The impact of technology on vehicle breakdowns

In addition to the decline in basic car maintenance knowledge, the research reveals the extent to which technology has impacted upon the role of patrols. Indeed, patrols cite the growing technical complexities of modern vehicles as the biggest single factor in the rising number of calls for advice.



“Understanding your vehicle is key to being a safe and responsible driver. Today’s motorists could save themselves valuable time and money, simply by reading their vehicle handbook, making regular checks to the oil and water and ensuring they carry a spare tyre, fuses and bulbs on journeys. Breaking down can be a distressing experience for a motorist but a vast number of call-outs could be avoided with just a little more preparation and care.”

David Young
RAC Head of Roadside Delivery

82% of patrols believe that technological developments mean that cars now require more specialist attention. Indeed, changing technology significantly contributes to the apparent reluctance amongst motorists to perform even simple car maintenance, with 56% of patrols believing that the average motorist fears looking under the bonnet.

While innovations such as satellite navigation and immobilisers have made a positive impact on car safety and security, the flipside is that they have created confusion for motorists:

- Over half of patrols believe the use of in-car accessories has resulted in more flat batteries
- 78% believe high-tech locking devices have led to rise in motorist lock-ins
- 63% have experienced non-starts as a result of immobiliser technology



The changing nature
of life on the road

Chapter Three

The role of RAC patrols has altered in line with both motorists' changing behaviours and technological advances in vehicles. The traditional image of a patrol arriving armed with a spanner and screwdriver is fast becoming a thing of the past. As modern vehicles become more reliant on electronic engine management, the average patrol is more likely to arrive at the scene of a breakdown equipped with a laptop and electronic diagnostic device, as well as the traditional toolbox.

This chapter focuses on the role of patrols, exploring in more depth the kinds of technology-related breakdowns experienced by patrols and considers how these have irreversibly altered the role the patrols play in helping and protecting motorists on the road. It also looks at the impact of declining car knowledge and care among motorists on the work that patrols carry out, as well as shedding light on some of the more bizarre and unusual call-outs experienced.



Key factors changing the role of a patrol

Technological advances have had a huge impact on the day-to-day work of patrols. According to the research, the following factors all play a significant role:

1. Technological diagnostic devices replacing mechanical skills (e.g. diagnostic fault code reader)
2. Breakdowns increasingly caused by human error
3. Increased motorist fear of damaging their vehicles leading to less likelihood to 'have a go' themselves
4. Motorists' inability to tell the difference between improved diesel and petrol technology causing misfuelling
5. Motorists' playing down the full extent of the problem

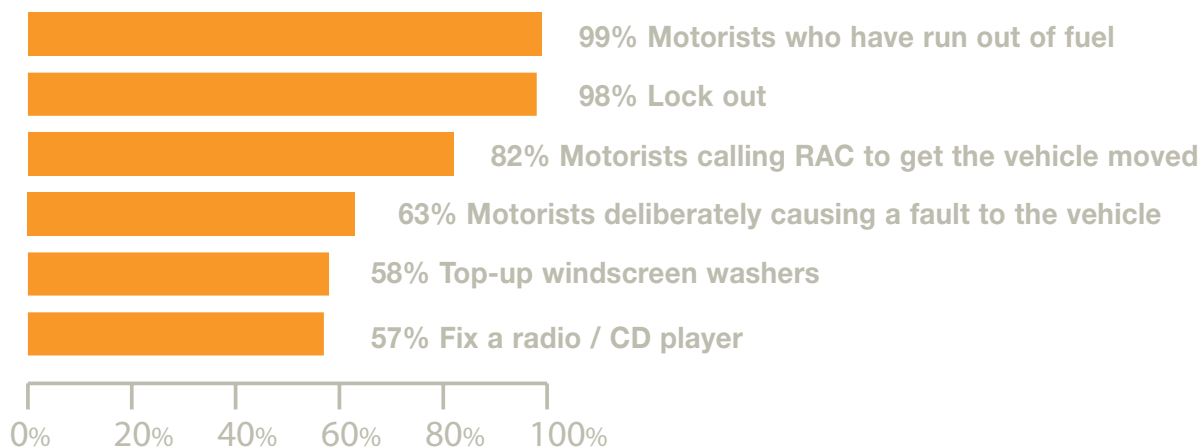
The impact of technology

Patrols cite many examples of technological hiccups in vehicles accounting for call-outs. While the patrols respond to many complex technical problems that require expert handling, the research suggests that in many instances, driver confusion about the workings of in-car accessories and devices is often responsible for call-outs.

Advanced locking devices have led to a very modern day problem of motorists accidentally locking themselves out of their vehicles. Almost all patrols (98%) have attended a lock-out. Similarly, an increasing use of gadgets, such as Satellite Navigation, DVD systems and MP3 players, puts additional strain on a battery, with over half of patrols citing this as a being responsible for the rise in the number of battery-related call-outs.

The impact of declining car care

Running out of fuel is the most common cause of avoidable breakdown with almost every patrol attending such a call-out (99%). Even more surprisingly, over half (58%) patrols have been called out for simple tasks such as topping up windscreen washers and even to repair a CD player (57%).



“Throughout the last decade a huge number of innovations have been introduced to make the experience of driving safer and more enjoyable. However, these same technologies have distanced owners from their vehicle, as many motorists fear damaging sensitive, and often expensive, devices. This has created a mindset in which drivers would rather do nothing, than risk causing harm to their vehicle.”

Sam Hudson
RAC Operations Manager

And finally...

The day-to-day reality of life on the road for an RAC patrol primarily involves responding to breakdowns caused by technology malfunctions, driver negligence, punctured tyres and flat batteries. However with the thousands of call-outs every day come some entirely unpredictable call-outs:

- One patrol delivered a baby
- Four out of ten patrols have rescued a celebrity
- One in ten patrols has attended a wedding related call-out, including retrieving a ring and delivering a bride to the altar
- RAC Patrols have responded to call-outs involving rescuing alligators, llamas, snakes and parrots from vehicles
- Call-outs don't just tend to the average family car – the original 1938 Austin from Pearl Harbour, a London tour bus, a traditional rickshaw and a mobile blood unit have all been attended by RAC

