

BREAKDOWNS – POOR MAINTENANCE & UNUSUAL CALL-OUTS



IF IT AINT BROKE – FIX IT!

Surprise, surprise. A recent AA survey has shown that most British drivers are not clued-up about the most basic aspects of car maintenance. It shows that only a third of motorists know how to properly maintain their car by carrying out basic maintenance checks - such as oil and water levels, tyre pressures and battery condition.

While patrols from roadside organisations like the AA fix around eight out of 10 vehicles, many of the 3.9 million breakdowns they attend each year are apparently caused by motorists failing to make simple mechanical checks which could keep their cars on the road.

The survey carried out for the AA revealed that most motorists were unaware how frequently these checks should be made. One in 10 motorists, for example, are putting their car engine at risk by never checking the oil level. The AA recommends that this should be done once a week, but two thirds of motorists still fail to carry out this basic weekly check.

Guilty? Then try this one. When it comes to checking tyre tread depths, only 9 per cent of those asked knew that the legal minimum depth was 1.6mm. Some 52 per cent had no idea at all. Less than a third (32 per cent) of those questioned knew that their car battery would, on average, only last for three to four years.

Less than a quarter (23 per cent) of motorists check their engine's coolant levels as recommended. Another 24 per cent never check while another 6 per cent only do so when they think there is a problem. Just over a third (34 per cent) find the time to check their car's washing water levels. Five per cent of men never check compared to 13 per cent of women.

It all paints a pretty bleak picture of motorists' incompetence. Still, it does at least keep the roadside recovery organisations in business - and even their longest-standing patrols amazed at what they find when they arrive to rescue a member.

Here are just a few of the AA's Top 20 most unusual call-outs. Don't laugh – it could be you next.....

1. Norfolk patrol Rolly Field used his initiative when trying to get into a locked car, and used birthing forceps belonging to the member who was a doctor.
2. Patrol Andy Cotton came to the rescue of a Royal Air Force aircraft when he lent his tools to help tighten up the nose cone of a Canberra T4 plane at International Air Tattoo at RAF Fairford.



3. Luton patrol Philip Homer was called out to a distressed driver who had noticed smoke billowing from her car boot. It turned out to be a fire extinguisher that had been set off by her luggage.
4. The quickest breakdown arrival and repair (of a vehicle) is currently held by patrol Paul Amos, who in 1999 got a member back on the road after just four minutes. Patrol Amos arrived on the scene two minutes after the member had phoned, having locked her keys in her boot. Two minutes after patrol Amos arrived, the member was back behind the wheel of her car.
5. AA patrol Bob Fuller, 63, of Cramlington, Northumberland, recently rescued a hamster from behind a car's gearbox. The rodent had nibbled a hole in the cardboard box he was travelling in, dived into the footwell and disappeared under the fascia as he was being driven home from a pet shop.
6. A Scottish patrol was surprised when he diagnosed a fanbelt problem only for the elderly female member to remove her tights to help repair it.
7. In separate incidents patrols in both the West Midlands and West Country have been called out to car lock-outs at nudist camps, where AA members had lost car keys and were locked out of their vehicles. The keys were later found in trousers, that for obvious reasons had been discarded!
8. Berkshire patrol Andy Smith rescued a woman from floods then drove her to the local supermarket to do her weekly shopping.
9. A Whitley Bay patrol retrieved a woman's keys from a drain using a magnet.
10. A Warwickshire patrol encountered an elderly man who thought that if he left food scraps in his car, mice would chew the food instead of the car's wiring.
11. A Tayside patrol found porridge in the car radiator – the member thought it would stop the leak.
12. A Brentwood patrol received a roaring reception when he attended a van breakdown and found three lions inside en route to Longleat Safari Park, Wiltshire.
13. A Norfolk patrol helped a farmer who was locked out of his car. A piglet inside the car had activated the central locking with its trotter.
14. Former Patrol of the Year Colin Hunter cut a cat free after it got entangled in a fan belt where it had gone for warmth.
15. A Perth patrol found a hot water bottle on the car engine – the member thought it would keep the engine warm.
16. A Telford patrol was called to wake up a 93-year-old woman who had fallen asleep in her locked car. The member had lost her keys and the elderly woman had taken her hearing aid out, and couldn't be woken.
17. A Patrol was called to solve a funny hissing noise inside a car – on closer inspection he found an aerosol can wedged under the driver's seat.
18. A Norwich patrol solved the mystery of a buzzing noise inside a member's car – a battery-powered razor had been left switched on in an overnight bag.
19. Two Kent patrols repaired the engine on a microlight aircraft after it crash landed in a corn field.
20. A West Midlands patrol coaxed a corn snake out from behind a car dashboard using a hairdryer.