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Are we there yet? UK drivers’ safety at risk abroad as majority are prepared for marathon drives without a stop

With this weekend and next due to be the busiest all summer for drivers heading south through France for the holidays, * new figures from [RAC European Breakdown](#)** reveal just how long motorists are prepared to drive without a break – risking their safety and that of their passengers and other road users in the process.

Incredibly, more than a quarter of UK drivers (28%) who have taken their own transport to the Continent admit to driving non-stop for five hours or more, with the figure leaping to a colossal 58% who say they’ve driven for four hours or more without a break. Within the EU, even people who drive for a living are [not permitted by law to drive for any more than four-and-half hours before stopping](#).

In contrast, just one-in-10 drivers who have driven abroad from the UK (9.3%) say they have stuck to driving two hours or less before stopping and taking a rest, as recommended by the Highway Code. While drivers are not bound by it outside the UK, [Rule 91 of the Code](#) states that a break of at least 15 minutes should be taken every two hours – with regular breaks essential in keeping a driver focused, alert and, above all, safe on the road.

Driving on empty? The longest motorists are prepared to go without taking a break

Time spent driving on the Continent without a break	% of drivers
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1 hour or less	0.5%
2 hours of less - as recommended in the Highway Code	9.3%
3 hours more more	90.1%
4 hours or more - commercial drivers can't drive for more than 4½ hours in the EU without a break	58.0%
5 hours or more	28.2%
6 hours or more	16.7%
7 hours or more	9.7%
8 hours or more	7.5%

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RAC Europe spokesman Rod Dennis said:

“This Saturday is declared a ‘Black Saturday’ or ‘un Samedi noir’ in France, and for good reason – widespread queues are expected as millions of holidaymakers head south and west in search of the sun, with a good number of these starting their journeys this side of the Channel.

“With long traffic jams inevitable, it’s vitally important UK drivers plan, but also pace their journeys. Worryingly, these new figures show just how few of us are prepared to do that. Perhaps it’s a desire to get to our holiday destinations as quickly as possible that means we continue to drive on, or maybe we’re not leaving ourselves enough time to reach the French ferry terminals on our journeys home – but whatever the reason, driving for so long in one go means we’re severely increasing the risk of causing a collision.

“Despite the ease at which modern vehicles allow us to clock up the miles (or kilometres) in relative comfort, it’s still the case that driving is an extremely demanding task – all the more so if you are getting used to foreign roads, and foreign drivers. So taking a proper break is essential – it doesn’t need to be a long one, but having a rest (even a short nap) and drinking two cups of caffeinated coffee as recommended in the Highway Code can keep you safe and alert.”

UK government data indicates that Brits take around 7m holiday trips into the Continent via ferry ports and the Channel Tunnel every year.***

Driving abroad this summer? Tips for staying alert

- **Share the driving.** If you’ve a long distance to cover, it makes a lot of sense to share the effort of driving – which allows the person not driving to rest up. [Buying temporary car insurance](#) can be much cheaper than adding someone to an existing car insurance policy
- **Plan for plenty of breaks.** The drive is part of the holiday, so make some stop-offs to discover, even just briefly, some other parts of the country you’re visiting. [Visit RAC Drive for some stop-off inspiration](#)
- **Don’t underestimate how long some journeys can take.** If you’re rushing back to a Channel port, perhaps you didn’t leave yourself enough time for the journey in the first place. [Check an online route planner](#) and then add some contingency time to give you a chance to rest up (and to factor in any traffic jams)
- **Avoid each ‘Samedi noir’ in France if you can.** There may be no avoiding them, but these Black Saturdays in the summer traditionally see the largest volumes of holidaymakers on the road – and some of the longest jams. [Check the RAC Drive](#)

- [website for when they are expected in 2019](#)
Don't forget breakdown cover. A good level of [European breakdown cover](#) is important for all drivers taking their own vehicles across the Channel

The RAC provides the best level of European breakdown cover available on the market, with its [Comprehensive Plus product](#).**** It is the only product that covers all the costs to bring a broken-down vehicle back to the UK (as long as it's not beyond economical repair) and gives drivers more to spend on a hire car and accommodation than any other provider.

The RAC has published a checklist for drivers on [what they need to know before taking their own vehicle over the Channel](#) this summer. A range of [country-specific driving guides](#) is also available.

Notes to Editors

* 3 August and 10 August are classed as 'Samedi noirs', or 'Black Saturdays', in France due to expected traffic volumes on key holiday routes. A calendar of classically-busy are published by the French government's Bison-Futé service each year. [Check the RAC website for this year's dates](#)

** Source: RAC Opinion Panel survey conducted in June 2019 with 1,010 people who drive, or have driven, to/from the UK to continental Europe

*** Source: [Office for National Statistics, Travel trends estimates: UK residents' visits abroad 2018](#). 7m made up of 4m 'Sea' and 3m 'Tunnel' holiday trips

**** Comparison based on RAC Comprehensive Plus European Breakdown cover against the top level of cover from other major providers as of 05.02.2019. For full details visit www.rac.co.uk/eurocompare

About the RAC

First formed in 1897, the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members for more than 120 years.

Today it has approximately 10m members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's [roadside assistance](#), [insurance](#), [buying a used car](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#) – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC supports the interests of its members and UK drivers at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – is one of a kind and provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#). It provides a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump - and tracks these prices daily to help drivers check if the price they pay to fill up is a fair one.

For more information about the RAC, visit the [RAC website](#).

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