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Drivers lack official source of vital emissions standards information

Millions of drivers have no easy way of knowing how they might be affected by the future roll-out of clean air zones in the UK because of the lack of an official, comprehensive number plate look-up system for checking a vehicle's Euro emissions category, the RAC warns today.

In a bid to improve air quality, dozens of towns and cities that breach legal air pollution limits have been told by the Government they must publish plans for reducing harmful nitrogen dioxide emissions by the end of March 2018. Depending on how each local authority seeks to reduce emissions, drivers may in the future face either restrictions or charges – based on the Euro emissions category of their vehicle which dictates, under laboratory conditions, maximum permitted tailpipe emissions.**

The RAC is therefore calling on the Government, through the DVLA, to urgently develop a website that allows every UK driver to check a vehicle's Euro emission standard by entering a vehicle registration number – a service already offered to drivers in [a number of other European countries](#).

As the DVLA already holds a detailed log of every registered vehicle in the UK it is ideally placed to provide an online look-up at GOV.UK as part of its [vehicle information database](#). The RAC believes such a service should be made available well ahead of the anticipated roll-out of clean air zones, so that motorists have enough time to check which category their vehicle falls under and if necessary consider changing it.

Despite the fact that drivers will soon want to know the Euro emissions category of their vehicle, new research based on a sample of 2,200 motorists conducted by the RAC found that nearly four in 10 (38%) haven't heard of the

Euro emissions classification system, while nearly two-thirds of those that have (64%) either don't know what category their own vehicle fits into or are unsure of it.***

Half of those surveyed (49%) said they would expect to find out the emissions category of their vehicle on the main GOV.UK website, while more than a quarter (28%) thought they would find it on a vehicle manufacturer's own website.

As of October 2017 the only source of detailed vehicle emissions information covering different manufacturers is the Vehicle Certification Agency's ['car fuel data' website](#). Drivers cannot simply enter a vehicle registration number but instead must provide several different pieces of information, including the specific model variant of a vehicle.

The website then displays the caveat: *'when looking to find out the Euro Standard for a vehicle already in service, we strongly recommend that you contact the manufacturer'*, which could raise doubts in motorists' minds about the accuracy of the information being presented to them.****

[Transport for London's website](#) allows motorists to find out if their vehicle is impacted by the new T-Charge by entering their number plate. Using this website, motorists can easily find out if their car meets the minimum Euro 4 standard, but the website stops short of informing them of the vehicle's Euro emissions category. The Mayor also plans to introduce an ultra-low emission zone in 2019, which will have stricter standards that vehicles must meet over a larger geographical area.

RAC spokesman Rod Dennis said: "As councils across the UK develop plans to tackle harmful emissions on a local level, we expect millions of drivers will want to find out the Euro emissions category of their vehicle – and the natural place to look will be on the official GOV.UK website. We've already seen a big increase in traffic to our own website from people trying to find this information and to understand more about what the Euro emissions standard actually means.

"It is simply unacceptable that there is currently no easy-to-use or conclusive online look-up system available – this will no doubt leave drivers confused about whether or not they are likely to be impacted by the introduction of clean air zones. And this is all the more surprising given that the Government

stated in its detailed air quality plan published in July that ‘information enabling customers to understand quickly and easily whether or not a given vehicle would potentially incur a charge is particularly important’.

“The DVLA already holds detailed records on vehicles registered in the UK – including CO2 emissions and engine size – and makes this freely available online; so why shouldn’t they also make available this one vital piece of information on each vehicle’s Euro emissions category?

“The only site that claims to hold the information is run by a body many drivers will probably never have heard of – the Vehicle Certification Agency – and their information carries a significant caveat.”

Euro 5 or Euro 6 confusion?

While the Government has said it favours non-charging clean air zones, it is likely that where charges are introduced by local authorities, vehicles meeting Euro 4 petrol and Euro 6 diesel emission standards will be exempt, at least initially.**

The RAC is concerned that without a definitive look-up website, and as a result of manufacturers being allowed to sell some Euro 5 models as recently as August 2016,*** there is a risk that motorists might wrongly think their car – or one they are considering buying – meets the latest Euro 6 regulations when it does not. This could mean drivers of diesel cars believing they will avoid potential restrictions or charges because their vehicle is Euro 6 compliant, when actually it is still Euro 5 and therefore more likely to be impacted.

Information widely available online states that cars registered from 1 September 2015 are Euro 6 compliant, which suggests cars with a ‘65’ plate or newer. However, Euro 5 cars manufactured before June 2015 could continue to be sold until 1 September 2016 – meaning that some cars that carry ‘65’ or even ‘16’ plates are actually still Euro 5.

Simply looking at a vehicle number plate, or checking the date of a car’s first registration via the V5C form, is therefore not a reliable way of knowing what Euro standard a car’s engine meets – reinforcing the need for a

comprehensive online look-up website.

Rod Dennis continued: “We are also concerned that drivers could end up thinking that a car they own, or one they are looking to buy, is Euro 6 compliant when it isn’t. A lot of the current information online advises drivers that any car registered from 1 September 2015 onwards is Euro 6 compliant. Yet a small number of Euro 5 cars continued to be sold for a full 12 months after this date, until 1 September 2016, if a manufacturer applied for an exemption.

“Much greater transparency of Euro emissions information will also help inform drivers as to how polluting their car might be, and assist them when it comes to choosing their next one – as buyers start to select models with particular Euro categories to be more confident of avoiding potential future charges or restrictions. It may even act as a catalyst to encourage drivers to purchase an ultra-low emission vehicle.

“We welcome independent emissions research such as [Emissions Analytics’ EQUA Index](#) that aims to provide drivers with a much clearer picture as to how clean their car is. But it is still essential that there is proper visibility of the standard Euro information that councils will use as the basis for their own air quality improvement schemes. The bottom line is that if local authorities are using emission standards as the measure as to whether a charge is applicable, then there must be a way for drivers to check what category their vehicle is.

“It is in the Government’s best interests to make accessing basic Euro emissions information as straightforward for the UK’s 38m drivers as possible.”

Notes to Editors

* Engines in vehicles sold in the EU since 1992 have a classification, [from Euro 1 to the newest and cleanest, Euro 6](#). These dictate the maximum emissions an engine can emit, when tested under laboratory conditions.

** See Table 5 of <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen->

*** Source: Sample of 2,200 RAC Opinion Panel survey, October 2017

**** See screenshot download at the foot of this press release

About the RAC

First formed in 1897 the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members and championing the interests of motorists for 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million 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 is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists 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 – 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](#) or follow [#racfuelwatch on Twitter](#). RAC Fuel Watch is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on

- average within 30 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 92% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

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