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Number of privately licensed battery electric vehicles in the UK rises 53% in a year

The number of battery electric vehicles ('BEVs') in private hands in the UK rose by nearly 30,000 in the 12 months to September 2020, an increase of 53% on the year before, with more than a third of these (36%) in London and the South East of England, RAC analysis of the latest official Government data shows.*

The increases mean that almost exactly half of all BEVs in the UK – 86,130

vehicles – were licensed by private individuals as of the end of the third quarter of 2020, with the remainder of 86,387 vehicles licensed by companies. This is a one-and-a-half fold (150%) increase compared to a year earlier, a clear indication of the rising popularity of electric vehicles among companies and something that is vital for the future health of the second-hand EV market.

Four of the top 10 local authority areas with the greatest number of privately licensed BEVs are in London, with Barnet having the most (1,235 vehicles). Wiltshire has the second highest number (1,075 vehicles), followed by Westminster (919 vehicles), Cornwall (899 vehicles) and Camden (781 vehicles). Conversely, the smallest numbers of privately run BEVs, aside from those on some island communities and the square mile that is the City of London, are to be found in South Wales – in Merthyr Tydfil (21 vehicles) and Blaenau Gwent (27 vehicles).

When it comes to the areas seeing the fastest growth in privately registered battery electric vehicles, the top two authorities are in London – Barking and Dagenham, and Waltham Forest – both of which have seen numbers double in the space of 12 months (from 52 in 2019 to 112 in 2020, and 89 to 179 respectively). Growth outside the capital is spread widely, with parts of Derbyshire, Cumbria, south west Wales and Sussex all recording significant increases, albeit starting from small bases.

At the other end of the scale, growth of battery electric vehicles was slowest in parts of Northern Ireland including Armagh (up just eight vehicles, from 134 to 142), Gateshead and Sunderland in the north east of England and on the Orkney Islands. Only the Isles of Scilly, off the coast of Cornwall, recorded a drop in licensed BEVs between 2019 and 2020, down from 28 to 25.

Overall, 87.3% of all battery electric vehicles licensed by private individuals were in England as of September 2020, almost unchanged (up 0.3%) compared to a year earlier. Scotland has the next biggest proportion (8.2%, up from 8.1%) followed by Wales (3.0%, down from 3.1%) and Northern Ireland (1.4%, down from 1.8%).**

RAC data insight spokesman Rod Dennis said:

“While starting from very small beginnings when you consider there are around 32m cars licensed for use in the entire United Kingdom, the growth in

pure electric vehicles is extremely promising. There is a long way to go, not least as only half of these vehicles are in private hands, compared to nine-in-10 of all cars**, but it's clear that the numbers are only going one way.

“The biggest annual rise in the numbers of vehicles are among those licensed by companies, which suggests the clear tax benefits given to company car drivers are beginning to stoke demand. It's vital this continues, as in many cases the new company vehicles of today will be the ones appearing on the second-hand consumer market in three or more years from now.

“The figures also highlight the locations where drivers are most likely to see these cleanest cars – increasingly sporting green number plates – either being driven or parked up and charging.

“It's important that the environmental and financial benefits afforded by the switch to electric cars are shared by drivers right across the country. Our analysis shows the extent to which the south and east of England currently dominate when it comes to the numbers that are currently in private hands, with London leading when it comes to the fastest growth in electric vehicles – something we've noticed when it comes to the volume of EV breakdowns our patrols have attended. Indeed, two of the three council areas that recorded a doubling in the numbers of vehicles between 2019 and 2020 were London boroughs, with the capital also having some of the highest concentrations of BEVs anywhere in the country.

“It's also certainly the case that the numbers only tell part of the story. Cornwall and Wiltshire, for example, while having some of the highest numbers of BEVs are also two of the largest counties by area, so in reality there will be far fewer electric cars seen on the roads in these counties right now compared to other urban locations.

“[Recent RAC research](#) shows a growing number of UK drivers are planning on switching to an electric vehicle next time they change their cars – up from 3% in 2018 to 9% in 2020. But despite this, most (78%) still think that pure electric cars are too expensive compared to conventionally fuelled vehicles, prompting around half (53%) to say they'd like to see VAT on new electric cars either being cut or abolished entirely.

“The RAC is leading the way when it comes to supporting drivers in the switch to electric vehicles. An ever-increasing number of our patrol vans have

built-in emergency mobile charging systems capable of giving an out-of-charge electric car enough power to be driven a short distance home or to a working chargepoint, while our All-Wheels-Up recovery system allows our patrols to safely rescue electric cars with no need for a flatbed.”

The RAC estimates that as of January 2021, there are now in the region of 213,000 battery electric vehicles in the UK, with more than 100,000 of these registered last year alone.***

For more information on the RAC’s services for drivers of electric vehicles, visit www.rac.co.uk/breakdown-cover/electric-car-breakdown-cover.

[View embedded content here](#)

Top nations and regions for privately licensed battery electric vehicles as of end of September 2020, and year-on-year increase

Nation or region	Privately licensed BEVs as of Q3 2019	Privately licensed BEVs as of Q3 2020	% increase year-on-year	Share of all BEVs licensed in the UK as of Q3 2020
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South East	11,760	17,820	51.5%	20.7%
London	8,503	13,605	60.0%	15.8%
East of England	6,256	9,555	52.7%	11.1%
South West	6,081	9,351	53.8%	10.9%
Scotland	4,595	7,069	53.8%	8.2%
North West	4,363	6,655	52.5%	7.7%
West Midlands	3,919	5,932	51.4%	6.9%
East Midlands	3,482	5,274	51.5%	6.1%
Yorkshire & Humber	3,026	4,725	56.1%	5.5%
Wales	1,731	2,616	51.1%	3.0%
North East	1,678	2,292	36.6%	2.7%
Northern Ireland	993	1,219	22.8%	1.4%
TOTAL †	56,393	86,130		

† Totals include additional small numbers of vehicles listed as 'region/country unknown' or 'vehicle under disposal'

Locations with the fastest growth in privately licensed battery electric vehicles as of end of September 2020, and year-on-year increase

Local authority	Q3 2019	Q3 2020	Difference	% change y-o-y
Barking and Dagenham [^]	52	112	60	115.4%
Waltham Forest [^]	89	179	90	101.1%
Bolsover	28	56	28	100.0%

Newham^	81	160	79	97.5%
Eden	32	62	30	93.8%
Pembrokeshire	75	143	68	90.7%
Eastbourne	41	78	37	90.2%
Bolton	91	173	82	90.1%
Sutton^	138	258	120	87.0%
Hackney^	130	242	112	86.2%

^ indicates a London borough

Locations with the greatest number of privately licensed battery electric vehicles as of end of September 2020, and year-on-year increase

Local authority	Q3 2019	Q3 2020	Difference	% change y-o-y
Barnet^	867	1,235	368	42.4%
Wiltshire	711	1,075	364	51.2%
Westminster^	627	919	292	46.6%
Cornwall	626	899	273	43.6%
Camden^	512	781	269	52.5%
Kensington and Chelsea^	523	775	252	48.2%
Leeds	530	766	236	44.5%
Edinburgh City	489	759	270	55.2%
Cheshire East	495	757	262	52.9%
Birmingham	408	664	256	62.7%

^ indicates a London borough

Notes to Editors

* Based on analysis of Department for Transport licensed battery electric

vehicles data. 'Battery electric vehicles' figures used in this release cover all major body types: cars, vans, buses & coaches, motorcycles, HGVs, taxis etc. Cars and vans / LGVs will currently make up the vast majority

** These proportions largely mirror the population distribution across the UK – [according to the ONS](#), as of 2019 84.3% of the population lived in England, 8.2% in Scotland, 4.7% in Wales and 2.8% in Northern Ireland

*** Based on SMMT new registrations data since 2010

The press office email address is press.enquiries@rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

ISDN radio studio facilities are available for interviews Monday to Friday.

About the RAC

The RAC provides complete peace of mind to 12m UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. Its services include:

- **[Breakdown assistance](#)**. Its highly-skilled, 1,600-strong branded patrol workforce attends more than two million breakdowns every year, fixing on average four out of five vehicles at the roadside. The RAC's patrol fleet is one of the most advanced in the UK, and was the first to roll out both an [All-Wheels-Up recovery system](#), allowing the vast majority of vehicles to be recovered from a single patrol van, and [EV Boost](#) mobile electric vehicle charging units
- **[Insurance](#)**. The RAC is a top-five [car insurance](#) broker having surpassed the 500,000 policies-in-force milestone in 2018. It also offers '[black box](#)' [telematics policies](#), as well as home and travel insurance
- **Other motoring services**. The RAC leads in the development of new solutions for business, fleets, electric vehicles and future car technology. Its additional products and services include

a [personal loans offering](#), a [used car buying website](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#). It also has a network of [Approved Dealers](#) and [Approved Garages](#) which combine the trust of RAC brand with local service and convenience

The RAC also works to support the interests of its members and UK drivers on the most important motoring issues which it identifies via the annual [RAC Report on Motoring](#) and the RAC Opinion Panel. The Report on Motoring is the longest running analysis of driver opinion in the UK having been published every year since 1989.

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

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