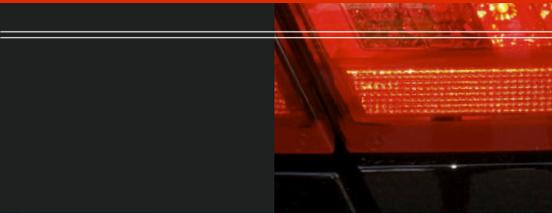


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# Direct Line & Brake Reports on Safe Driving 2015-2017 **REPORT ONE**

## Are you ready to drive?



Produced by:



Working in partnership with:



**direct line**



**Julie Townsend**, Brake's deputy chief executive, says:

"As this report is published, it is nearly two years since the government promised a re-evaluation of the way we learn to drive, in the form of a green paper on young drivers. That green paper has still yet to emerge. In the meantime, young people – exposed to too much risk, too early – continue to die, and to kill and injure others, at an unacceptable rate on our roads.

"Brake continues to call on the government to implement reform that ensures learner drivers gain as much experience as possible while limiting their exposure to the worst risks. It should learn from international experience of implementing graduated driver licensing (GDL), which includes a minimum learning period and post-test restrictions, and which has been proven to save lives.

"As well as highlighting the importance of reforming the way we learn to drive, this report exposes the ongoing need to help drivers of all ages and levels of experience to ensure they are ready to drive, every time. Many drivers are failing to take some basic steps to help prevent crashes and reduce the chances of injury, sometimes due to complacency but often also due to misunderstanding. Hence continuing to raise awareness about the importance of belting up, adjusting your head restraint properly, and maintaining your vehicle – empowering drivers to protect themselves and others – continues to be a major focus for Brake."



## About this report

This is the first in a series of reports on safe driving 2015-17 by Brake and Direct Line. It examines attitudes and behaviour in relation to learning to drive, vehicle selection, vehicle maintenance and crash protection.

The report is based on a survey of 1,000 drivers and carried out by research company Surveygoo on behalf of Brake, across the UK. For other reports in the series, visit [www.brake.org.uk/safedrivingreports](http://www.brake.org.uk/safedrivingreports).

# Are you ready to drive?



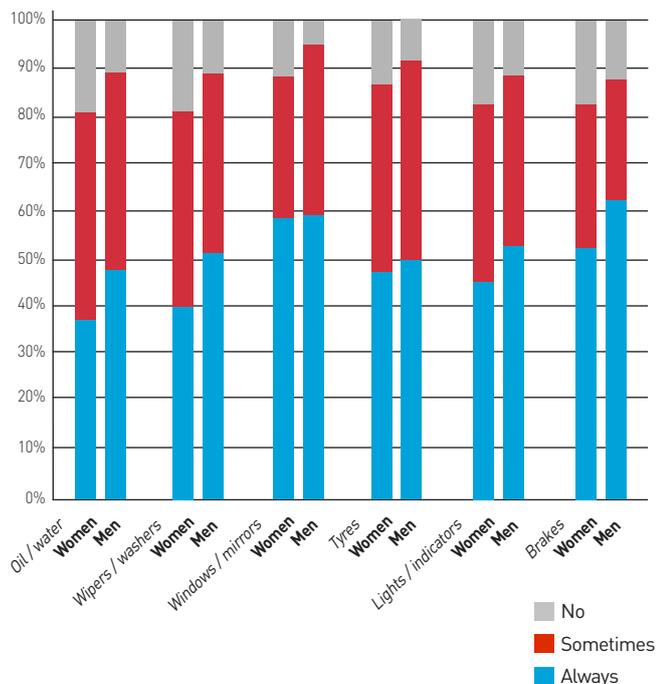
## VEHICLE MAINTENANCE AND WINTER WEATHER

### Q1: Do you check the following on your vehicle before setting out on long journeys?

The following are basic and essential vehicle maintenance checks that all drivers should make before setting off on long journeys. Worryingly, one in seven (15%) do not check oil and water levels, or that wipers, washers, lights, indicators or brakes are working. About one in 10 do not check their windows and mirrors are clear or their tyres are in good condition (9% and 11% respectively). In all cases, women are less likely than men to make checks – for instance, one in five women (19%) do not check oil and water levels, compared with one in nine men (11%).

- Correct oil and water levels: 42% said always; 43% said sometimes; 15% said no (19% women, 11% men)
- Working wipers and washers: 45% said always; 40% said sometimes; 15% said no (1% women, 11% men)
- Clean and clear windows and mirrors: 59% said always; 32% said sometimes; 9% said no (12% women, 5% men)
- Tyres in good, legal condition: 49% said always; 40% said sometimes; 11% said no (14% women, 8% men)
- Working lights and indicators: 49% said always; 36% said sometimes; 15% said no (17% women, 12% men)
- Working brakes: 57% said always; 27% said sometimes; 15% said no (17% women, 13% men)

Figure 1: Do you check the following on your vehicle before setting out on long journeys?



### Q2: Are you confident you know how to check the following on your vehicle?

A significant minority of drivers are not confident on how to make basic and essential vehicle maintenance checks. One in six (17%) do not know how to check oil and water levels, and more than a quarter do not know how to check tyres are safe and legal, or that brakes are working properly (27% and 26% respectively). Women and younger drivers showed the lowest levels of confidence. For instance, two in five women (39%) do not know how to check for safe tyres, compared with one in seven men (14%), and a third (33%) of young (17-24) drivers do not know how to check their brakes, compared with one in seven drivers over 65.

- Correct oil and water levels: 83% said yes (79% women, 88% men; 74% 17-24, 91% over 65)
- Tyres have legal tread depth, right tyre pressure and in good condition: 73% said yes (61% women, 86% men; 70% 17-24, 84% over 65)
- Brakes working properly: 74% said yes (68% women, 81% men; 67% 17-24, 85% over 65)
- 9% said none of the above (11% women, 6% men; 0% 17-24, 8% over 65)
- 4% said they don't know (6% women, 2% men; 5% 17-24, 4% over 65)

#### ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Making sure your vehicle is in good working order before you set off needn't take long. There are a few simple checks you can do yourself to make sure your vehicle is as safe as it can be. Brake advises drivers to do the following once a week and before any long journeys.

#### Check:

- tyres have a tread depth of at least 3mm (less is risky in the wet), are free from cracks, buckles or bulges and are at the right pressure (using a gauge to check);
- all lights and indicators are working properly by having someone stand outside the vehicle as you switch them on and off;
- windscreen wipers and washers are working by testing them while the car is stationary and topping up the windscreen washer if needed;
- oil and water levels are correct;
- windows and mirrors are clean and clear and the latter positioned properly;
- brakes are working, by applying them gently while driving very slowly in a safe, flat place with no one else around. If they feel different to how they usually feel – such as taking longer to 'bite' or are harder to push down or are making squeaking or grinding noises – you need to get them checked with a mechanic immediately.

**If you notice any problems, get them fixed straight away, and consult a garage if you have concerns.**

# Are you ready to drive?

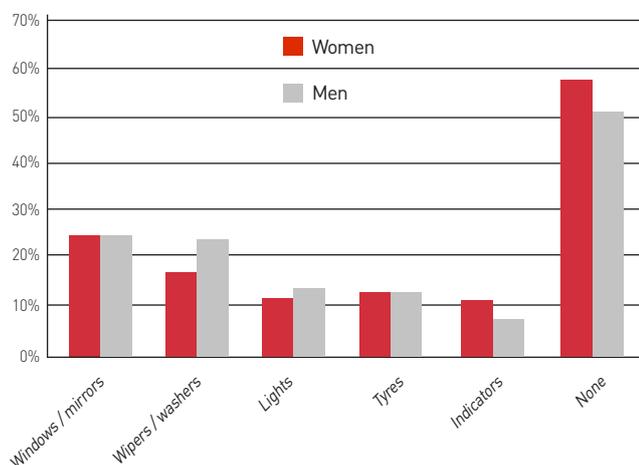


### Q3: In the past 12 months, have you driven, even once, when you knew your vehicle had any of the following problems?

Although the majority of drivers are confident they know how to check for problems with their vehicles, shocking numbers have noticed problems and driven anyway, putting lives at risk. Almost half (45%) admitted to driving with at least one of these risky problems or defects in the past year, including a quarter (24%) who drove without clear windows or mirrors. Younger drivers were the worst offenders, with more than three in five 17-34 year olds (63% 17-24, 62% 25-34) having driven knowing there was a problem with their vehicle. Men (49%) also admitted this more than women (42%).

- Windows or mirrors not clear or clean: 24% said yes (24% women, 24% men; 18% 17-24, 40% 25-34, 16% over 65)
- Windscreen wipers broken or washers not topped up: 19% said yes (16% women, 23% men; 39% 17-24, 26% 25-34, 8% over 65)
- Lights broke or faulty (when it was dark): 12% said yes (11% women, 14% men; 15% 17-24, 24% 25-34, 0% over 65)
- Tyres defective (worn tread, wrong pressure, or cracks or bulges): 12% said yes (12% women, 12% men; 13% 17-24, 26% 25-34, 4% over 65)
- Broken indicators: 4% said yes (3% women, 5% men; 5% 17-24, 8% 25-34, 0% over 65)
- 55% said they have not driven with any of the above (58% women, 51% men; 37% 17-24, 38% 25-34, 77% over 65)

Figure 2: In the past 12 months, have you driven, even once, when you knew your vehicle had any of the following problems?



### Q4: What items do you carry in your vehicle in winter in case of bad weather or breakdowns?

A significant number of drivers do not take simple precautions for bad conditions and breakdowns in the winter, despite the unpredictable nature of UK weather. For instance, more than half (53%) do not carry a first aid kit, and seven in 10 (69%) do not carry a warning triangle. Older drivers showed a generally higher level of preparedness, but there was little significant gender difference.

- 85% carry an ice-scraper/de-icer (85% 17-24, 90% over 65)
- 53% carry a torch (32% 17-24, 67% over 65)
- 51% carry cloths (45% 17-24, 72% over 65)
- 47% carry a first aid kit (54% 17-24, 57% over 65)
- 38% carry a blanket/warm clothes (38% 17-24, 37% over 65)
- 31% carry a warning triangle (19% 17-24, 40% over 65)
- 27% carry a high-visibility vest (29% 17-24, 28% over 65)
- 20% carry food and drink (4% 17-24, 15% over 65)
- 16% carry a spade (7% 17-24, 23% over 65)
- 3% carry none of the above (0% 17-24, 5% 25-34, 1% over 65)

#### THE FACTS: VEHICLE SAFETY

- Drivers and fleet operators have a responsibility to ensure their vehicles are roadworthy and well-maintained. If safety critical parts such as brakes, tyres, windscreen wipers and wheels are not kept in good repair, this could cause the driver to lose control or fail to respond in an emergency, with potentially fatal results.
- Vehicle defects contributed to 2,000 crashes in 2013, 42 of them causing deaths<sup>1</sup>. Illegal, defective or under-inflated tyres are the most common defect contributing to fatal crashes<sup>2</sup>.
- In the UK, all cars, motorbikes and light passenger vehicles must pass an annual MOT test once they are three years old. Trucks and buses have their own version of the MOT, known as the annual vehicle test. 40% of cars and vans failed their initial MOT in 2012/13<sup>3</sup>.
- The legal minimum tread depth for tyres is 1.6mm in the UK, but less than 3mm can be risky in wet weather, as it results in significantly increased stopping distances<sup>4</sup>.



# Are you ready to drive?

## Q5: The recommended minimum tyre tread depth in wet weather is 3mm. Do you check for this on your vehicle?

Wet weather is common in the UK, so it is safer for drivers to ensure their tyres have the minimum recommended tread depth for wet weather driving of 3mm, and not just the legal minimum of 1.6mm. However, only three in five drivers (63%) check for this. Almost a quarter (23%) only check for the legal minimum, and one in seven (14%) do not check their tyre tread depth at all. Younger drivers performed best here, with more than four in five (83%) checking for the recommended 3mm. Men (72%) were better than women (55%).

- 10% said no, but they do check they meet the legal minimum requirement (1.6mm) monthly or more (12% women, 9% men; 8% 17-24)
- 13% said no but they do check they meet the legal minimum requirement (1.6mm) less than monthly (14% women, 12% men; 4% 17-24)
- 14% said no, they never check their tyre depth (19% women, 7% men; 5% 17-24)
- 21% said yes, less than once a month (18% women, 25% men; 18% 17-24)
- 31% said yes, about once a month (27% women, 35% men; 42% 17-24)
- 11% said yes, weekly or more (10% women, 12% men, 23% 17-24)

## IN THE PAST THREE YEARS...

Since Brake carried out a similar survey of drivers in 2012, confidence in vehicle maintenance has declined. The proportion of drivers unable to confidently check their tyres are in safe and legal condition has risen from two in five (20%) to more than a quarter (27%). Drivers unable to confidently check their oil and water levels are up slightly from 15% to 17%.

At the same time, the number of drivers ignoring known defects and driving anyway is also on the rise:

- Driving with windows or mirrors not clean or clear – up from 10% to 24%.
- Driving with wipers and washers not working or topped up – up from 6% to 19%.
- Driving with broken lights in the dark – up from 6% to 12%.
- Driving with defective tyres – up from 5% to 12%.
- Driving with broken indicators – up from 3% to 4%.

## End notes

1. *Reported road casualties Great Britain: annual report 2013, Department for Transport, 2014*
2. *Ibid*
3. *VOSA effectiveness report 2012 to 2013, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, 2014*
4. *Tyres should be changed at 3mm, RoadSafe, Mira, Continental, 2005*

