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Harsh winter weather leads to one of the worst quarters for RAC 'pothole breakdowns'

The proportion of RAC breakdowns caused by potholes in the first quarter of 2018 was the third highest recorded since 2006 when tracking of such faults started.

An analysis of RAC breakdown data has revealed motorists are sadly still suffering the effects of the harsh winter weather seen in February and March of this year due to the resulting deterioration of road surfaces right across the UK.

The percentage of RAC breakdowns likely to be attributed to damage caused by potholes and poor quality road surfaces, such as damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension springs or distorted wheels, doubled to 2.3% from 1.2% in the last quarter of 2017 – only the first quarters of 2015 (2.6%) and 2017 (2.7%) were higher. This equated to 5,540 call-outs for these faults from a total of more than 244,000 RAC breakdowns over the same period – up from 2,841 in Q4 2017.

While the sheer volume of ‘pothole breakdowns’ may not have been as high as might have been expected considering the severity of the cold weather, the RAC expects the second quarter of the year to be a better indicator of the true state of the country’s roads.

It is, however, very concerning that the RAC’s most accurate picture of road quality – the RAC Pothole Index* – has worsened slightly in Q1 2018. This is now the fourth successive quarter the index has worsened following a period of slow improvement.

Using a base of 1.00 established in 2006, the index for the first quarter of 2018 was 2.63, up from 2.59 the previous quarter – a year ago, however, in Q1 2017 it was 2.08. The higher the figure, the greater the likelihood of an RAC member suffering a breakdown caused by a pothole or other road surface defect and so, potentially, the worse the surface quality of the average road. It should be pointed out that the index is still considerably lower than its peak which occurred in the first three months of 2010 at 3.5.

RAC chief engineer David Bizley said: “Few would disagree that the harsh cold weather experienced over the last three months has led to a further deterioration of road surfaces. While RAC patrols saw the third highest quarterly share of pothole-related breakdowns in the first three months of 2018 the figure was not as high as we had been expecting, probably due the fact that the weather hit relatively late in the quarter. For this reason we feel we are likely to see more vehicles suffering pothole damage in the second quarter of 2018 compared with recent years.

“The start of the year normally sees the highest number of breakdowns attributable to poor quality road surfaces, but more telling will be how much this drops in the second quarter. Ever since we started analysing these faults, this second quarter figure has dropped sharply as local authorities catch up with repairs to address the worst damage to their roads caused by winter

weather.

“We will be monitoring the situation very closely to see what effect the harsh winter weather has had. If the index doesn’t reduce or, worse still, continues to increase then this will be a very strong indication that our roads are still in a dire state of repair.

“We know that many local authorities will be even more stretched in the new financial year and therefore having to deal with the effects of very poor weather in February and March will be a very unwelcome hit on their maintenance budgets for the next 12 months.

“The Government has made additional funding available through yet another emergency pothole fund, but at best this will only allow councils to patch up roads that in many cases are in desperate need of longer term preventative maintenance.

“Motorists understand that councils are under difficult financial pressures and are not able to spend as much on road maintenance as they have done in the past. The RAC has repeatedly called for a change of tack from the Government to give councils certainty of funding going forwards to address the huge backlog in maintenance over an agreed period.

“We are calling for ring-fencing of additional long-term funding to provide the money needed to bring our local roads back to a condition that is fit-for-purpose over a period of five to 10 years. For example, ring-fencing 3p for local road maintenance from the 58p fuel duty paid by motorists on every litre of fuel purchased over seven years would give councils raise an extra £9.5bn – enough, according to the recent survey of councils conducted by the Asphalt Industry Alliance, to eliminate the maintenance backlog on roads in England and Wales.

“Drivers contribute in excess of £40bn in motoring taxation a year and many feel they should not have to endure substandard roads as a result.”

Potholes and other road surface defects can be reported on the RAC website at www.rac.co.uk/potholes.

Notes to Editors

* The RAC Pothole Index is a 12-month rolling measure of the share of pothole fault breakdowns compared to 2006, corrected for seasonal weather effects and improving longer term vehicle reliability Data has been collected by the RAC since 2006. Data excludes punctures

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 more than 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 – 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.

Contacts



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