

Dec 17, 2017 00:01 GMT

More than 11 million getaway trips by car before Christmas Day

Drivers will be making 11.5m separate festive getaway trips before Christmas Day this year which has led the RAC to dub Friday 22 December 'Frantic Friday' – the day when the last of the year's commuter traffic clashes with people desperately trying to get to see family and friends.*

New research by [RAC Traffic Watch](#) shows pre-Christmas leisure traffic will peak on Christmas Eve when 1.87m separate getaway car journeys will be taken, but in reality Friday 22 December is likely to be the most congested on the roads as commuter traffic mixes with an expected 1.25m leisure trips.

With the bank holidays falling on weekdays and schools breaking up for Christmas at different times across the UK, the RAC expects an even spread of traffic in the run-up to the big day, averaging about 1.4m getaway journeys each day between today and next Saturday. Leisure traffic is anticipated to then build with 1.56m journeys on 23 December, rising to 1.87m journeys on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day itself.

The total pre-Christmas getaway traffic will, however, be eclipsed this year by the 17.5m leisure trips that will be taken between 25 December and New Year's Day as drivers criss-cross the UK to visit friends and family this festive season. Congestion on some parts of the network is therefore inevitable, but with little commuter and commercial traffic the roads will generally be quieter.

The busiest day for leisure trips to see family and friends – and of course trips to the post-Christmas sales – is expected to be Boxing Day according to this year's study of drivers' plans, with 5.3m separate journeys planned.

Rail strikes may also have the effect of increasing the number of cars on the roads. There is likely to be disruption on the rail network on a number of days both before and after Christmas, including 22, 23, 24, 27 and 31 December.**

Journeys that drivers do make by road before Christmas will unfortunately be more costly this year compared to last.*** It costs around £3 more per tank on average to fill up a 55-litre family car this December (£66.40 to fill up a petrol car compared to £63.30 in 2016; £67.77 to fill up a diesel car compared to £64.65 in 2016). The RAC flagged there was a risk that prices could rise as a result of the temporary closure of a major North Sea pipeline, but thanks to a relatively stable oil price and a strengthened pound wholesale prices have so far remained fairly static – giving some relief to motorists.

RAC traffic spokesman Rod Dennis said: “The roads are traditionally busy in the run-up to Christmas, especially when you have commuters, commercial and leisure traffic all competing for space. Things tend to get worse on the last working day before Christmas, with ‘Frantic Friday’ this year falling on the 22 December – we strongly urge drivers planning long journeys to avoid this day if they possibly can.

“We’re then expecting pre-Christmas leisure trips to peak on Christmas Eve, with getaway traffic combining with the inevitable dashes to the shops for last-minute Christmas presents. Highways England has announced that 99% of England’s strategic roads – that’s motorways and major A-roads – will be free of roadworks by this time which should ease things, but it only takes a single accident or breakdown in some locations to bring traffic grinding to a halt.

“As always, the message to drivers is to plan ahead and try to avoid peak times if you can. Depending on where you live in the UK, schools have been breaking up since Friday 15 December so if you have a chance to complete your journey sooner than the end of next week then it might be a good idea to do that.

“Don’t let an avoidable breakdown get in the way of you reaching your destination this Christmas. A few moments now spent checking the condition of your car could save hours stuck in the dark. Make sure you have enough fuel for your journey, and ensure your oil and screenwash are topped up to the correct levels. While there are no signs yet of the recent harsh wintry

conditions returning, you should still check that your tyres have plenty of tread and are properly inflated. Finally, carry an emergency kit of food, water, a torch and some warm blankets so you and your passengers can stay reasonably comfortable in the event your car does let you down.”

Highways England’s customer service director Melanie Clarke said: “We’re doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible this Christmas and that’s why we’re keeping 99% of the road network we manage free from roadworks. Over the past two years we’ve already added 190 lane miles of much-needed capacity and that will make life easier for those travelling around this month, as the festive countdown begins.”

Met Office senior press officer Grahame Madge added: “The secret to a successful and stress-free Christmas is planning and preparation. Just as you wouldn’t want to buy your presents in a Christmas Eve panic, it’s never sensible to leave planning your travel arrangements until the last minute either. Take time out to plan any trip, download the Met Office weather app or check our website and give your vehicle the once over. That way you’ll be setting off on a more relaxing journey, knowing that your car is safe and knowing what weather you can expect on your journey. Just don’t forget the presents!”

Planned leisure car journeys by day

17 to 24 December 2017	25 December to 1 January 2018
Sunday 17 December – 1.59 million	Monday 25 December – 1.87 million
Monday 18 December – 1.59 million	Tuesday 26 December – 5.30 million
Tuesday 19 December – 1.2 million	Wednesday 27 December – 2.18 million
Wednesday 20 December – 1.25 million	Thursday 28 December – 1.87 million
Thursday 21 December – 1.25 million	Friday 29 December – 2.18 million
Friday 22 December – 1.25 million	Saturday 30 December – 1.56 million
Saturday 23 December – 1.59 million	Sunday 31 December – 1.56 million
Sunday 24 December – 1.87 million	Monday 1 January 2018 – 935 thousand
<i>Total for above period – 11.53 million</i>	<i>Total for above period – 17.46 million</i>

Anticipated busiest times to travel on the roads

- Friday 22 December, between 4pm and 8pm
- Sunday 24 December, between 10am and 2pm
- Tuesday 26 December, between 10am and 2pm (later where there are Boxing Day football matches)

Reduce the chances of a breakdown – remember **FORCES:**

- **F** is for **Fuel** – make sure you have enough for your journey
- **O** is for **Oil** – check your levels before you set off and top up if needed
- **R** is for **Rubber** – make sure all your tyres have plenty of tread and enough pressure, and look at the condition of your windscreen wipers too
- **C** is for **Coolant** – again, check you have the right amount before setting out
- **E** is for **Electrics** – with darker days, having fully functioning lights is more important than ever
- **S** is for **Screenwash** – essential in clearing your screen and keeping your view of the road ahead clear

For more information on how to help prevent a breakdown this winter, visit the guide on the [RAC Drive website](#).

Notes to Editors

* Based on surveys of drivers' plans covering 17 to 25 December and 26 December to 1 January. Sample sizes of 1,964 and 2,089 drivers respectively. Total trips figure calculated by taking percentages of drivers stating they are planning on making a leisure trip and extrapolating by numbers of licensed cars in the UK (31.17m). 11.5m leisure trips planned between 17 December to 24 December; 17.5m leisure trips planned between 25 December and 1 January

** Based on information available on 15 December 2017

*** Comparing average petrol and diesel pump prices on 13 December in both 2016 and 2017.

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

Contacts



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