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RAC deals with record number of third-quarter pothole breakdowns

The poor condition of Britain's local roads has led to the RAC dealing with the highest number of pothole-related breakdowns it has seen in any third quarter since it began recording this data in 2006.

RAC patrols went to the rescue of 5,978 drivers from July to September for damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension springs or distorted wheels – the call-outs which are most likely to be caused by wear and tear from defective road surfaces. This was 580 more than the previous third-quarter

high of 5,398 recorded in 2013. It was also 1,893 more than the same period in 2022 when there were 4,085 – meaning this year has seen a 46% increase.

July to September, however, is not the worst quarter of the year for pothole breakdowns – that dubious honour goes to the colder months of January to March. The first quarter of 2021 still holds the record for the RAC's highest number of pothole call-outs in a quarter, with a shocking 14,827 drivers breaking down for that reason.

The July to September 2023 findings have also led to an increase in the RAC Pothole Index, which tracks the probability of drivers suffering a pothole-related breakdown since 2006. The index has now increased to 1.7 which means motorists are nearly twice as likely to break down due to the repeated wear caused by potholes than they were 17 years ago.

The RAC's figures, however, purposefully don't include punctures as these are often caused by nails and screws as well as poor road surfaces. Between July and September RAC patrols went out to 101,000 puncture jobs which is an 8% increase on the same period in 2022 which may imply that poor road surfaces were partially to blame.

Garage repair data analysed by the RAC shows that drivers can currently expect to pay an average of £440 if their car needs fixing after hitting a pothole, for anything more serious than a puncture.*

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said:

“Our analysis of pothole-related breakdowns is sadly once again showing that the sub-standard state of the country's local roads is causing a world of pain for drivers, let alone those on two wheels.

“Fortunately, the Government has promised £8.3bn for local highways authorities which should give them the certainty of funding they need to be able to plan longer term road maintenance work. We very much look forward to finding out exactly how the money will be allocated.

“We have long argued that it's not just a question of filling potholes, it's about getting the roads in the worst condition resurfaced. Then, it's vital that more councils start to make greater use of surface treatments which can cost

effectively extend the lives of these roads.

“[Our analysis of government data](#) shows that many are no longer surfacing dressing their roads which partly explains why so many are now peppered with potholes. Our message to government is therefore not just to get the potholes fixed, but to get councils using surface dressing again as this helps seal roads which prevents water getting in cracking the asphalt when the temperature drops to freezing.

“We’ve also asked the Department for Transport to set out guidance for councils on how best to make use of their funding. Roads in better condition need to be kept that way through a combination of carrying out the most permanent pothole repairs possible, with those requiring more attention being surface dressed, while roads that are no longer fit for purpose must be fully resurfaced.

“If this approach is adopted, we believe we will eventually see lasting benefits and a welcome end to the pothole plague drivers have had to endure for far too many years.”

RAC recorded pothole-related breakdowns – full year: 1 November – 30 September

To 30 September 2018	To 30 September 2019	To 30 September 2020	To 30 September 2021	To 30 September 2022	To 30 September 2023
29,929	20,821	22,430	30,986	21,657	29,139

* RAC analysis of average quotes for work that is most likely needed as a result of a pothole-related breakdown, last updated May 2023

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About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to more than 13 million private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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