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Apr 23, 2024 00:01 BST

RAC pothole-related breakdowns ‘spring’ forward by 50% in 2024

The RAC attended nearly 8,000 (7,904) breakdowns in the first quarter of 2024 due to bad road surfaces, up 53% on the last three months of 2023, a clear sign that the UK is suffering a pothole epidemic as roads continue to crumble.

Analysis from the driving services company shows it’s been far from a smooth start to the year for the nation’s drivers, with pothole-related breakdown numbers up by 9% in the last 12 months from 1st April 2023 to 31st March

2024. In this period, the RAC went out to 27,205 breakdowns, 2,299 more than the 24,906 incidents it attended between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

But the RAC believes drivers may have actually ‘dodged the pothole bullet’ in what is normally the worst three months of the year for them. Milder weather led to patrol call-out rates dropping by 22% from 10,076 last year to 7,904 in 2024.

During the winter months, sub-zero temperatures normally cause more surface deterioration as water gets into cracks in the road, freezes and expands. In the first three months of 2024, while there was an average of 121mm of rain – 22% more than normal – the milder weather meant there were only seven days of frost, against the usual average of nine. This potentially limited the number of brand new potholes forming.

For this reason, the RAC doesn’t believe the decrease in pothole-related breakdowns – damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension springs and distorted wheels – is a sign of road conditions improving. In fact the [RAC Pothole Index](#), which measures the likelihood of suffering one of these call-outs, increased, meaning drivers are even more likely to experience damage now than they were 12 months ago.

And compared to 2006 when the RAC first began tracking these faults, drivers are now nearly twice as likely (1.76 or 76% more likely than 2006) to experience pothole damage.

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said: “While our data shows pothole damage to vehicles in the first three months of this year is lower than it was in the same period in 2023, it’s important not to lose sight of the bigger picture and the ongoing miserable state of our roads. The analysis clearly shows drivers are now twice as likely to suffer a breakdown due to sub-standard road surfaces as they were in 2006.

“While many would rightly say the roads are terrible, we believe they would have been far worse had we not had such a mild winter. We feel drivers have dodged the pothole bullet as the lack of widespread sub-zero temperatures has masked the true state of our roads.

“After all, all the cracks left by years of declining road maintenance budgets can’t easily be filled. Even though the Government has given councils an additional £8.3bn for road maintenance from the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2, we know this is only enough to resurface 5,000 miles of roads – the equivalent of just 3% of all England’s local roads.

“To make the most of this funding, we implore local authorities to focus their efforts on resurfacing the worst roads in their areas rather than pointlessly trying to patch pothole-ridden roads that can’t be saved from further decline. And now is the time for preventative action to be taken, as it’s between the warmer months of April and September when vital surface dressing work can be carried out to extend the life of roads. Sadly, government data we analysed shows 60% of English councils didn’t do any such work in the 2022-2023 financial year.

“Drivers frustrated by the UK’s pothole epidemic can highlight the problem by downloading and using Stan, a new free mobile app capable of automatically detecting road defects via a smartphone camera mounted in a cradle. The data is helping build the [UK’s first ever national map of road surface issues](#). The RAC is urging local authorities to use the data to locate problems on their networks and carry out repairs quickly and efficiently.”

Download Stan on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Pothole-related breakdowns in numbers

	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Q1 2023	Q1 2024
Total pothole-related breakdowns over previous 12 months	28,670	23,584	24,906	27,205
Pothole share of all RAC breakdowns	2.4%	1.5%	1.9%	1.4%
RAC Pothole Index at end of year – likelihood of drivers breaking down compared to 2006, ie 2.0 = twice as likely	1.82	1.59	1.69	1.76

The press office email address is press.office@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.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.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 14 million UK 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. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

Contacts



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