

BIBA research raises misfuelling concerns

Following figures published by the AA today which show that misfuelling is on the increase, affecting 150,000* drivers in the UK each year, research from the British Insurance Brokers' Association (BIBA) has revealed that many instances of motorists accidentally filling up with the wrong fuel at the pump may not be covered by motor insurance.

The cost of repairs can range from £150 to £300 for a fuel drain, to over £5,000 if the car is driven causing serious damage to the engine. BIBA is urging consumers to purchase an adequate motor insurance policy from a broker which protects against just such an event and not buy solely on price alone.

BIBA's survey of the major UK insurers reveals that reference was made to misfuelling in only 22 per cent of comprehensive motor policies, leaving 78 per cent of drivers unaware if their claim would be met. Forty per cent of insurers stated they would not meet a misfuelling claim, when contacted by BIBA.

The insurance industry has a varied attitude towards misfuelling as BIBA's survey shows. All policies are different and this research highlights the need for consumers to fuel their car correctly, especially if they change to a new car, use a hire vehicle or have multiple cars in the household.

BIBA advises that in the event of misfuelling the motorist should not start the vehicle and ought to notify the petrol station and breakdown company immediately. The possibility exists that an insurer may refuse to pay out in the case of a motorist who knowingly drives their vehicle with the wrong fuel in it because the policyholder may be deemed to have failed in their duty of care.

Graeme Trudgill, BIBA Technical and Corporate Affairs Executive, said: "Nobody goes out to put the wrong fuel in their car, if the motorist is innocent the insurance industry would normally treat this as an accidental damage claim. However, if the policy contains a misfuelling policy exclusion, then the motorist is unlikely to be able to claim at all.

"The consumer has the right to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service, if the exclusion was not brought to their attention at the point of sale. Where there is any doubt, a broker is best placed to argue on the policyholder's behalf." Trudgill added.

John Close, insurer relations director at BIBA member AA Insurance Services, said: "BIBA has identified the different approaches regarding misfuelling and, of course, AA roadside patrols attend tens of thousands of breakdowns caused by misfuelling."

Close added: "Make sure you're aware of what fuel your car uses and double check the pump when you fill up, especially if you are in an unfamiliar vehicle. Normally, you won't be able to put a diesel nozzle in a petrol car's filler because it's bigger. The filler of modern cars is colour coded, too – if it's green, it takes unleaded petrol so put the green nozzle in your tank. Diesel nozzles are black, but take extra care with older cars that do not have this feature."