



No nervous breakdown

Reigning roadside champ the AA once again finishes in first place in our mega survey, but the race to provide good-value breakdown cover is closer than ever

For around one in six motorists in our survey, at least one journey a year will result in a breakdown. Choosing the right breakdown rescue service could make the difference between, at best, an interrupted journey and, at worst, the day ending early and being towed to a garage.

The last thing you'll want is to spend hours on the hard shoulder, ruining your choice of provider as you wait for the breakdown patrol to arrive, and even if you've chosen well, the tight economic times mean there's a lot to be said for making sure you also get value for money.

Good service matters

Whether your car is new and reliable or an old banger, it can still break down – simply leaving the lights on and flattening the battery or suffering a puncture you can't deal with may mean you require assistance. Most new cars now come with breakdown cover as standard – but when it runs out you'll be looking for a new service.

When we break down, most of us are anxious to finish our journey, so what

we're told when we call for help, and what happens after that, makes a big difference to our day.

Nearly three quarters of drivers who needed immediate help were told a patrol would attend within an hour. The reality was even better than that – on average, patrols reached 79% of breakdowns within that time. And 40% were reached within half an hour.

The slowest of the bunch is Mondial, which reached just 58% of its stranded customers within an hour and a mere 21% within 30 minutes. Top scorer for response times is AutoNational, which reached more than half of its stranded members within 30 minutes of the call and 89% within the hour.

Politely sending you on your way

More than half of all cars in our survey were fixed at the roadside and, when that wasn't possible, another 11% had temporary fixes to get them to the end of their journey.

The AA and RAC came out tops for politeness and awareness, with phone

operators rated at four stars and the patrol crews achieving five stars for both courtesy and knowledge.

Sensible pricing

AA members won't be so chuffed to find they often pay the most for cover.

Our table (right) shows online quotes for two of the most popular forms of breakdown cover. The first includes only basic roadside assistance – where the provider will come out and try to get you going, but charge extra if it's more serious. Here, the competition is stiff and you shouldn't pay more than £30 a year for it.

The second option provides roadside assistance but also recovery and home start, meaning you should be able to finish your journey, however serious the problem. And should your car not start at home, they'll come out and try to sort it.

Some providers hook you in with competitive prices then hike their prices up on automatic renewal, so check your renewal notice, and query it if they do this to you. Don't be afraid to switch if they won't budge on price.

WHICH.CO.UK

No need to call your breakdown service for a flat tyre – our video guide to changing a wheel will show you how it's done

www.which.co.uk/changingawheel



Great value cover

AutoNational joins top four breakdown service providers

A new name appears in our survey results for the first time. AutoNational provides national breakdown services, and this year we received enough responses for us to include it in the table.



AutoNational provides a similar roadside fix-rate as the RAC, but its £66 cover costs less than two thirds of the price of the RAC's equivalent cover, saving you £43 and getting to you faster on average.

But its backer isn't new to motoring and isn't a minor player. Equity Red Star is a long-established insurer which claims to be the UK's fifth largest motor insurer, serving more than a million policy holders and insuring one in three motorcycles in the UK.

But consumers can't buy Equity Red Star breakdown services direct because, like most providers, it sells its cover under a number of names. There's the AutoNational



brand, which is what we've cited when showing the service costs. But you should receive the same service levels if you sign up with names including Auto Aid, Auto Direct, Boncaster, Flux Rescue and Age Concern.

The other names have slightly different terms. For example, with Auto Aid you have to pay for any recovery service and then claim it back, while Age Concern's cover has features specifically targeted at the 50-plus generation.

OUR RESEARCH

As part of the huge Which? Car survey (between January and March 2009, see *Which? Car*, free with this issue) we gathered data from 13,390 drivers who had broken down in the previous 12 months.

Each driver answered a series of questions covering everything

from the politeness of the person taking the emergency call through to response times and whether the car was fixed on the spot. Customer Score combines likelihood of recommending to a friend and overall satisfaction.

This the most robust survey of its kind in the UK.

Contacts

AA 0800 085 2721; www.theaa.com

AutoNational 0845 910 0345; www.autonational-rescue.co.uk

Britannia 0800 591563; www.britanniarescue.com

Europ Assistance 0844 338 5533; www.europ-assistance.co.uk

Green Flag 0845 246 1557; www.greenflag.com

Mondial 020 8681 2525; www.mondial-assistance.co.uk

More Than 0800 300988; www.morethan.com

RAC 0800 731 1104; www.rac.co.uk

BRAND (sample size) ^a	TYPE OF COVER ^b			SPEED OF RESPONSE		REPAIRS		POLITENESS		SCORE
	COVER TYPE (person/vehicle)	ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE (£ per year)	ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE, RECOVERY AND HOMESTART (£ per year)	WAIT OF LESS THAN 30 MINS (%)	WAIT OF LESS THAN ONE HOUR (%)	REPAIRED AT ROADSIDE (%)	PATROL KNOWLEDGE	PHONE STAFF	PATROL STAFF	
1 AA (5,558)	Either	29	115	42	82	71	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	86
2 BRITANNIA (759)	Vehicle	29	85	39	84	61	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	85
3 AUTONATIONAL^c (99)	Vehicle	30 ^d	66 ^d	51	89	67	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	84
4 RAC (3,650)	Either ^e	28	109	41	77	68	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	84
5 MONDIAL^f (549)	Vehicle	n/a	n/a	21	58	60	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	77
6 GREEN FLAG^g (1,164)	Vehicle	25	70	37	80	53	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	76
7 MORE THAN (96)	Vehicle	43	94 ^h	33	82	61	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	75
8 EUROP ASSISTANCE (95)	Vehicle	45 ^j	65	26	78	56	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	74

a Almost all the companies shown also provide services for others **b** Quotes obtained using the provider's website, and assume online discounts apply. They are for vehicle cover; where vehicle details were requested, we've assumed a five-year-old Renault Grand Scenic 1.9DCi, covering 8,000 miles a year **c** Covers services offered by Equity Red Star (see 'Breakdown breakout', above) **d** Assumes a 25% no claims discount **e** Personal cover carries a higher premium **f** Doesn't sell direct to consumers. Provides breakdown assistance for car manufacturers (including BMW, Jaguar/Land Rover, Jeep, Mazda, Mercedes, Mini, Smart and Subaru) **g** Includes the responses for its parent company, Direct Line **h** Includes cover in Europe (UK-only cover not available) **j** Base-level service includes recovery of the car and passenger if your car can't be repaired on the same day.