



# RAC Roadside Assistance patrols survey results

2018



For the better

# About our RAC Roadside Assistance patrols

RAC Roadside Assistance is a 24/7 operation. Our patrols and dedicated contractors travel throughout Western Australia in state-of-the-art patrol vans, fitted out with a full range of tools, equipment, GPS vehicle positioning tracking, electronic diagnostic equipment, GPS route guidance, emergency lighting and even feature electronic payment facilities and digital stock management.

Given the vast amount of time they spend on the road, our patrol team are undoubtedly the eyes and ears of WA roads. They are uniquely placed to offer real insight and knowledge to the issues facing WA drivers. As such, RAC has asked its dedicated patrol team about what they see on the roads of Western Australia. The in-depth survey covered a range of topics such as common causes of break-downs, WA's road conditions, driver safety issues, the prevalence of mobile phone use among drivers, road rage and vehicle care and maintenance.

## About this report

RAC is committed to road safety and aims to shed light on the issues that are contributing to road fatalities and serious injuries in Western Australia, which will ultimately inspire action by government and changes in behaviour by road users. In 2017, there were 161 deaths on WA roads, with many more people seriously injured.

The findings of this RAC Roadside Assistance survey paint a picture of the State's roads, and uncover the key issues facing road users in Western Australia.



## A bit of history

In 1926, RAC launched its RAC Roadside Assistance patrols. At that point in time, roadside assistance consisted of just two patrolmen on motorcycles, which were kitted out with sidecars and filled with just enough equipment to make running repairs to most makes and models of vehicles on the road at that point during the 1920's.

# Road conditions and safety

Every day RAC Roadside Assistance patrols are driving along roads, freeways, highways and bridges, fixing vehicles and talking to members. As such, our patrols are in a unique position to comment on the quality of our roads and congestion. It is a topic of real significance, with poor roads not only causing anxiety among road users, but also being a potential direct cause of vehicle damage.

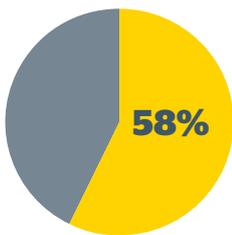
When asked whether the state of the roads had declined during their time as a patrol, more than half of the patrols thought that the road quality had deteriorated. This decline in road quality is clearly taking its toll on members' vehicles with 58% of patrols surveyed noticing an increase in damaged tyres.

The consensus among RAC Roadside Assistance patrols (many of whom have been a patrol for longer than a decade) is an increase in safety issues is due to inadequate infrastructure (i.e. emergency lanes) and foreign objects on the roadside.

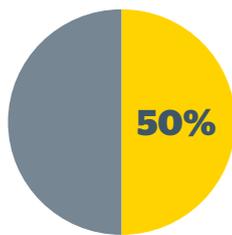
**97%** of RAC Roadside Assistance patrols surveyed have seen an increase in congestion on the roads during peak times.

**58%** of RAC Roadside Assistance patrols surveyed have seen a decline in the quality of WA roads.

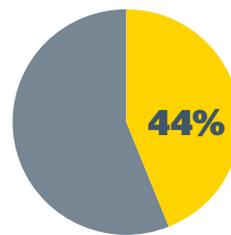
Patrols say congestion and poor road quality have contributed to increased vehicle faults, including:



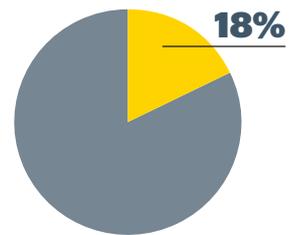
Say damaged tyres



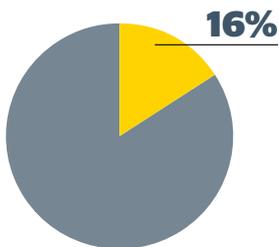
Say flat batteries



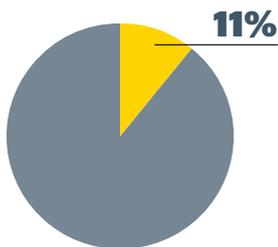
Say damaged wheels



Say running out of fuel



Say damaged underbody/suspension



Say overheating

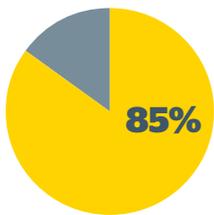
# Near misses on WA roads

When asked if they had experienced an increase in roadside safety issues during their time as an RAC Roadside Assistance patrol, an overwhelming 70% of respondents said they encountered safety issues due to having no or insufficient emergency lanes to do their job.

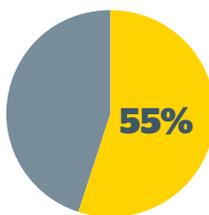
With WA's steadily growing population, the increased volume of traffic poses a hazard to those working on the roadside, particularly during peak periods. RAC believes that having sufficient emergency lane space is of utmost importance; however responsibility must also be taken by drivers as well to drive responsibly when passing incidents on the side of the road. The results from this survey strongly indicate that our RAC Roadside Assistance patrols are at a high-risk

when performing their job on the roadside. Shockingly, more than half of the RAC Roadside Assistance patrols surveyed have experienced a 'near miss' on WA roads in the past year. A near miss can be described as an incident where the patrol, their vehicle, the RAC member or the RAC member's vehicle was dangerously close to being involved in an accident that could have resulted in injury or property damage.

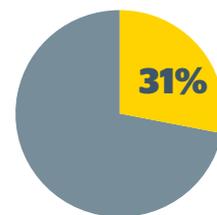
### Near misses:



Have experienced a near miss during their time as a patrol



Have experienced a near miss in the past 12 months



Have experienced a near miss at least once a month

# Vehicle care and maintenance

A common theme that emerged from the survey results was the notion that cars have become too complicated for motorists, and as such, many drivers are reluctant to care for their vehicles themselves. This was indicated by a high volume of call-outs for basic maintenance.

Our patrols found that increasingly complex technology, lack of time and overall disinterest in vehicle maintenance have contributed to a generation of motorists who are less savvy with the workings of their cars than previous generations.

## Basic vehicle knowledge

When asked about motorists' car care, 90% of RAC Roadside Assistance patrols said motorists are less likely to know how to change a tyre, 87% think motorists are less likely to have a basic understanding of their vehicle's mechanics and operations, and 88% think motorists are less likely to check their car's oil, water or tyre pressure.

**97%** think motorists are less likely to carry basic items such as spare water, oil, bulbs or fuses

**90%** think motorists are less likely to know how to change a tyre

**88%** think motorists are less likely to check their car's oil, water or tyre pressure

**68%** think motorists are less likely to read their driver's handbook

**77%** think motorists are more likely to ignore their vehicle's gauges and warning lights

## Modern vehicle technology

The overwhelming response from RAC Roadside Assistance patrols is that vehicle technology is the number one reason for motorists' lack of understanding of their vehicle's mechanics.

90% of patrols said that the increasing complexity of car technology is preventing drivers from understanding their vehicles' mechanics.

In fact, almost 70% of patrols surveyed increasingly attend call-outs to find the motorist has misinterpreted a warning light and assumed their vehicle is unsafe to drive. More than half of the patrols surveyed have noticed an increase in the number of call-outs for a remote locking system locking the driver out of their car.

To address this issue, the general consensus among RAC Roadside Assistance patrols surveyed was to make car manufacturers more responsible to their customers. 70% of patrols recommended that car manufacturers improve the user friendliness of their handbooks, and 63% advised that car manufacturers should provide a quick reference guide with simple explanations of solutions to the most common problems.

## Getting your vehicle serviced

The most user-friendly car handbook in the world is not much use if the driver does not get their car serviced.

Our patrols said that a third of the breakdowns they have attended to could have been avoided if the car owner had their vehicle serviced regularly. They also indicated that around 38% of breakdowns would not have occurred had the driver performed basic maintenance checks on their vehicle.

## Proportion of breakdowns that could have been avoided:

**38%** If the owner had taken the time to perform basic checks on their vehicle

**38%** If the owner had a better understanding of/ attending to vehicle's gauges/warning lights

**35%** If the owner had had their car serviced regularly

# Member stories

Spending all day and night on the road driving from one member to another, our patrols get to meet a wide range of Western Australians, all of different ages, from different backgrounds, with different interests and different stories. We asked them to give us a breakdown of their member encounters during their travels.

It seems that the RAC Roadside Assistance patrols have a fan base, with many commenting on how eager children are to meet them. In fact, 92% have arrived at a call-out to find a family with kids who are excited to see them. It also seems that Western Australians have a knack for making the most out of a bad situation. More than half of our patrols have arrived at a call-out to find the member or family taking advantage of the breakdown like having a picnic or going to the beach; and 35% have admitted to arriving to a call-out to find a couple being passionate whilst waiting for the RAC! Now that's what we call multitasking.

## Some interesting things our patrols have experienced:

**92%** have arrived to kids excited to see them

**75%** have arrived to a couple having a heated argument

**75%** have arrived to a member on their way to a job interview

**35%** have arrived to a couple being passionate

“I once attended a vehicle to retrieve a live parrot out from the engine bay.”

“Having to remove a car from the top of a set of brick letter boxes.”

“A member calling RAC because he got a parking ticket and wanted us to fabricate a breakdown note so he could have an excuse for ticket.”

“Being asked to repair a washing machine.”

While the sole purpose of our patrols is to provide roadside assistance to stranded Western Australians, they also spend time chatting to our members.

Whilst they're changing tyres, topping up oil, replacing batteries or getting into a locked vehicle, our patrols are having a chat with the people they're helping.

## Conversation starters

**88%** The weather

**73%** The member's destination that day

**65%** New cars

**65%** Holiday plans

**63%** Sport

**40%** The member's job

**28%** The economy

**27%** The member's personal problems

The role of a patrol is far more than just a mechanic. They listen to members' problems and often go above and beyond by rescuing pets and dropping members to important occasions.

**100%** have rescued children and pets from locked vehicles

**92%** have come to the aid of emergency services, getting ambulances back on their way

**71%** have assisted a celebrity or well-known public figure

**39%** have delivered an RAC member to an important event like their wedding or job interview

**22%** have been called to a breakdown where there is a life or death scenario

# Conclusion

One of the biggest problems witnessed by patrols appears to be driver distraction. The use of mobile phones and electronic devices is alarmingly high and ultimately puts all road users at risk.

Another key finding of this report was the volume of near-misses experienced by RAC Roadside Assistance patrols.

With almost all of our patrols experiencing a near miss when performing their job on the roadside, this is a significant issue for RAC as well as the WA community.

This is why it is critical that laws such as Slow Down Move Over (SLOMO) are enforced and that regular and consistent community education is implemented to raise awareness of the dangers associated with working on busy roadsides.

Motorists also appear to be uninformed on basic car maintenance and are not getting their vehicles serviced regularly. RAC urges WA drivers to take the time to look after their cars and get them serviced, not only to save them the inconvenience of breaking down, but also to ensure the safety of themselves, their passengers and other road users.



**For the better**