



# RAC Patrol Survey Results

2015



# About our 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.

Our Patrols rescue someone every minute across Western Australia. In 2014 alone, they rescued over 400,000 stranded Western Australians.

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. So for the first time, 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 usage 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 2014, there were 184 fatalities and 298 critical injuries from reported road crashes in Western Australia.

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. Several strong themes have emerged in this report, including:

- › Driver inattention
- › Lack of vehicle care and maintenance
- › Disregard for road rules and 'near misses' for our Patrols



## A bit of history

In 1926, RAC launched its 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.

# 1.0 Road conditions & safety

Every day RAC 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, almost half of the Patrols thought that the road quality had deteriorated. This decline in road quality is clearly taking its toll on member's vehicles with 53% of Patrols surveyed noticing an increase in damaged tyres.

**96%** of RAC Patrols surveyed have seen an increase in congestion on the roads during peak times.

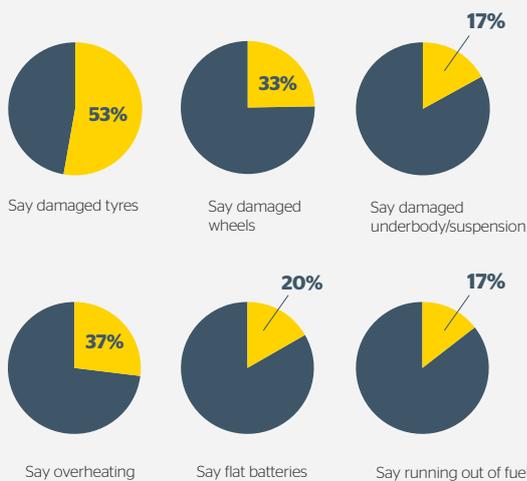
**43%** of RAC Patrols surveyed have seen a decline in the quality of WA roads.

RAC Patrols commented on the prevalence of debris on WA roads, indicating that the high volume of punctured tyres could be directly correlated to the amount of rubble left on motorways. Furthermore, more than half of respondents said they had experienced safety issues whilst on the job due to foreign objects such as glass bottles on the roadside.

Abandoned vehicles being left in breakdown lanes for extended periods of time are also a safety concern for Patrols.

The consensus among the RAC Patrols (many of whom have been a Patrol for longer than a decade) was that WA roads are not maintained as much as they once were.

### The most frequent types of vehicle problems according to Patrols:



### What our Patrols have to say about safety related issues they experience on the roadside:

"I've seen a lot of damaged tyres and wheels as a result of sharp edges on storm drains, speed bumps, roundabouts and kerbing. A lot more nails and screws in tyres too, I'm sure the roads aren't swept as often as they used to be."

"Punctures caused by tec screws, the short large headed screws with a drill bit at the end which stand upright if dropped on the floor.

"Abandoned damaged wheels on the side of the road and shredded truck tyres left scattered all over the road after a blowout."

"There doesn't seem to be road sweeping vehicles on the roads as much, and this may be the cause of items such as screws and nails puncturing tyres."

# 2.0 Near misses on WA roads

When asked if they had experienced an increase in roadside safety issues during their time as an RAC Patrol, an overwhelming 78% 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 road side, 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 Roadside Assistance Patrols are at a high-risk when performing their job on the roadside. At least 70% of the RAC 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.

The reasons for these near misses were attributed to motorists not slowing down when there is a roadside incident, or even using emergency stopping lanes to avoid traffic congestion.

### What our Patrols have to say about safety-related issues they encounter on the roadside:

"Passing vehicles do not slow down or give any extra space when we are attending to breakdowns. It can be quite frightening at times, especially on freeways and highways."

"Motorists not slowing down when passing a breakdown site."

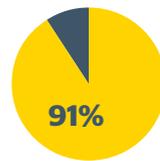
"Impatient motorists not slowing down at breakdown scenes."

"Motorists not slowing down when safety cones are out and lights are flashing."

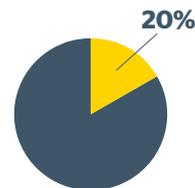
"Drivers using emergency lanes to bypass traffic jams."

"General lack of courtesy and little regard for road rules, for instance driving in an emergency stopping lane or bus lane."

### Near misses:



Have experienced a near miss in the past 12 months

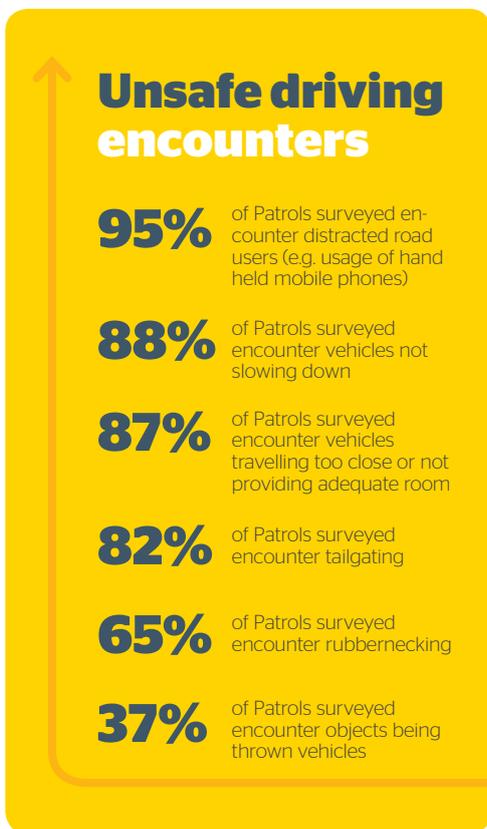


Have experienced a near miss at least once a week.

# 3.0 Road user behaviour

One of the most significant and startling discoveries of this report was that unsafe driving habits in WA are sadly on the rise. A huge 98% of RAC Patrols said they have noticed an increase in the prevalence of unsafe driver behaviours, including road rage, tailgating, speeding, running red lights and using electronic devices whilst driving. This poor driving behaviour was most commonly accredited to driver impatience and inattention during traffic congestion.

incidents in emergency stopping lanes. Reckless driving behaviours such as travelling too close to other motorists or not providing adequate room was encountered by 87% of Patrols. Drivers tailgating the vehicle in front of them was encountered by 82% of Patrols, and 65% of Patrols said they have encountered drivers 'rubbernecking' to catch a glimpse of roadside breakdowns or crashes instead of keeping their eyes on the road.



**What our Patrols have to say about the types of distracted drivers they have encountered:**

"Drivers applying make-up, reading the newspaper, shaving or having breakfast whilst driving."

"Drivers with a pet dog in their lap."

"Inattention due to checking emails or texts or making phone calls."

Not surprisingly, when asked what sort of unsafe road user behaviour was typically encountered, mobile phone usage topped the list, with 95% of Patrols reporting they have seen drivers being distracted by use of mobile phones.

Vehicles not slowing down again was a major concern, with 88% of Patrols saying they have experienced motorists not reducing their speed when approaching

## 3.1 Road Rage

Despite their purpose being to help stranded West Australians, the majority of RAC Patrols reported that whilst providing Roadside Assistance to members, they had experienced road rage from passing road users. A huge 85% of Patrols said they had been the subject of mild road rage, such as shouting abuse, rude gestures or honking horns; and one third said they had experienced severe road rage involving being threatened or assaulted while helping stranded motorists.

**85%** of Patrols surveyed have been the victims of mild road rage (shouting abuse, honking, rude gestures)

**30%** of Patrols surveyed have been the victims of severe road rage (being threatened or assaulted)

# 4.0 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 reluctance to tackle the problem have contributed to a generation of motorists who are less savvy with the workings of their cars than previous generations. Interestingly enough, even though drivers don't seem to be fixing their vehicles themselves, they also don't appear to be getting them serviced regularly either. Our Patrols indicated that a large number of breakdowns they have attended could have been avoided if the driver had regularly had their car serviced.

## 4.1 Basic Vehicle Knowledge

When asked about motorists' car care, a huge 88% of RAC Patrols surveyed said motorists are less likely to know how to change a tyre, 78% think that motorists are less likely to have a basic understanding of their vehicle's mechanics and operations, and 80% think motorists are less likely to check their car's oil, water or tyre pressure.

### What our Patrols have to say on popping the bonnet:

"I have noticed more and more owners do not even know how to open their bonnet."

"These days, people don't know how to pop their bonnet or even where things are stored in the vehicle. Simple things like hazard lights, they're unaware of where the button is."

"Years ago, everybody would know how to open their bonnet. Now it is quite common for people to say they have never opened their bonnet or even seen under their bonnet, even if they have owned the car for years."

Half of the Patrols surveyed think motorists do not pay attention to their vehicles gauges or warning lights, with 74% saying that motorists are less likely to read their car owner's handbook. An overwhelming amount of comments from Patrols also indicated that many drivers don't even know how to open their car bonnet.

**89%** Think motorists are less likely to carry basic items such as spare water, oil, bulbs or fuses

**88%** Think motorists are less likely to know how to change a tyre

**80%** Think motorists are less likely to check their car's oil, water or tyre pressure

**74%** Think motorists are less likely to read their driver's handbook

**30%** Think motorists are more likely to ignore their vehicle's gauges and warning lights

### What our Patrols have to say on reading your handbook:

"Motorists are not taking the time to read their handbook to make themselves familiar with this like warning lights and gauges."

"Members do not read their handbooks and as such don't understand what their car can and cannot do."

"Motorists unaware that if their key remote doesn't work, you can manually unlock the car with the key and start it. They are not familiar with what the vehicle can do, because they haven't read their drivers manual."

"Motorists buy a new vehicle and won't even read the owner's manual, so they are generally too scared to touch the vehicle."

When it comes to explaining this lack of knowledge, RAC Patrols indicated a number of reasons, but the most prevalent was modern vehicle technology.

Over 80% of Patrols said that the increasing complexity of car technology is preventing drivers from understanding their vehicles mechanics.

## 4.2 Modern Vehicle Technology

The overwhelming response from RAC Patrols is that vehicle technology is preventing motorists from opening their driver's manual, let alone their bonnet. Driver knowledge has not kept pace with modern technology, and has caused drivers to completely shun the idea of comprehending their vehicle's capabilities.

In fact, two thirds of Patrols surveyed increasingly attend call-outs to find that the motorist has misinterpreted a warning light and assumed that their vehicle is unsafe to drive. 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, and 55% have noticed an increase in the number of call-outs due to the driver refuelling their vehicle with the wrong type of fuel. With new car technology so advanced, it appears that motorists have indeed developed a phobia of their vehicles.

### What our Patrols have to say about modern vehicle technology:

"When I started 27 years ago, people were far more likely to do their own servicing. People are intimidated by modern technology now and prefer to leave it to the professionals."

"Motor vehicles have become too complicated."

"Members tend not to check basic oil and water, possibly because under the bonnet looks more complicated these days."

"Back in the day, you had more 'feel' with a car and knew its drawbacks. These days, you press a button to start it, it locks the doors for you, the brakes, steering wheel and airbags can be electronically controlled, the air conditioning is on and your iPod is playing through the stereo. So it's like they're sitting at home on the couch - mobile phone in hand and all."

To address this issue, the general consensus among RAC Patrols surveyed was to make car manufacturers more responsible to their customers. Two-thirds of Patrols recommended that car manufacturers improve the user friendliness of their handbooks, and 79% advised that car manufacturers should provide a quick reference guide with simple explanations of solutions to the most common problems.

Additional suggestions were also made for car dealerships to give a more adequate hand-over to new car owners after purchase. Given how much more complicated new vehicles have become, the new car handover process should in turn become more complex as well.

### 4.3 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 almost half 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 43% of breakdowns they have been called out to would not have occurred had the driver taken an interest in maintaining their vehicle or performed basic maintenance and checks.

#### Proportion of breakdowns that could have been avoided:

**47%** If the owner had had their car serviced regularly

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**43%** If the owner had taken an interest in maintaining their vehicle

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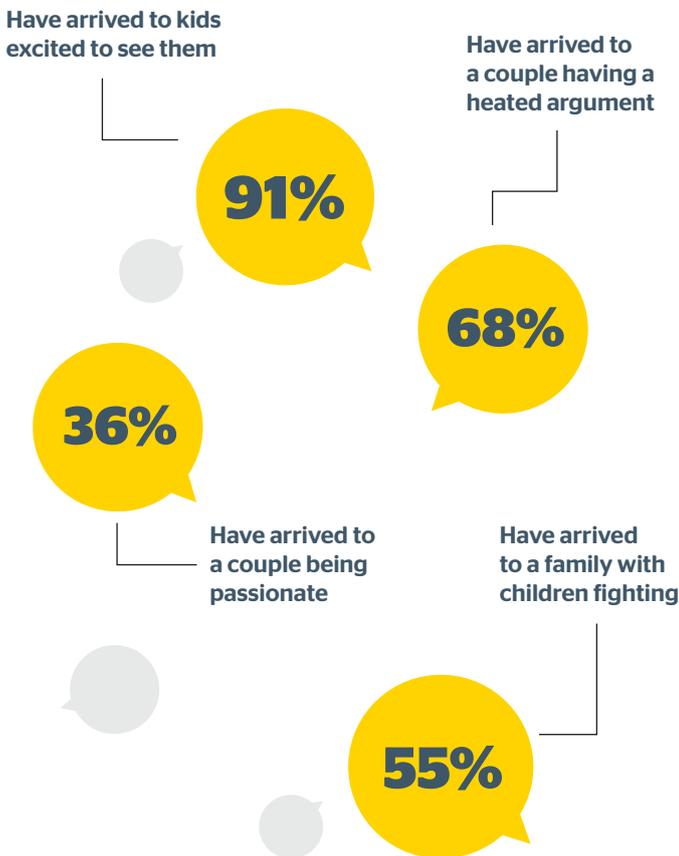
**42%** If the owner had taken the time to perform basic checks on their vehicle

# 5.0 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 West 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 Patrols have a fan base, with many commenting on how eager children are to meet them. In fact, 91% 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 by having a picnic or going to the beach; and 36% 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 arrived to:**

"Naked members answering the door."

"I have had a member rescue an injured parrot from the grille of their car, place it on the front passenger seat and drive it to the vet. However during the car ride the parrot came to, and flew up under the dashboard and didn't want to come out. So when I arrived I was greeted with 'I have a parrot stuck in my car!'"

"I have given relationship advice to crying, distraught members who have just broken up with their long term partners and tried to drive away, but their car won't start."

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**

**81%** The weather

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

**65%** Sport

**61%** New cars

**60%** Holiday plans

**48%** The member's job

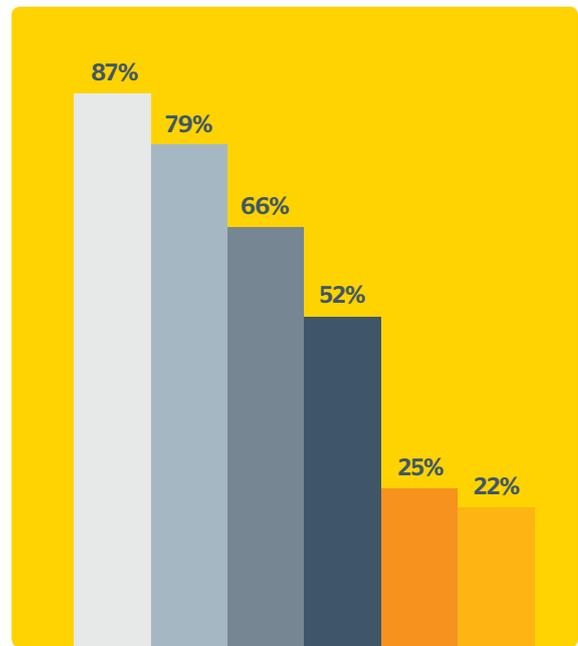
**30%** The economy

**21%** 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.

**29%** Have delivered an RAC member to an important event like their wedding or job interview.

**Based on the survey, it also appears that members don't mind venting their frustrations about their car or roads to their RAC Patrol:**



Legend for the bar chart:  
 - Light grey: The cost of car servicing and repairs  
 - Blue-grey: Traffic congestion  
 - Dark grey: Other motorists driving skills  
 - Dark blue: The price of fuel  
 - Orange: Quality of roads  
 - Yellow-orange: Vehicle registration costs

**78%** Have assisted a celebrity or well-known public figure.

**86%** Have come to the aid of emergency services, getting ambulances back on their way.

**97%** Have rescued children and pets from locked vehicles.

# Conclusion

One of the biggest problems facing Patrols appears to be driver inattention. Given the steadily increasing traffic congestion on Western Australian roads, it seems WA drivers are looking for distractions inside their vehicle to pass the time in traffic jams. 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 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. The safety of our Patrols, members and the community is of paramount importance, and is something RAC is treating extremely seriously. As such, RAC is strongly advocating its Slow Down, Move Over approach. Slow Down, Move Over implores motorists to reduce their speed and, where possible, move into a right-hand lane

when approaching vehicles stopped in emergency lanes. Slow Down, Move Over will also build awareness about the dangers of driving in emergency stopping lanes and seek to eradicate this behaviour among WA drivers. 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**