

## RAC Service and Repair Code of Practice

### Approved Consumer Code

### Desktop Audit - 3 October 2022

#### Background information

The RAC Service and Repair Code of Practice has 1319 members. The members of the code are mainly small independent garages. The code has members spread across the UK. RAC Accredited Repairers come under the same regime as Approved Garages.

Members of the code are judged not just on their ability to carry out the service and repair work, but also on the wider breadth of their services including, such things as, customer service reception areas, customer car-parking facilities etc.

#### Audit Process

The desktop audit was carried out on behalf of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute by a Chartered Trading Standards Practitioner on 3 October 2022.

The audit focused on the following areas:

1. Member application process, including checks carried out on prospective members
2. Member auditing-content and process, including general compliance with the code, staff training and dealing with consumer complaints
3. Sanctions for non-compliant members
4. Marketing and advertising by member businesses - terms and conditions and pre-contractual information, including cancellation rights, deposits, delivery times and guarantees and warranties
5. Customer service provisions, including support for vulnerable consumers
6. Consumer complaints process, including ADR
7. Customer satisfaction, information/complaints from enforcement agencies, and how this information is used to develop and improve the code

#### Audit Summary

The audit examined:

- The application process for new members
- The records of audit of existing members
- Complaint procedure, including Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)
- Process for unauthorised use of the RAC logo/membership

## **Member Application Process**

RAC has a comprehensive member database with all records kept electronically.

Since the last audit, an additional 215 garages have applied to join. The application process remains unchanged.

All areas of the business are assessed before their application is considered. This includes assessment of the 'retail' aspects of the business and the overall customer experience. Initially, the premises are visited to ensure the garage is suitable and that it meets RAC's requirements for consumers (including customer facilities) then the application can be submitted by the garage. RAC completes its due diligence checks, including credit history checks and Companies House.

Upon joining, the garage is asked to complete a self-declaration questionnaire and upload documents and images, including copies of their insurance certificates, waste consignment notes, H&S risk assessments, fire risk assessments and training records.

New members are assigned an account manager and an onsite audit is carried out to ensure that the garage meets requirements. The garage is visited initially monthly to ensure that any changes recommended prior to acceptance for RAC Code membership are implemented and that standards are being upheld.

Details of two new members were supplied as requested. The recent audit of one of the applicants was examined and found to be thorough and comprehensive. The other member joined on 8 December 2021 and was subsequently visited a number of times, however, due to building work, the full inspection could not be completed. This member has been suspended from membership until the final audit checks are complete. The websites of both garages were examined. The RAC logo was not present on the website of the member who joined in December.

## **Existing Members Inspections/Audit**

The RAC aim to carry out an onsite audit of each garage once a year. Over the last 12 months, 92% of the network has been audited. The RAC hope that the figure will improve upon the recruitment of more engineers and once the final affects of Covid have subsided.

RAC member garages/repairers are finding that more people are driving used vehicles, which is increasing work volumes so they are struggling to cope with the volume of repair requests. This has meant that some garages are unable to accommodate unannounced audit visits meaning that the auditor has to re-attend.

Although Covid-19 restrictions have ended, RAC engineers are still following Covid guidelines to ensure their safety and that of the garages. This means that audits are taking longer than normal.

RAC Inspection Services carried out 1213 inspection audits of RAC Approved Garages within the last 12 months. Visits are carried out by an RAC engineer. Any garage scoring below the benchmark score of 80% are set up with an action plan within the week to ensure improvements are quickly made. 496 action plans were issued within the last 12 months. The action plan details the changes or amendments that are needed.

The average score of these inspection audits was 91% against a benchmark of 80%. There were 16 garages who failed to meet the standards agreed and once results were reviewed, RAC took the decision to remove them from the scheme.

All garages have access to the RAC portal. This contains the Code of Conduct and details of what is expected from them as a code member in each aspect of the code. The RAC portal also contains briefings and acts as a point of reference for members. If any areas are identified where the garage is failing to meet the standards, RAC engineers will carry out training on site where possible.

Five audits were examined in their entirety. All were found to be satisfactory.

### **Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses**

In many instances of non-compliance, the initial response from the RAC is to attempt to assist the garage to improve their business practices. In cases where this is resisted, the issues that have arisen are endemic in the business or are too fundamental to resolve, members face a range of sanctions, including a formal warning or expulsion.

Once three complaints are upheld against the member, these are reviewed for trends and action taken if necessary. The RAC have sanctions in place to dismiss a member business within one month, with immediate dismissal from the scheme if circumstances require. The member is removed immediately from the RAC website and the list of garages that can be used by RAC patrols.

RAC Patrols, random checks and reports from members of the public have highlighted misuse of the RAC logo. Enforcement Notices are sent by RAC Legal if the garage persists in using the RAC logo.

In the year since the last audit, 185 members have left. Three exit letters were examined and the websites for the ex-members checked. None were found to be using the RAC and/or CTSI logo.

No members are currently in the RAC disciplinary process.

### **Marketing and Advertising by Member Businesses**

All approved garages have access to RAC Approved Garage branding. RAC supply the branding to garages so it's fully controlled and the RAC engineer will ensure the branding is being used correctly during the onsite annual audit. Any instances of incorrect use of branding are picked up with the garage as soon as RAC is aware.

RAC Roadside Patrols also raise any issues of garages they observe who are displaying RAC branding but aren't part of the network. RAC then follow this up with the garage concerned to ensure this branding is removed. The RAC Legal Team provide assistance where necessary. This process is also followed when a consumer makes RAC aware of a garage advertising as RAC approved when they're not part of the Code.

There were no issues of concern with marketing and advertising by members of the code.

### **Terms and Conditions and other Pre-Contractual Information**

Terms and conditions and other pre-contractual information is required by the code to be visible to consumer prior to contract. This is checked by RAC auditors as part of the regular onsite audits.

RAC had a Primary Authority Partnership with Kent Trading Standards who previously agreed a set of standard terms and conditions for code members to use. These are provided to the garage direct at the time of audit if they do not have suitable Ts&Cs.

### **Customer Service Provisions**

A high level of customer service is fundamental to the RAC and it places the same high expectation of customer service on its code members.

The RAC considers that all breakdown customers are, at that point in time, vulnerable and, therefore, requires them to be treated by their members with due care and consideration. The code requires that no entrapments methods are used e.g., retaining of keys due to alleged issues with vehicle's brakes. Unauthorised repairs can be an issue so this is carefully monitored during visits, member audits and in the content of any complaints. If the RAC receives three or more complaints about any member, this triggers a report and investigation, however, one single complaint that highlights issues about the customer care culture within the business can cause removal of the member from the RAC Code.

### **Consumer Complaints Process**

RAC provide their own ADR. Complaints and Conciliation are managed by a dedicated customer support team within RAC. Within the last 12 months, RAC ADR have assisted 56 consumers, of which 15 were upheld against the garage. In these cases, the RAC secured additional repairs or refunds for the consumers.

Where improvements are identified, RAC issue recommendations to the network.

### **Customer Satisfaction and Feedback**

Customer feedback can be logged on the RAC website:  
<https://www.rac.co.uk/approvedgarages/search>

Customers can find a garage/repairer on the RAC Garage Finder website and leave a review for the garage and view reviews that have been left by other customers. When RAC Patrols recommend the use of an approved garage to a customer from the roadside, these customers are sent an email invitation to leave a review of the services provided by the garage. The RAC can only do this where they have the email address and correct permissions in place to contact via email. This process has been reviewed and is compliant with GDPR.

RAC use Net Promoter (NPS) to measure customer satisfaction and also ask a series of supplementary questions to gain more insight into the customer's experience of the RAC Approved Garage. Customers also have a free text field where they can leave specific feedback.

The RAC NPS score for the last 12 months was 53%. Any low scores are reviewed directly by RAC.

## **Conclusions**

Following the Covid pandemic, the RAC audits were resumed as planned. The RAC have, this year, audited 92% of members, just short of the 100% target. It is hoped that the figure will improve upon the recruitment of more engineers and once the final affects of Covid have subsided.

The RAC brand is an iconic name within the motoring industry and garages using the name gain instant credibility. The RAC works hard to protect its brand and this is demonstrated in their constant review and improvement in ways to ensure that the customer is treated well and fairly by its member businesses.