



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Trading Standards in Scotland act to drive consumer complaints about motor cars off the number 1 spot.

Consumer complaints about second-hand cars have topped the complaints “league table” in Scotland for many years. Common problems include mechanical issues, misdescribed cars and history. Local authority Trading Standards services tackle the issues in partnership with Advice Direct Scotland, giving advice, carrying out investigations and taking action to protect motorists.

But in times of diminishing resources for many local authority services, Trading Standards work to the maxim that “prevention is better than cure” and have recently upped their game on business advice to the car trade. Sandra Harkness of the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS), explains:

“While local Trading Standards services will not hesitate to take firm action against bad trading behaviour, we much prefer to stop problems occurring in the first place. This is done through detailed engagement with the trade to advise them on their obligations and what they must do to treat consumers fairly. This is cost-effective for us and much better than dealing with detailed and sometimes intractable problems after the event.”

Car traders face detailed legal requirements and written advice is often required to supplement discussions held during visits by officers to dealerships. Officers realised that there was no comprehensive up-to-date guidance available and SCOTSS decided to do something about it. Sandra Harkness continued:

“Consumer law had changed and existing guidance was out-of-date, forcing officers to write bespoke advice for individual circumstances. This was time-consuming and inefficient so we decided to write our own guidance for the trade that would cover all situations, and we were very pleased to be able to engage with the Scottish Motor Trader Association last year, to launch the guide”.

The result was a comprehensive 56-page guide which lays out the full obligations for motor dealers in a readable format, complete with real-world examples to illustrate the points. Over the last year or so, Trading Standards officers across Scotland have engaged closely with the car trade using the guide as a key tool in these discussions, resulting in:

- 1256 Trading Standards business advice visits carried out to car dealers across Scotland
- Hard-copy Guidance booklets distributed to 946 second-hand car dealers
- Booklet downloaded from website 2713 times
- 82% of respondents welcomed the guide and found it useful

One case study is the authority of Highland, whose officers were instrumental in the production of the new guidance. In that area, all 75 dealerships were visited and given a hard copy of the guidance. Officers report a very positive response from the trade and high levels of co-operation. Positive outcomes have been identified: a 21% fall in complaints about 2nd hand cars in the Highland area has been recorded since this initiative was undertaken.

The work continues and now has an extra focus, as David Mackenzie of Highland Council explains:

“This initiative was about close engagement with the visible side of the trade: dealers who have garages and forecourts and licences to sell 2nd hand cars. We are also aware of a growing trend of more “irregular” sales from online sources such as e-marketplaces, small ads sites and social media. Traders selling through these methods must comply with the same rules as traditional dealerships. Feedback from the traditional “forecourt” trade has emphasised the need for Trading Standards to also tackle the online trade”.

To enable this work a new online investigative tool is being trialled by Trading Standards authorities in the North of Scotland. It will enable a full account to be made of online advertising and sales and enable appropriate engagement with the businesses involved.

And yet another car trade initiative is being worked on by SCOTSS to help businesses and consumers. An electronic tool is being developed to calculate fair deductions from refunds to reflect use, in the event of a vehicle being faulty. This is a relatively “grey area” in the law and would benefit from effective guidance. SCOTSS will shortly be consulting with business and consumer groups and other interested parties to take this idea forward.

Sandy Burgess of the SMTA added:

“The SMTA is Scotland’s largest and only Scotland specific national representative motor trade body, with over 1350 members, and we fully support the work that SCOTSS has done in producing guidance for the motor trade. It has been embraced by our members who seek to bring the highest industry standards to the marketplace and ensure the best possible customer service to Scottish consumers.

Buying a motor vehicle is a major consumer purchase and we are committed to helping our members deliver the highest standards of customer service across Scotland”

Other links:

- www.tradingstandards.scot/files/tuesday/info1.png - What LATSS have done
- www.tradingstandards.scot/files/tuesday/info2.png - Consumer Rights
- www.tradingstandards.scot/files/tuesday/info3.png - Next phase of SCOTSS initiative
- www.tradingstandards.scot/files/tuesday/cases.pdf - Case studies
- www.tradingstandards.scot/files/tuesday/feedback.pdf - Feedback on the Guide

TS Week takes place 16-20 September 2019. Follow @socotss on Twitter for full updates and follow #ScottishTSweek2019 for updates from across Scotland.

www.tradingstandards.scot

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Notes for Editors:

For press queries, email coordinator@scotss.org.uk telephone 07720538349

1. The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS) represents the 31 local authority Trading Standards services in Scotland. SCOTSS was established in 1996 and helps support and coordinate the activities of Scotland local authority trading standards teams. It is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC047951 and works closely with other governmental and regulatory organisations, such as the Competition & Markets Authority, The revised SCOTSS car sales guidance is available on the SCOTSS website at: www.scotss.org/cars/SCOTSScarsalesguide.pdf

2. Trading Standards Officers in Scottish councils advise on and enforce laws that govern the way we buy, sell, rent and hire goods and services. Local authorities carry out inspections and monitor or investigate complaints, they work with businesses to help achieve compliance but ultimately, can instigate prosecutions against those who break the law.

3. Businesses can find contact details for their local Trading Standards service at:
<https://www.tradingstandards.uk/consumers/support-advice>

Scottish consumers can receive advice on their rights by visiting www.consumeradvice.scot or telephoning Advice Direct Scotland on Freephone 0808 164 6000