



Department for Transport

Vehicle Licensing Statistics: 2020 Quarter 1 (Jan - Mar)

About this release

This release presents the latest [statistics on licensed motor vehicles](#). Detailed [data tables](#) are available online and more detailed commentary can be found in the [annual release](#).

These statistics are based on administrative data held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Except where otherwise stated, the statistics refer to Great Britain. UK data is available from July 2014.

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ULEVs: Vehicles that emit less than 75g of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the tailpipe for every kilometre travelled.

Alternative fuel: Vehicles powered by something other than petrol or diesel.

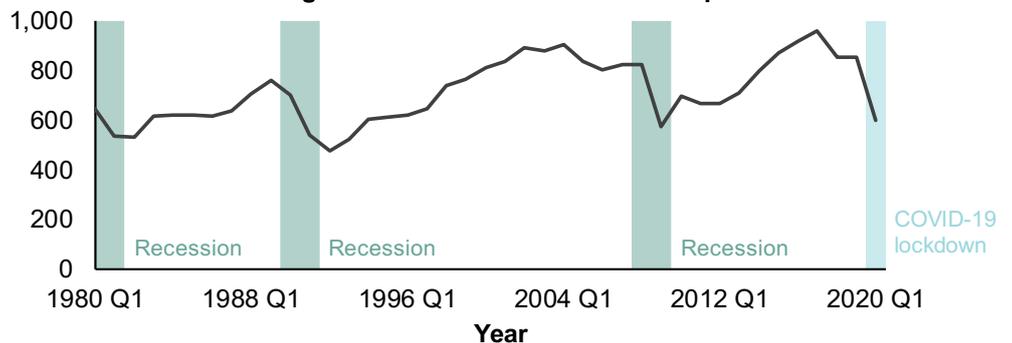
**Next published:
September 2020**



599 thousand vehicles were registered for the first time in Great Britain during 2020 Q1, 30.1% fewer than during 2019 Q1.

[\[VEH0150\]](#)

Thousands of vehicles registered for the first time - GB - up to 2020 Q1



Additional summary data relating to new registrations have been included in this release, covering a split of March, April and May. These show a large decrease in new vehicle registrations linked to the measures implemented towards the end of March 2020 to limit the impact of **the coronavirus (COVID-19)** pandemic. These measures are highly likely to have affected all statistics presented here. See [page 2](#) for more information.

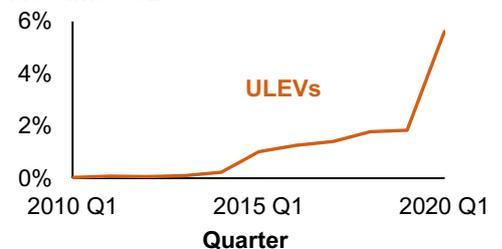


The number of **diesel** cars registered for the first time in Great Britain during 2020 Q1 declined by 45% compared to 2019 Q1, with **petrol** cars declining by 34%. There was a 65% increase in the number of **alternative fuel** cars registered over the same time period. [\[VEH0253\]](#)



During 2020 Q1, 33,696 **ultra low emission vehicles (ULEVs)** were registered for the first time in Great Britain, an increase of 113% on 2019 Q1. ULEVs made up 5.6% of all new registrations. [\[VEH0150\]](#)

Proportion of vehicles registered for the first time - GB



At the end of March 2020, there were 38.3 million **licensed vehicles** in Great Britain, a decrease of 0.2% compared to the end of March 2019. This is the first annual decline in the number of licensed vehicles since 1991. [\[VEH0101 VEH0103\]](#)



Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19)



The statistics for this quarter cover the period before and immediately following the government's announcement of measures to limit the impact and transmission of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The UK lockdown was applied on 23 March 2020, which included vehicle dealerships and showrooms being required to close, removing the main method by which new vehicles are sold in the UK. There are typically a large number of new registrations at the end of every month, especially in March due to the end of the financial year. A new license plate was also released in March ("20"), which usually (along with September) corresponds with a high number of new registrations compared to other months.

Impact on new registrations including more recent trends

In order to provide more timely data during the coronavirus pandemic, the Department has published some additional data covering the months of April and May 2020 in [table VEH0150](#), ahead of the scheduled release in September 2020.

The sharp decline in new vehicle registrations continued into April and May 2020 in the UK. There were 12 thousand new registrations in April and 37 thousand in May, representing a decline of 94% and 85% respectively, compared to the same months in 2019.

Table 1: New vehicle registrations, United Kingdom, January to May, 2018 to 2020 [\[VEH0150\]](#)

Date	2018	2019	2020	Annual percentage change: 2020 (%)
Quarter 1: Jan to Mar	875,768	877,240	613,720	-30
January to March 21st	589,020	595,800	561,936	-6
January	199,813	202,012	190,887	-6
February	108,493	111,025	108,310	-2
March	567,462	564,203	314,523	-44
1st to 21st	280,714	282,763	262,739	-7
22nd to 31st	286,748	281,440	51,784	-82
April	213,277	211,560	12,342	-94
May	245,922	240,046	37,079	-85

Ultra low emission vehicles (ULEVs) accounted for 13.5% of all new registrations in April 2020 and 9.3% of all new registrations in May 2020.

This is likely an artefact of how vehicles are purchased, as ULEVs are more likely to be delivered directly to consumers rather than through dealerships, especially as there is often a delay between purchase and registration due to demand.

Table 2: New vehicle registrations by body type and ULEV breakdown, United Kingdom, April and May, 2019 and 2020 [\[VEH0150\]](#)

	Apr-19	May-19	Apr-20	May-20	Annual percentage change (%)	
					Apr-20	May-20
Cars	163,840	185,919	4,240	20,635	-97	-89
Light goods vehicles (LGVs)	25,696	30,753	3,062	7,635	-88	-75
Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)	5,031	4,981	1,016	1,236	-80	-75
Motorcycles	10,952	12,108	1,719	5,471	-84	-55
Buses & coaches	524	631	67	65	-87	-90
Other	5,517	5,654	2,238	2,037	-59	-64
Total: All	211,560	240,046	12,342	37,079	-94	-85
Car ULEVs	3,465	4,393	1,429	3,164	-59	-28
Other body type ULEVs	602	580	236	272	-61	-53
Total: ULEVs	4,067	4,973	1,665	3,436	-59	-31
<i>Proportion of all new vehicles that were ULEVs</i>	1.9	2.1	13.5	9.3

Year on year comparisons

Comparing new registrations on a daily basis by year can be difficult for a number of reasons. For instance, 2020 is a leap year so February had an extra day, and the period of Easter varies between years.

Whilst the UK lockdown was introduced from 23 March 2020, the comparison of 1 to 21 March in **Table 1** is more valuable as it relates to three full weeks of March. Registrations are typically much lower at weekends, and 22 March was a Sunday in 2020 but a weekday in both 2018 and 2019.

Vehicles registered for the first time

During 2020 Q1, 599 thousand vehicles were registered for the first time in Great Britain. [\[VEH0150\]](#)

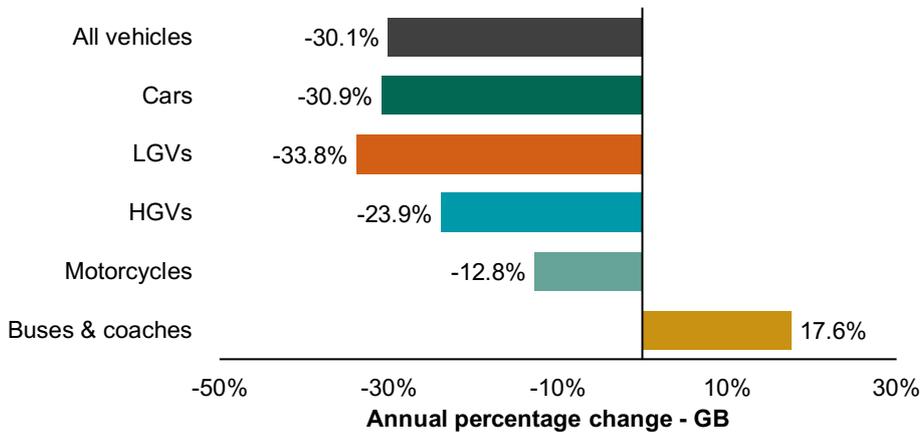
New vehicle registrations declined by 30.1% compared to 2019 Q1, heavily influenced by the coronavirus pandemic. This was the lowest number of new registrations in the first quarter since 2009.

Body Type

Most body types saw a large decline in new registrations during 2020 Q1, with the only exception being buses & coaches, which saw an increase of 17.6%, following a particularly low number in 2019 Q1.

Figure 1: Annual percentage change in vehicles registered for the first time compared to 2019 Q1 by body type, Great Britain, 2020 Q1

[\[VEH0150\]](#)



Although the number of new registrations in Great Britain can vary considerably each year, the [total vehicle stock](#) varies much more slowly as there are many more vehicles that remain licensed over the year.

Table 3: Vehicles registered for the first time by body type, with previous year and total stock comparison, Great Britain, 2020 Q1

[\[VEH0101\]](#) [\[VEH0150\]](#)

	2019 Q1		2020 Q1		Total stock at the end of March 2020
	New registrations	Proportion of all new registrations	New registrations	Proportion of all new registrations	
Cars	694	81.0	480	80.1	31,661
Light goods vehicles (LGVs)	104	12.1	69	11.5	4,079
Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)	13	1.6	10	1.7	470
Motorcycles	30	3.5	26	4.4	1,230
Buses & coaches	1	0.2	2	0.3	126
Other	14	1.6	12	2.1	765

During 2020 Q1

599 thousand

vehicles registered for the first time in Great Britain



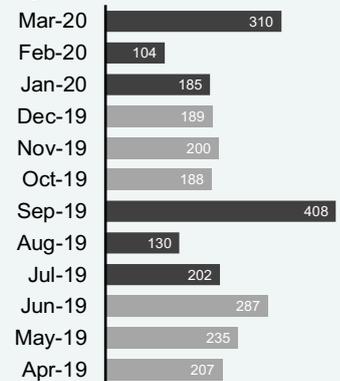
Monthly seasonality

Up to 1998, new registration plates were issued once a year in August, causing a peak in new registrations in the third quarter.

Since 1999, new plates have been issued twice a year, in March and September. This changed the distribution of new registrations through the year, with peaks in the first and third quarters.

INSET: Vehicles registered for the first time by month, Great Britain, year ending March 2020 [\[VEH0150\]](#)

Thousands of vehicles registered for the first time



Updated tables

Detailed new registrations data tables updated this quarter:

All vehicle types: [VEH0150, 0160, 0161 & 0170 to 0172](#)

Cars: [VEH0253 & 0256](#)

New car registrations by fuel type

Alternative fuels see large shift as new diesel cars continue their decline. [\[VEH0253\]](#)



In 2020 Q1, there was a sharp decline in new conventional car registrations compared to 2019 Q1, with diesel cars down 45% and petrol cars down 34%. Diesel car registrations had been falling in recent years since

peaking in 2016 Q1 with 356 thousand registrations. Over the four year period from 2016 Q1 to 2020 Q1, new diesel car registrations fell 71%.

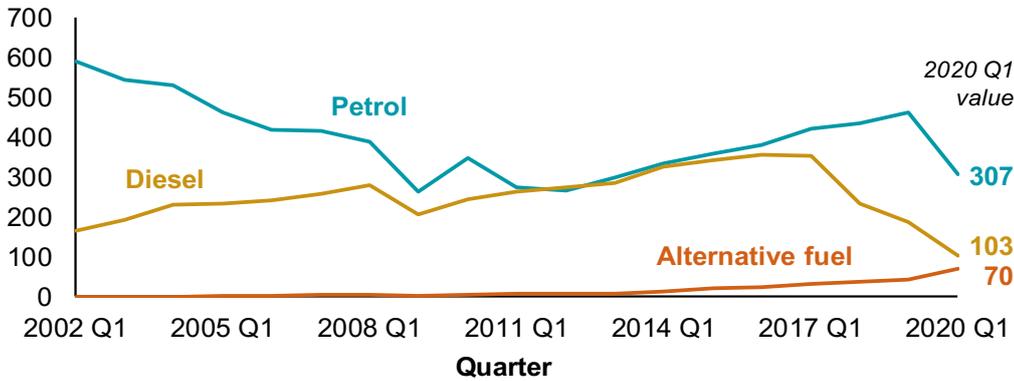
In contrast, new registrations of alternative fuel cars saw an increase of 65%, continuing strong growth in this area from previous quarters.

New car registrations
Annual change in 2020 Q1 - GB

Diesel	Petrol	Alt. fuel
-45%	-34%	+65%

Figure 2: Cars registered for the first time by fuel type, Great Britain, 2002 Q1 to 2020 Q1 [\[VEH0253\]](#)

Thousands of cars registered for the first time - GB



Battery electric new car registrations more than tripled in Great Britain, with large increases for cars using other alternative fuels. [\[VEH0253\]](#)

In 2020 Q1, out of all new alternative fuel car registrations, there were 38 thousand hybrid electric (HEVs), 18 thousand battery electric (BEVs), 14 thousand plug-in hybrid electric (PHEVs), and less than one hundred using other alternative fuel types.

The number of battery electric cars registered for the first time in 2020 Q1 more than tripled (+203%) compared to 2019 Q1

Hybrid electric cars increased by 37% in 2020 Q1 compared to 2019 Q1, with the number of plug-in hybrid electric cars increasing by 62%.

Key events around the decline in new diesel cars

April 2017: changes are introduced for newly registered car [tax bands and rates](#).

July 2017: [UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations](#) is announced, ending the sale of all new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040.

November 2017: Transport for London announces the “world’s first [Ultra-Low Emission Zone](#)” - although new diesel cars would not be charged under the current plan.

Electric Vehicle Charging Device Statistics

The Department for Transport publishes [statistics](#) on the number of publicly available electric vehicle charging devices in the UK.

		Does the vehicle use petrol or diesel?	
		Yes	No
Does the vehicle use electric power?	Yes, and is a plug-in	Plug-in hybrid electric (PHEV) ¹	Battery electric (BEV)
	Yes, but is not a plug-in	Hybrid electric (HEV)	Fuel cell electric (FCEV)
	No	Petrol / Diesel	Other*

1. A range-extended electric vehicle is a special case of PHEV, where the conventional fuel does not power the wheels directly, usually only charging the battery for additional range.

* This table excludes rare combinations based on biofuels and other emerging technologies.

Ultra low emission vehicles (ULEVs)

This section relates to the United Kingdom rather than Great Britain.

New ULEVs in the UK double in 2020 Q1 despite the coronavirus. [\[VEH0171\]](#)



In 2020 Q1, 34,115 ULEVs were registered for the first time in the United Kingdom, an increase of 113% on 2019 Q1 and 121% on 2018 Q1. ULEVs accounted for 5.6% of all new vehicle registrations, up from 1.8% in 2019 Q1. [\[VEH0150\]](#)

For the year ending March 2020, the most common generic model of ULEV registered for the first time in the UK was the Tesla Model 3 with 16,014 vehicles, followed by the BMW 3 Series with 6,823 vehicles and the Nissan Leaf with 6,485 vehicles. [\[VEH0171\]](#)

Figure 3: ULEVs registered for the first time by fuel type, United Kingdom, 2010 Q1 to 2020 Q1 [\[VEH0171\]](#)

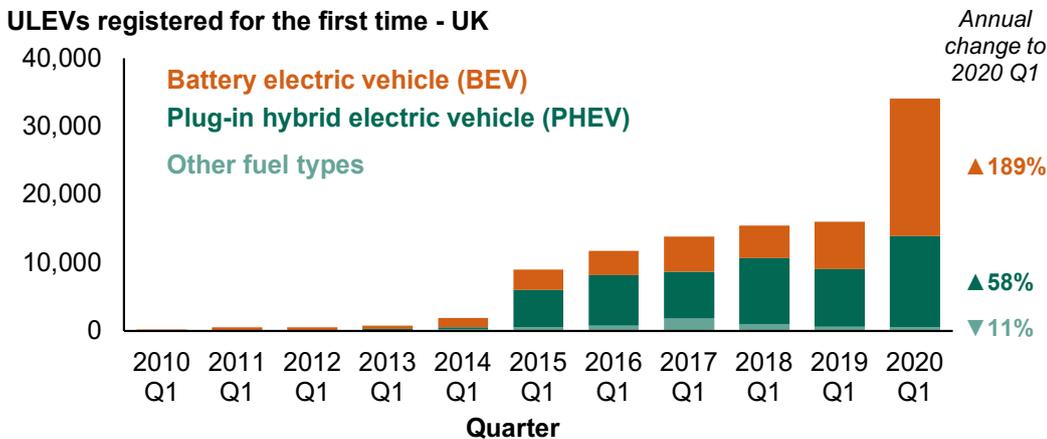
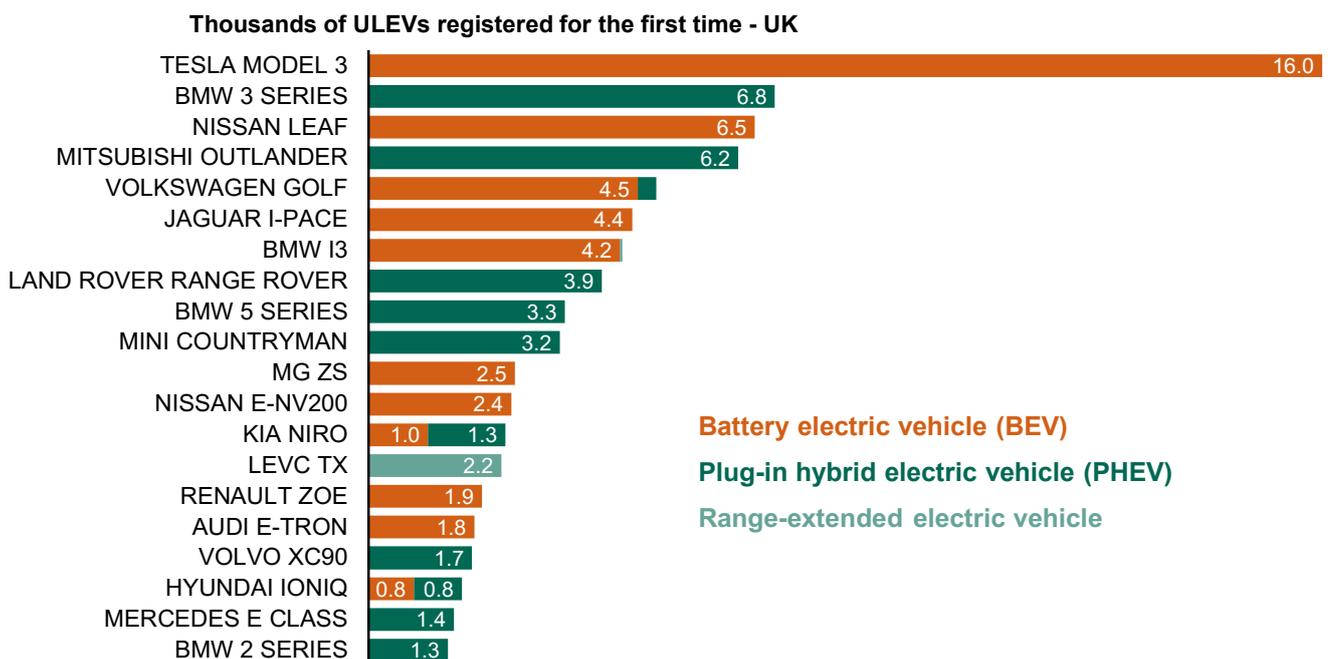


Figure 4: Top 20 generic models for ULEVs registered for the first time by fuel type, United Kingdom, April 2019 to March 2020 [\[VEH0171\]](#)



Key events surrounding the uptake of new ULEV registrations

2011/2012: [plug-in car and van grants](#) are introduced, reducing the cost of new qualifying models. These were expanded to cover more body types in 2016.

July 2018: [Road to Zero Strategy](#) is announced, confirming the government's ambition to see at least half of new cars to be ultra low emission by 2030.

October 2018: The government announced that [changes would be made to the plug-in car grant](#), focusing on battery electric vehicles.

Updated tables

Detailed environment data tables updated this quarter:

ULEVs: [VEH0130 to 0134](#) & [VEH0170 to 0172](#)

Cars: [VEH0256](#)

Total licensed vehicles

The decline in licensed vehicles at the end of March 2020 was affected by increased levels of SORNs issued and the fall in new registrations. [\[VEH0101\]](#)

At the end of March 2020, there were 38.3 million licensed vehicles in Great Britain, a 0.2% decrease compared to the end of March 2018.

The number of licensed vehicles at the end of each quarter had not decreased since quarterly records began in 1994, and had only decreased once since the end of the Second World War (in 1991).

Cars make up the majority of licensed vehicles. In Great Britain, there were 31.7 million cars (82.6%), 4.1 million LGVs (10.6%), 0.47 million HGVs (1.2%), 1.2 million motorcycles (3.2%), 0.13 million buses & coaches (0.3%), and 0.76 million other vehicles (2.0%) licensed at the end of March 2020.

All body types, apart from LGVs, saw a decrease in licensed vehicles since the end of March 2019. These decreases coincided with higher than usual increases in SORN stock, possibly due to keepers choosing to SORN their vehicle following the announcement of the UK lockdown to save on vehicle tax. [\[VEH0101,VEH0110\]](#)

For example, the largest annual percentage decrease in licensed stock was for buses & coaches at 18.1%, a fall of 28 thousand vehicles. However, as shown in **Table 4**, the number of buses & coaches with a SORN went up by 29 thousand vehicles over the same period.

Table 4: Annual difference in licensed vehicles and vehicles with a SORN by body type, including total stock for reference, Great Britain, end of March 2020 [\[VEH0101,VEH0110\]](#)

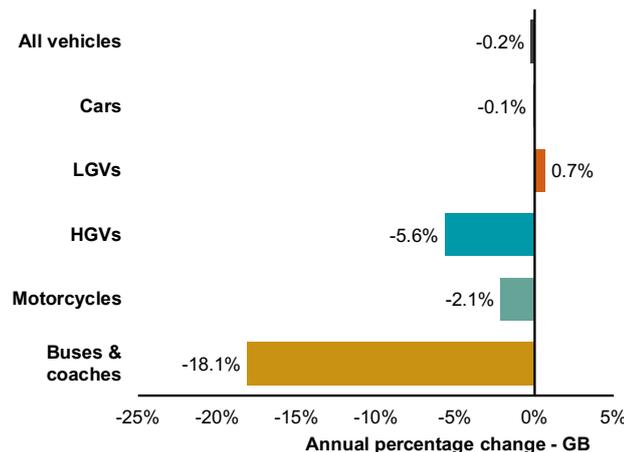
	Difference between end of Mar-20 compared to end of Mar-19		Thousand
	Licensed vehicles	Vehicles with a SORN	Total licensed stock at the end of
			Mar-20
Cars	-26	+413	31,661
Light goods vehicles (LGVs)	+27	+124	4,079
Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)	-28	+49	470
Motorcycles	-27	+123	1,230
Buses & coaches	-28	+29	126
Other	+9	+22	765
All vehicles	-72	+760	38,332

At the end of **38.3 million** March 2020

vehicles licensed for use on roads in Great Britain



Figure 5: Annual percentage change in licensed vehicles by body type, Great Britain, end of March 2020 [\[VEH0101\]](#)



How are these different from new registrations?

Figures on total licensed vehicles have slower variations compared to vehicles registered for the first time as there are many more vehicles that remain licensed over the year.

What vehicles are included?

These figures only include vehicles that are licensed for use on UK roads, which typically requires [paying Vehicle Excise Duty \(VED\)](#).

Vehicles that are not licensed should typically be given a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN). The keeper can then re-license their vehicle at any time. This occurs frequently for motorcycles, as keepers do not wish to pay VED during the winter months.

[Detailed tables relating to vehicles with a SORN are available.](#)

Updated tables

Detailed licensed vehicle data tables updated this quarter:

All vehicles types: [VEH0101, 0104, 0110, 0120 to 0123 & 0128 to 0134](#)

Motorcycles: [VEH0301](#)

Car makes and models

Volkswagen became the most common make for new car registrations in Great Britain during 2020 Q1, replacing Ford after nearly a decade. [\[VEH0160\]](#)



During 2020 Q1, the top five makes were Volkswagen (9.2%), Ford (9.0%), BMW (7.1%), Mercedes-Benz (7.0%), and Audi (6.3%). The equivalent top five for 2019 Q1 were Ford (9.6%), Volkswagen (8.4%), Vauxhall (7.8%), Mercedes-Benz (7.4%) and BMW (6.7%). The last time that Ford was not the most common make in a quarter was 2010 Q2.

There were 16 makes with over 10 thousand cars registered for the first time each in 2020 Q1, accounting for 81.4% of all new car registrations.

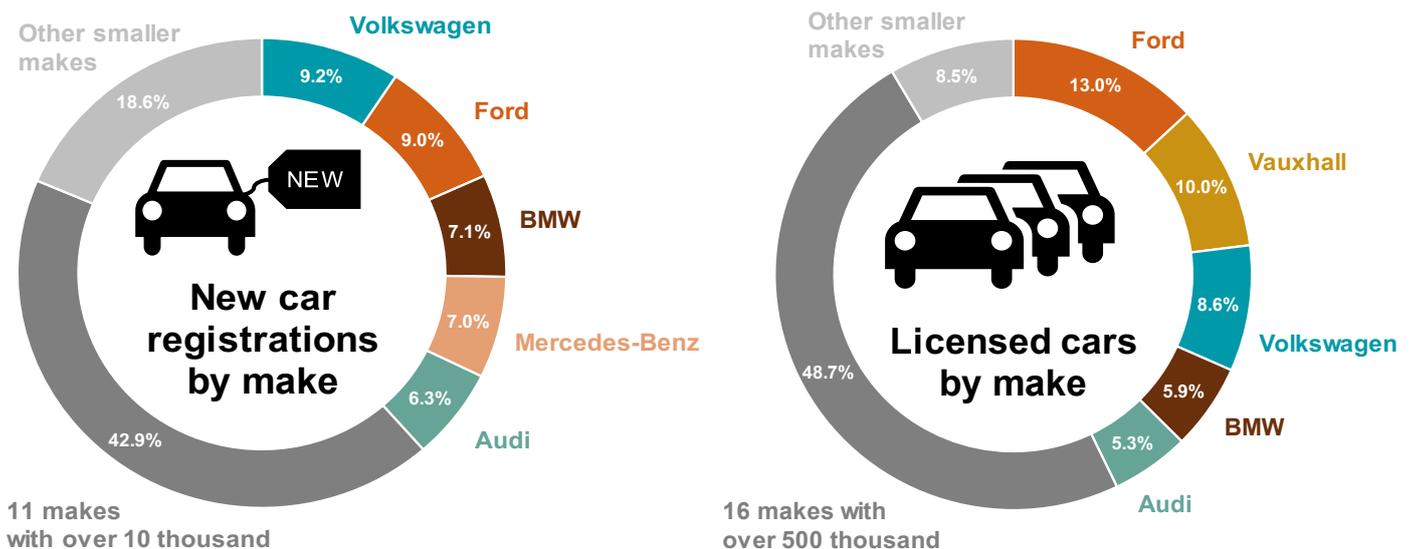
For total licensed stock at the end of March 2020, the top five makes were different to new registrations, namely Ford (13.0%), Vauxhall (10.0%), Volkswagen (8.6%), BMW (5.9%), and Audi (5.3%). There were 21 makes with over 500 thousand licensed cars each, accounting for 91.5% of all licensed cars. [\[VEH0120\]](#)

Updated tables

Detailed make and model data tables updated this quarter:

[VEH0120 to 0123, 0128, 0129, 0160 & 0161](#)

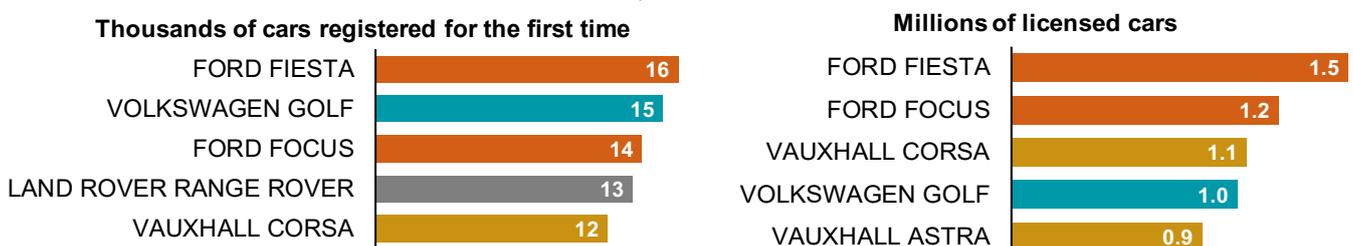
Figure 6: Top five makes for cars registered for the first time during 2020 Q1 and for those licensed at the end of March 2020, Great Britain [\[VEH0120, VEH0160\]](#)



Ford Fiesta remained the most common new car registration in 2020 Q1, with 16 thousand registered for the first time. This was followed by Volkswagen Golf with 15 thousand and Ford Focus with 14 thousand. [\[VEH0161\]](#)

At the end of March 2020, the most common licensed car was Ford Fiesta, with 1.5 million cars licenced, followed by Ford Focus with 1.2 million, and Vauxhall Corsa with 1.1 million. [\[VEH0128\]](#)

Figure 7: Top five generic models for cars registered for the first time during 2020 Q1 and for those licensed at the end of March 2020, Great Britain [\[VEH0128, VEH0161\]](#)



Background notes

About these statistics

Almost all the statistics in the vehicle licensing statistics series are derived by Department for Transport statisticians from extracts of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) vehicle database. The main purpose of the database is to administer vehicle registration and licensing records in the United Kingdom.

For further information about the data used in this release, please see the detailed [notes and definitions](#). There is also a [Statement of Administrative Sources](#) for the DVLA vehicles database.

A separate note on users and uses of these statistics is available from the vehicles statistics information [web page](#).

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

The DVLA database can be regarded as being virtually complete in terms of the number of vehicles registered for the first time, licensed vehicles and vehicles with a SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification). However, there may be some errors in some of the specific details of individual vehicles.

The Department for Transport estimates that under 2% of the vehicle records have an inaccuracy in one of the variables used for the statistics published. Other factors to consider in interpreting these statistics include:

- ▶ Changes in legislation;
- ▶ Revisions to the series;
- ▶ Seasonal variation which affects some vehicle types;
- ▶ Foreign registered vehicles may also use UK roads without being registered with DVLA;
- ▶ Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) evasion.

Most of these factors will only have a marginal effect for most uses of the data.

Geography

In July 2014, vehicle and registration services for Northern Ireland were centralised at DVLA, where these services for Great Britain were already administered. This created a single vehicle register for the United Kingdom, in place of separate registers for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

As a result of these changes, the coverage of the vehicle licensing statistics tables was expanded to cover UK as well as GB where practical. Because of the greater availability of GB time series data, this statistical release will continue to focus mainly on GB rather than UK results for now.

For further information, please see the detailed [notes and definitions](#).

Request for feedback

We welcome any feedback on these statistics, to ensure future releases best meet user needs. Feedback can be provided by email to vehicles.stats@dft.gov.uk.

National Statistics

These statistics were [designated as National Statistics in April 2012](#). There are a few exceptions listed on the [collection page](#).

National Statistics are produced to the high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found in the [pre-release access list](#).

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on every aspect of life in the United Kingdom, which has affected almost all statistical trends across the transport sector. New vehicle registration and licensed vehicle statistics are likely to be affected in future months and quarters by the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus.

Recent trends

There are more recent data than published here available from SMMT on the majority of vehicle sales. SMMT data are published monthly for cars and vans shortly after the month-end, in advance of the publication of DfT's detailed official statistics. This can be useful to look at the most recent trends in vehicle registrations.

Although there are slight differences in coverage of the SMMT data, the volumes and trends published by SMMT are generally consistent with DfT published data.

More information about the data published by SMMT can be found on [their website](#).

Next release

Vehicle Licensing Statistics are published quarterly. The next release is due in September 2020, which will cover the period up to the end of June 2020. The quarterly releases (typically published in June, September, and December) have a reduced number of tables and commentary compared to the annual publication (April).

Any updates to these plans, including the exact publication date when known, will be advertised via the [DfT statistical publications schedule](#).

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