



## Vehicle Licensing Statistics: notes and definitions

This note provides definitions used in vehicle licensing statistics. It also describes the main source of the data and some of the characteristics of the source, and of the statistics, which should be considered when using them.

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### FURTHER INFORMATION

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## 1. Source

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 Great Britain. This note provides guidance on this source and the statistics derived from it.

The DVLA database contains a new record every time a new (or used) vehicle is first registered in Great Britain. A wide range of variables are captured, including the make, model, body type, colour and size of the vehicle, plus some basic information about the keeper of the vehicle, including the postcode of the keeper. More information about what is captured and how this is done can be found in the V355 Guidance Notes for Completion of the V55 Forms document (available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/v355-5-guide-to-filling-in-the-application-for-a-first-tax-disc-and-registration-for-a-used-motor-vehicle-v55-5>).

The initial registration of new vehicles is usually carried out by vehicle manufacturers at the point of sale. In most cases, this process is carried out using the Automatic First Registration and Licensing (AFRL) system and all the data stored on the database comes directly from the manufacturers' records. Any vehicle that has been imported into Great Britain by an individual or has been restored and brought back onto the road will be registered by the keeper. In these cases, along with any new vehicle that is being registered outside of the AFRL system, the information is keyed in manually by DVLA staff.

Further information about the DVLA database is provided in the Statement of Administrative Sources, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vehicles-statistics-guidance>.

All the statistics derived from the DVLA vehicle licensing database are designated as National Statistics. A small number of tables published in the vehicles series, but taken from different sources, are not designated as National Statistics. These are listed on the web page referred to in the previous paragraph.

## 2. Compilation of the statistics

The DVLA database is regarded as an authoritative list of all licensed and SORN vehicles. The statistics produced from the database are direct aggregations of vehicles using certain characteristics. These characteristics, for instance, age of vehicle, fuel type, keeper type, location, are explained in the title of each table and the variables provided.

Most of the statistics presented are currently for Great Britain, except for tables VEH0130 and VEH0170 which cover the United Kingdom.

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## 3. Publication schedule

Most of the vehicle licensing statistics tables are published **annually** in April, with an accompanying statistical release.

A few tables are also published **quarterly**, in June, September and December (the final quarter being incorporated into the April annual release). Further details of these tables are given in the relevant quarterly releases.

One table, VEH0150, is updated **monthly**. This table presents a long-term time series using stable definitions. Therefore it is updated as a 'standalone' output with no accompanying documentation. However, users should note that the table exhibits strong seasonality - see 'Seasonality in the new registration figures' section below).

All the statistics are published via the vehicle licensing statistics home page <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vehicles-statistics>. An index of the tables is also available on this page.

## 4. Definitions

### Body types

DVLA record a vehicle body type for each registered vehicle. These body types relate to the physical construction of the vehicle but **not** the way in which it is currently being used. The key body type groups used are:

- Cars 4-wheel vehicles including people carriers and all passenger carrying vehicles that can carry no more than eight passengers (excluding the driver). Includes private hire taxis (PHV – Private Hire Vehicles) that are car based. Hackney Carriages are in the 'Other vehicles' group.
- Motorcycles 2-wheel vehicles powered by an engine. Includes Scooters and Mopeds.
- Light goods vehicles / light vans 4-wheel vehicles constructed for transporting goods. Must have a gross weight of 3.5 tonnes or less. This includes road tractors and curtain sided vehicles (with a gross weight of 3.5 tonnes or less).
- Heavy goods vehicles Larger vehicles constructed for transporting goods. Must have a gross weight more than 3.5 tonnes. This includes road tractors and curtain sided vehicles (with a gross weight of over 3.5 tonnes).
- Buses and coaches Includes minibuses (which can carry no more than sixteen passengers) and all other passenger carrying vehicles with nine seats or more (excluding the driver's seat).
- Other vehicles All vehicles not mentioned above. Includes rear diggers, lift trucks, rollers, ambulances, Hackney Carriages, three wheelers and agricultural vehicles. Up to 2007 road tractors and curtain sided vehicles were included. They are now in the light and heavy goods categories (see above).

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## Taxation classes

All vehicles registered by DVLA are allocated a taxation class, reflecting the way in which the vehicle is used and, in some cases, by whom it is used. It does **not** always reflect the physical construction of the vehicle.

In some cases, the precise taxation class depends upon certain vehicle characteristics such as engine size, propulsion type, emission rates, gross weight, number of axles or, in the case of public transport vehicles, the number of seats. There have been many changes to the taxation classes over the years and the main ones are described later.

Key taxation class groupings presented within this publication are:

- Private and light goods (PLG) This is by far the most common tax class, covering almost 89 per cent of licensed vehicles. This tax class primarily consists of cars and light vans but can include other vehicles used only for private purposes. Tax bands within PLG depend on engine size for vehicles first registered before March 2001, while for cars registered on or after March 2001, tax bands are based upon levels of CO2 emissions, with lower rates for cleaner vehicles.
- Motorcycles, scooters and mopeds This is a self-explanatory tax class, but excludes tricycles which have their own tax band. The rates of tax payable depend upon engine size.
- Goods vehicles Vehicles that have a gross weight of over 3.5 tonnes and are used for carrying goods are taxed in this class. Generally, the rate of tax payable depends on the maximum gross weight and the axle configuration of the vehicle. Since 1999 reduced rates have been available for vehicles that create less pollution.
- Buses This category covers buses and coaches with more than eight seats (excluding the driver) used for commercial purposes. Vehicles not used for commercial purposes would be licensed in the PLG tax class. The rate of tax payable is dependent upon the number of seats in the vehicle. As for goods vehicles, since 1999 reduced rates have been available for vehicles that create less pollution.
- Other vehicles This group includes vehicles which are exempt from vehicle excise duty. This can be for a variety of reasons, including vehicles driven by disabled drivers, emergency and crown vehicles and vehicles manufactured before 1972. The 'other' group also include agricultural vehicles, recovery vehicles, general haulage vehicles, small island vehicles and tricycles.

## Statutory Off-Road Notification (SORN)

From 31<sup>st</sup> January 1998 it has been necessary to make a Statutory Off-Road Notification for any vehicle for which the keeper does not wish to renew the tax, or wished to claim a tax refund, because it is not being used on the road. SORN declarations made prior to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 had to be renewed after 12 months. Declarations after this date no longer have to be renewed annually, and will remain valid until the vehicle is re-taxed, sold, permanently exported or scrapped. When a vehicle with a SORN declaration is sold, the new owner will need to tax or

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SORN the vehicle themselves.

For statistical purposes, this change to 'continuous SORN' may make a difference in a very small proportion of cases to the estimation of whether a vehicle was licensed or SORN at the statistical census date (i.e. the end of the previous quarter). It is also possible that the removal of the requirement to renew SORN declarations has resulted in an increase in their number – this will be kept under review as more data become available.

## 5. Historical changes to the vehicle taxation system (Vehicle Excise Duty, or VED)

There have been several major changes to the vehicle taxation system in recent years.

First, as from 1 October 1982, all general goods vehicles less than 1,525 kgs unladen weight were assessed for vehicle excise duty at the same rate as private vehicles, and the old Private Car and Van taxation class was replaced by the new Private and Light Goods (PLG) taxation class. In addition, goods vehicles greater than 1,525 kgs unladen weight were to be taxed with reference to their gross vehicle weight and axle configuration, as opposed to unladen weight as in previous years. Farmers' light goods vehicles and showmen's light goods vehicles, i.e. vehicles of less than 1,525 kgs unladen weight, were allocated to their own distinct taxation classes and were not included in the PLG taxation class.

Secondly, from 1 October 1990, goods vehicles less than or equal to 3,500 kgs (3.5 tonnes) gross vehicle weight were transferred from the Goods Vehicle taxation class to the Private and Light Goods class. Farmers' and showmen's goods vehicles of less than or equal to 3,500 kgs gross vehicle weight, but more than 1,525 kgs unladen weight, were transferred to the Light Goods Farmers' and Light Goods Showmen's taxation classes.

Thirdly, 1995 saw major reforms of the vehicle taxation system as a whole. The bulk of the 1995 changes came into operation on 1st July 1995, but some additional changes were introduced on 29th November 1995. The intention was to remove many of the complications in the existing taxation structure, using a strategy to link VED rates for many vehicles directly to the rate for the PLG group, or the basic minimum rate for HGVs.

Finally, the VED rate on cars registered since 1st March 2001 has been determined by their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

In addition, the goods vehicle taxation system was considerably simplified by the abolition of separate goods vehicle classes for farmers and showmen. All remaining light goods vehicle taxation classes were also abolished and vehicles in those groups transferred to the PLG class. At the same time, the basis for calculation of excise duty for goods vehicles was amended to "revenue weight". Revenue weight means either "confirmed maximum gross weight" as determined by plating and testing regulations, or "design weight" for vehicles not subject to plating and testing (formerly known as Restricted HGVs).

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The process also included further simplifications and “tidying” arrangements. These included cases in which vehicles not over 3,500 kgs gross weight were moved into the PLG taxation class rather than remaining in specialised taxation classes and groups, and the re-allocation of some tax classes into more appropriate groups. One key change of a similar type was to abolish the separate taxation of public transport vehicles with eight seats or fewer and tax all such vehicles in the PLG class. From start of July 1995 bigger public transport vehicles were taxed in a new Bus taxation class. The changes were completed by the introduction of a new Exempt class in the November 1995 budget for vehicles previously in the private and light goods or motorcycle groups over 25 years of age. From November 1997 this applies only to vehicles that were manufactured before 1973.

Subsequent changes have generally involved some changes to VED rates. In March 2006, a new emissions band (Band G) was introduced for PLG vehicles. From April 2009 the seven emission bands were increased to 13 (A to M) and redefined. However, the overall structure of the taxation system has remained largely unchanged, beyond the changes outlined above.

Since September 1999, new number plate age identifiers have been issued twice early, in March and September, with the first of these being in September 1999. Prior to this date, new letter prefixes were only issued in August.

## 6. Factors affecting statistics on licensed vehicles

When assessing the data on licensed vehicles presented within this publication, it is important to note that the numbers given represent the number of vehicles licensed at the end of each year. The following factors may affect the statistics given.

### Seasonality in stock figures

For certain types of vehicle, licensed stock at the end of the year may differ significantly from the stock in the middle of the year. This is especially so with motorcycles and other similar vehicle types, for which large numbers of vehicles may be kept off road during the winter months. Many such vehicles have six month licences covering, for example April to September and are not used for the rest of the year. The end year figures given in this publication are therefore an underestimate of the stock that is used throughout the year. The quarterly tables show how the figures vary throughout the year.

### Seasonality and trends in new registration figures

New registration data generally shows very marked peaks of new vehicle registrations in March and September and troughs in February and August. These correspond with the release of the new registration plates in March and September each year.

New registration statistics are also much more responsive to the wider state of the British economy than the total licensed vehicles statistics. In general, new registrations are higher during periods of

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strong economic growth and lower during times of low growth or recession.

The effects of government interventions, such as those discussed in the following section, are usually more likely to be apparent in the new registration figures, as they will often apply to new vehicles rather than retrospectively to the whole stock.

## Effect of government actions

These can include actions such as taxation, regulatory or administrative changes, and stimulus schemes.

Taxation changes will tend to result in stock shifting from one tax class to another. In some cases, this has resulted in the creation of new tax classes - as in 1995 when there was a major overhaul of the whole taxation system. More recently, there have been more subtle changes but ones which have still changed the distribution of vehicles across the tax classes.

As noted above, the VED charges for cars have been based on CO2 emissions since 2001, giving owners an added incentive to opt for lower emitting vehicles, and manufacturers to respond to this demand. In addition, EU legislation introduced legally binding Europe-wide emission targets for manufacturers of cars and light goods vehicles, in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The first targets with financial penalties for manufacturers who miss them are for new cars registered in 2012 and new light goods vehicles registered in 2015. More stringent targets apply for both in 2020.

Other government policies directly intended to influence behaviour include the plug-in car and van grants introduced in 2011 and 2012 to encourage the take-up of electric vehicles, and the Vehicle Scrappage Scheme, which ran from May 2009 to March 2010 and had a clear upward effect on new vehicle registration statistics during this period.

## 7. Revision to series

In December 2010 the licensed stock and SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification) series from 2006 to quarter 2 2010 were revised. This was due to a reallocation of vehicles which were original designated as licensed to the SORN category.

Further details of the revision are provided at <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/vehicle-licensing/notesvls.pdf>.

## 8. Guidance on using the make/model tables

Some tables in the vehicle licensing statistics series contain detailed make / model information. This section provides some guidance about this information and how the statistics should be interpreted

### Make and model names

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The entry for each vehicle on the database does not contain the text of the make and model. Instead, vehicles are registered using a set of standard codes. Each manufacturer has defined what level of detail should be captured by these codes. A standard list which can be used to convert the code into a textual name has been published at:

<http://www.joinedupsystems.net/Context.aspx?ContextId=20312>.

Prior to 1963, these codes were created by manufacturers and they tended to record less detail than for modern vehicles. Usually just a generic commercial name was used.

Since 1963, the manufacturers created the model codes in conjunction with the DVLA, initially, and the various trade associations (SMMT, MCIA, AEA) later on. The main stipulation of the codes is that they should only be created for models which have been made available for sale in the UK and that the name is 25 characters or shorter (this limit was increased to 30 characters for new models in 2010).

A number of a small-volume car manufacturers do not take part in SMMT's code scheme. In these cases, although vehicles are registered with the correct make code, they usually do not have any model code at all.

## 'Missing' or 'incorrect' model names

As described in the Sources section of this note, the vast majority of new vehicles are registered through the DVLA's AFRL system which takes the data directly from manufacturers. The DVLA do not change this information at all, so any mistakes in the final data are usually as a result of errors made by the manufacturer. The remaining vehicles are registered by individuals or manufacturers with the DVLA using V55 forms. Any mistakes in the final data for these vehicles are as a result of errors made by either the individual completing the form or the DVLA operator when keying the information into the system.

There are nevertheless some conditions under which individual vehicles either have no model name or it is seemingly incorrect:

- Modern vehicles which are on general sale in the UK have DVLA model names as defined by manufacturers. This usually does not include Mark (Mk., or version) numbers so in most cases it is usually impossible to distinguish between vehicles of the same model name but of a different Mk. number. Similarly, manufacturers may not choose to use the full model name within the description.
- Vehicles from before 1963 are less likely to have a specific model name or any model name at all. Model names would only have existed if the manufacturer created one at the time.
- No model codes exist for imported vehicles of models which have not been on general sale in the UK (or are sold in the UK under a different make or model name). In these cases the DVLA operator will either try to find the nearest, sensible, match to the name as written on the V55 form, or will record the vehicle in the 'model missing' box. The former is often done when

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keepers want something to appear on the V5 document for insurance purposes. The nearest match would usually be a shorter, more generic term for the vehicle.

- Small-volume manufacturers who do not take part in SMMT's coding scheme will often register their vehicles without model names. This is also very common for commercial vehicles.
- Multi stage build vehicles (especially motor caravans): if these vehicles are converted by body builders in the UK they are likely to have model information relating to the base chassis but if they are imported to the UK as a finished vehicle they are unlikely to be coded.

Any vehicle of a given model name which cannot be located in the data tables will most likely be included in the 'model missing' categories.

## 'Correcting' the DVLA database

The flaws of the data highlighted above are not errors in the database, but are inherent in the registration system. Therefore it is not possible to either identify specific models from any the 'missing' categories or applying any changes to the model names on the database.

If a vehicle owner believes that there is a specific error on the V5 document for their own vehicle, they should contact the DVLA directly to have this corrected.

## Simpler access and interface to the data

The specific tables discussed here have been made more accessible, with a simple search tool, at <http://www.howmanyleft.co.uk/>. Although this is not an official DfT website, it is based entirely on DfT data and the developer has combined some of the models together where they have the same name but different model codes. The DfT accepts no responsibility for the content or accuracy of this site.

## 9. Accuracy of the DVLA database

The DVLA database can be regarded as being virtually complete in terms of the number of licensed vehicles and vehicles with a SORN. However, there will be some errors in some of the specific details of individual vehicles.

The DVLA carry out regular Traceability Surveys which look at whether it is possible to trace the owner of any given vehicle and check what details on the database are inaccurate. They estimate that every variable is correct for roughly 89 per cent of the registered vehicles. The remaining 11 per cent of vehicles will have an error in at least one of the fields. Of the overall total, about 4 per cent have wrong details that make it impossible to trace the registered keeper of the vehicle (often caused by keepers not providing DVLA with updated details when they move or dispose of the vehicle).

Most of the inaccuracies in the database are with the less important variables, such as colour,

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though some will affect the statistics published here (e.g. by having the wrong CO2 g/km emission value or the wrong wheelbase). DfT estimates that under 2 per cent of the vehicles records have an inaccuracy in one of the variables used for the statistics published.

## 10. Other sources of data

### Tables containing data on vehicles within other DfT statistical series

Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) evasion: The vehicle licensing statistics cover licensed (or SORN) vehicles only. If a vehicle is being illegally used on the road without a licence (i.e. evading VED), then it is not counted in the statistics presented within this publication. DfT statistical estimates of the level of VED evasion are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vehicles-statistics>

Foreign registered vehicles: In addition to the licensed vehicles and VED evading vehicles using the road network, foreign registered vehicles can also use the road network. DfT statistical estimates of foreign registered vehicles are published within the road traffic statistics series at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics>.

National Travel Survey: Includes tables on driving licence holders, vehicle ownership and driving intentions at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-travel-survey-statistics>

Reported road accident statistics:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics>

### Northern Ireland

Statistics for Northern Ireland are published by the [Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland](#) and the [Department for Regional Development, Northern Ireland](#). They are directly comparable to the statistics published on this site and use the same tax class, body types and make/model names. Some changes are expected in the vehicle licensing statistics as a result of plans announced in March 2014 to centralise the delivery of vehicle and registration services for Northern Ireland at DVLA in Swansea, where these services for Great Britain are already administered, from July 2014. We are working in consultation with DVLA and Northern Irish colleagues to continue to produce consistent statistics for the whole of the United Kingdom. Please see the [Vehicles Statistics home page](#) for the latest information on these changes.

### Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) also produces some statistics for the UK (<http://www.smmt.co.uk/>). These are collated directly from the manufacturers and therefore only report new vehicles, rather than all new registrations.

In addition, there are some minor differences in body type classifications used. This means that

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although the broad trends between the SMMT data and the statistics published in this series tend to be similar, there will be some minor differences.