

# CONSUMERS AT RISK IN £MULTI- MILLION CAR-SELLING SCAM

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Motors.co.uk, OFT and Police Launch Initiative to Drive Out Scammers

The UK's fastest growing used car (<http://www.motors.co.uk>) website motors.co.uk is supporting an industry wide campaign with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to tackle the growing problem of vehicle matching scams which are costing consumers millions of pounds every year.

The scams involve fraudsters approaching consumers selling their cars and promising to find them a definite buyer. Typically, the seller is cold-called by phone once they have placed an advert in a magazine, on a website or in a newspaper. Consumers are promised that a buyer has been found for their vehicle but are told they must pay a matcher's fee up front before the sale is completed. However, in many cases there is no buyer, the contract with the vehicle matcher cannot be cancelled, and any money paid is lost.

Last year over 1,600 private sellers of second hand cars complained to Consumer Direct about the practice, losing between £80 and £99 each, but the true number of victims is thought to be much larger with latest estimates of consumer losses valued at almost £3 million.

The OFT has co-ordinated the sharing of intelligence between different enforcement agencies to target action against traders engaged in unfair commercial practices and has organised a day of action with the police, local authority Trading Standards Services and consumer bodies to crack down on the car matching scammers.

motors.co.uk (<http://www.motors.co.uk>) is supporting an industry wide partnership to combat the scams, which will see prominent warnings displayed on all the major used car websites to alert private sellers of the vehicle matching scam as soon as their car is listed for sale.

Motors.co.uk has spearheaded a number of industry wide campaigns to tackle car fraud and was one of the founding members of VSTAG, the Vehicle Safe Trading Advisory Group, an industry body specifically created to highlight the dangers of vehicle fraud.

In March, Motors.co.uk launched a nationwide campaign with the Metropolitan Police and motoring authority Quentin Willson to highlight the growing problem of car fraud. Called 'Real or Rogue?', the campaign saw the launch of a free downloadable, safe car buying guide to help consumers steer clear of stolen cars and dodgy deals. The motors.co.uk website also provides free history checks for all cars listed on the site providing additional security for car buyers.

Katie Armitage, Marketing Manager for motors.co.uk (<http://www.motors.co.uk>), said:

"Motors.co.uk has been very active in the past 12 months in leading the used car industry's response to vehicle fraud. Initiatives such as our 'Real or Rogue?' campaign and this latest operation tackling vehicle matching scams, demonstrate our commitment to fighting car crime

“Our research has found that because of the credit crunch more people are taking risks and so more are prone to being caught out by scams such as vehicle matching. That’s why the warning appearing on the [motors.co.uk](http://motors.co.uk) website alongside our free history check service, is so important.”

Mike Haley, OFT Director of Consumer Protection, said:

“Time is up for rogue traders who attempt to cheat sellers with false promises of a guaranteed buyer for their cars. We are working with the industry and enforcement partners across the UK to crack down on scammers who are preying on consumers during the economic downturn.”

Motors.co.uk and the OFT have produced the following top 5 tips to beat vehicle matching scams:

1. Stop, think and be sceptical if you are cold called and are asked for money in advance.
2. Don't be pressured into anything - if in doubt about a particular telephone call, hang up.
3. Don't give your credit or debit card details to people you don't know.
4. If something sounds too good to be true it probably is.
5. For more information on vehicle matching scams go to [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/vehiclematching](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/vehiclematching)

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For more information please contact Simon Baylis or Emma Campbell at Acceleris Marketing Communications on 0845 4567 251 / [simonb@acceleris-mc.com](mailto:simonb@acceleris-mc.com)

Notes to Editor

1. The Consumer Protection from Unfair Regulations 2008 prohibits unfair commercial practices and, in particular those which constitute misleading actions, misleading omissions and aggressive commercial practices. The Regulations are enforceable through the civil and criminal courts. Breach of the law is an offence punishable by up to two years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

2. Car-matching scammers have easy access to car sellers' details through online publications and newspapers, and a number of individuals are associated with more than one company. Consumers across the country have been targeted. The OFT has also been informed that consumers from the Republic of Ireland have been targeted by some of the same UK traders.

3. There has been a concentration of scam companies operating from around North London and Hertfordshire and several recent enforcement cases have been successfully brought against these rogue traders by trading standards. Recent action taken against vehicle matching companies, includes a prosecution taken under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 by Hertfordshire County Council Trading Standards. See press release [http://news.hertsdirect.org/Release.aspx?a=1&id=7704&\\_cat=11](http://news.hertsdirect.org/Release.aspx?a=1&id=7704&_cat=11). In addition CIB investigations have led to several vehicle matching companies being put into liquidation.

4.The OFT is also warning employees of rogue car matching firms that they will be individually liable for prosecution for knowingly and dishonestly misleading consumers.

5.Earlier this month, the OFT launched a market study into the sale of second-hand cars related to franchised and independent dealers. Though not looking at private car sales, its findings will aim to provide clarity across the wider second-hand car market. See press release <http://www.ofc.gov.uk/news/press/2009/51-09>

6.If you think you have been the victim of a vehicle matching scam, or you suspect a scam, call Consumer Direct for clear, practical consumer advice on 08454 04 05 06.

7.The [motors.co.uk](http://www.motors.co.uk) network, which launched in January 2007, is now visited by over 2.9 million car buyers every month. It features nearly 200,000 used cars for sale from car retailers and private sellers across the UK and provides free history checks, advice and guidance covering every part of the car buying process to help motorists make informed choices about their next car. For a downloadable copy of the [Motors.co.uk](http://www.motors.co.uk) Real or Rogue? safe car buying guide visit the link below:  
<http://www.motors.co.uk/cars/news/motorscouk-launches-safe-buying-guide>