

Open Letter to all Independent Car Servicing Businesses

27 May 2009

MOTOR INDUSTRY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR SERVICE AND REPAIR

I am sure you are aware that in August last year Motor Codes Ltd., launched a new code of practice specifically for the motor service and repair industry. I am writing to underline the Government's support for this initiative and to encourage you to give serious thought to the potential business benefits of participating.

The Code, launched with "stage one" approval from the Office of Fair Trading under the Consumer Codes Approval Scheme, has been designed with the support of the industry, government, trade bodies and consumer bodies. It aims to build consumer confidence and will give participating businesses the means to reassure their customers, and prospective customers as to the level of service they can expect.

The Code will achieve this by providing a Government approved indicator for consumers that the participating business is committed to doing its best to provide a proper level of service to a set of widely recognised and approved standards. It will also assure consumers that if things do go wrong the business will do its best to resolve complaints to the customer's satisfaction.

The Code got off to an encouraging start with some 5000 businesses already committed to participate. However, I am disappointed that only a small percentage of those businesses were from the independent, non-franchised, sector. The Code has been developed to be a tool for the whole industry by which all competent operators can demonstrate to consumers that they are as capable of providing good levels of service as any in the sector. In that way the Code can also be viewed as an aid to effective competition across the market.

With your support the Code can achieve full approval, but it is not until the systems have been demonstrated to have been working effectively, and that a sufficient number of businesses within a particular sector are participating, that this can be achieved, and participants can market themselves as "OFT Approved".

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Motor Codes Ltd has been at great pains to seek to ensure that the standards and processes which individual businesses must abide by, while encouraging broad improvement across the sector, are nevertheless within relatively easy reach of any operator which is committed to good and fair customer service. The Codes team has also been acutely conscious of the need to keep costs down in order that the scheme can be as inclusive as possible.

The industry has taken great strides in improving customer service and delivery and a successful Code might provide the key to finally dispel the largely ill-deserved negative public perception of the industry. To do so however, and to generate the potential for delivering competitive advantage for participants, there must be sufficient numbers of garages nationally, of a sufficient variety, to provide a properly representative local choice for consumers.

To ensure success it is important for any independent garage, or network of garages, which might be waiting to see how the Code develops before fully committing, to take part now. You will join those like yourselves who are striving to address quality issues in the industry and expose unscrupulous operators who damage the reputation of the whole industry.

You can find out more about the Code at <http://www.motorindustrycodes.co.uk>. Chris Mason who heads up the team at Motor Codes Ltd will be happy to talk through the detail with you. He can be contacted at:

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am keen to see the Code succeed for consumers and for business and look forward to receiving news of increased membership and subsequent OFT approval.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gareth Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gareth Thomas MP
Minister for Trade & Consumer Affairs