

# Mobile phones



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This report was prepared for RAC by Sarah Clarke and her team at Market Dynamics under the editorial control of Harry Mirpuri at RAC. The original research for this report was undertaken by Sample Surveys and Swift Research.

Motoring organisation RAC supports its six million individual and business customers with breakdown cover and a wide range of other individual motoring solutions. The RAC Foundation for Motoring is an independent body established to protect and promote the interests of UK motorists. The opinions of each organisation are not necessarily shared by – and should not be attributed to – the other.

Design: RAC Design

Printing: Hampton Printing (Bristol) Ltd

January 2003

Price £149

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# The RAC Report on Motoring 2003 Mobile phones

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RAC Consumer Services

RAC Consumer Services sells a comprehensive range of individual motoring solutions to consumers and offers exceptional levels of support to our customers throughout the whole of their motoring lifetimes.

For many of our customers our wide range of products and services begins with driving or rider tuition from RAC-owned BSM.

In addition to breakdown assistance RAC Consumer Services' non-roadside services include:

- RAC Financial Services, providing a range of insurance, loans and other financial service solutions
- RAC Legal Services, providing legal advice to motorists on a range of issues such as car accidents and personal injuries
- RAC Auto Windscreens, the UK's largest manufacturer and installer of vehicle windscreens with over 900 fully trained fitters operating from the largest network of specialist fitting centres in the UK
- BSM, the UK's largest and most reputable driving school with an unrivalled high street presence

Other RAC services include Travel Services and Hotels which offer advice on all aspects of travel – from warnings of congestion ahead to providing holiday travel insurance or recommending the best hotel in town – and RAC's expert vehicle examiners who offer an impartial opinion when you decide to buy a used car.

RAC Public Affairs

RAC's Public Affairs team spearheads campaigns on behalf of RAC Consumer Services and develops advice and guidance on responsible motoring for our members. Its corporate social responsibility projects, including the highly successful Grass Routes programme which challenges UK schools to plan safe journeys for the route to school, complement the activities of the RAC Foundation for Motoring, an independent charitable organisation which champions the interests of motorists.

RAC plc

RAC plc (formerly Lex Service PLC) provides motoring and vehicle solutions to individual and business customers, ranging from teenagers who are learning to drive with BSM and families who enjoy peace of mind with RAC breakdown cover, to the Ministry of Defence which trusts RAC to supply and maintain all its non-combatant vehicles and other services.

For more information about RAC, visit [www.rac.co.uk](http://www.rac.co.uk)

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January 2003

Foreword by Findlay Caldwell,  
Managing Director, RAC Consumer Services

The phenomenal growth in the number of mobile phones purchased by UK consumers over the past few years has changed the way we lead our personal and business lives.


Whether used for essential calls to colleagues at work, staying in touch with our families during the day, or simply calling friends to catch up, many of us now find that the convenience of being able to communicate instantly is indispensable.

But new technologies bring with them additional responsibilities. Mobile phones have given us greater freedom but have also brought the new dangers of another hazard. It is vital that we use mobile phones on our roads responsibly, with consideration and always with road safety at the forefront of our minds.

Motorists are increasingly concerned about the dangers facing them on our roads, rightly so when we consider that nearly 10 people are killed in road accidents each day in the UK. Their views are of paramount importance in this debate.

The RAC Report on Mobile Phones provides a compelling insight into how ordinary motorists use their phones while on the move and their attitudes to the Government's proposals to ban the use of hand-held phones while driving.

This is one of a series of authoritative reports released by RAC on major issues of concern to our members and the wider motoring public. It is essential reading for everyone with an interest in road safety. I hope you find it useful.



Findlay Caldwell, Managing Director  
RAC Consumer Services

Introduction

The Government is proposing to make the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving a specific motoring offence. RAC Motoring Services commissioned this study to better understand how our members, and the wider motoring public, use mobile phones and their views on further legislation.

This report – commissioned as part of the RAC Report on Motoring series – examines the extent of the problem, gauges support among motorists for change, and assesses how they would prefer new measures to be introduced.

Our research over the past 15 years has consistently shown that motorists have a keen interest in road safety issues. If policies and road safety campaigns can better reflect their perceptions, and the practicalities of everyday life on the road, they will be better targeted, more effective and much more likely to secure widespread support.

**The research programme**  
This report is based on the views of 500 motorists – a combination of 250 RAC members and 250 other road users. The results have been weighted accordingly to show a true reflection of the views of all road users. The research was conducted by telephone by Sample Surveys, a specialist in automotive research, during October 2002.

Summary

Ban hand-held phones and make it a comparable offence to speeding

Only 1 in 4 drivers admit to using a mobile phone while driving and under 1 in 10 use a hand-held mobile phone. This is despite the fact that 63% of motorists say that they frequently observe others driving carelessly while using a mobile.

Calls made and received on the road are of relatively low importance – mostly from friends, family and people from the office. Those taking more regular business calls on a phone supplied by their company are more likely to have a hands-free kit in their car.

There is widespread acceptance that using a hand-held mobile phone while driving is dangerous (two thirds believe that it is significantly impairs driving ability), but there is scepticism among hand-held users that their own personal driving ability is impaired in any way.

Reflecting these opinions, 9 in 10 drivers support a ban on hand-held phones while driving, although support falls away dramatically for a complete ban on all forms of mobile phones. Many still believe, however, that using a mobile phone while driving can be in the interests of road safety in certain circumstances, particularly for reporting an accident or in an emergency.

With a ban imposed, the vast majority (two thirds) would like to see a system of fines and penalty points imposed as punishment. Those at most risk of receiving such a punishment (current hand-held users) would prefer a system of ‘warnings’ – this suggests that fines and points would probably be effective with this group.

These results support RAC’s call for a ban on hand-held mobile phones while driving, with punishments in line with minor speeding offences. RAC also strongly urges the government to pursue an information campaign to encourage safer behaviour by users of hands-free phones.

The impact of previous RAC Calls to Action

Over the past eight years RAC has made various Calls to Action based on the conclusions of our research for the Reports on Motoring. Our Calls have covered issues such as the environment, road rage, speed limits, school travel and driver training.

RAC is proud not only to contribute to current debates on these issues, but also to attempt to make a difference as a company. For example, following a Call for Action made in 1999, RAC now sponsors the Baywatch campaign, which aims to highlight the abuse of disabled parking spaces by non-disabled drivers. In 2000 RAC also welcomed the Government's initiative to include hazard perception testing in driving tests. BSM now provides computerised training to help novice drivers with this essential learning process.

We have made several Calls over the years for traffic on the school run to be examined. RAC's award-winning Grass Routes programme challenged pupils to examine the environmental consequences of their method of travel to school. The programme this year focuses on road safety and journey planning and has been taken up by over 2,000 secondary schools.

Driver safety is another important focus for RAC. In 2001 we called for an education programme to ensure drivers know what to do in the event of a breakdown on the motorway. The Survive group, of which RAC is a part, was set up to do just this and has produced a clear and comprehensive guide to staying alive on the hard shoulder. We also called on the Government to commit itself to not using the hard shoulder as a running lane for congested motorways, and we continue to campaign on this matter.

Since 1996 we have made several calls for high polluting cars to be taken off the roads, and for the environmental impact of cars to be made clear to buyers. The car manufacturing industry has now started to label the environmental standards of cars, and the Government's CO<sub>2</sub> taxation on company cars from April 2002 has made drivers consider their choice of vehicle more carefully.

Some of our Calls have predicted recent developments. For instance in 1998, we stated that "controls on driving in town centres are acceptable to many...in the form of charges, not taxes, so that money can go back into transport". Whether congestion charging in London will work, and whether it will be acceptable in practice remains to be seen. In 2000 we suggested that driver rectification schemes should be extended, to allow drivers to pay for targeted training instead of a fine or endorsements. Avon and Somerset police now run a very successful scheme that aims to educate and retrain drivers in a bid to change behaviour permanently.

The Calls to Action with the first Reports for 2003 focus on responsibilities – the responsibility of a company to ensure the safety of all drivers; and also the responsibility that each and every motorist in the UK has to consider his or her driving behaviour and how it could be improved. At RAC we will be continuing to campaign for a better transport environment for all, and attempting to do our bit to help.

RAC Call to Action

- Change the law
- ban hand-held mobile phones but allow people to use hands-free equipment
  - apply equivalent punishment to those for minor speeding offences
- Encourage safe behaviour
- encourage the use of good quality hands-free systems
  - advise users how to use hands-free systems safely
  - avoid using the phone in poor weather or hazardous driving conditions
  - use the voice messaging facility while on the road; stop and park safely before returning calls
  - if a call is essential, keep it short and simple, use pre-programmed numbers or speech activated dialling and let the other person know that you are driving



Mobile phones



The research findings

The problem is limited to a few persistent offenders but the potential impact affects so many.

The use of mobile phones while driving is apparently less widespread than may be imagined. Although nearly 9 in 10 drivers have a mobile phone, just under a quarter of them admit to using their phone while driving and only 1 in 10 admit to using a hand-held mobile phone. Use of phones while driving is more prevalent among the young (40% of under 35s), men (27%) and those in work (particularly in management positions).

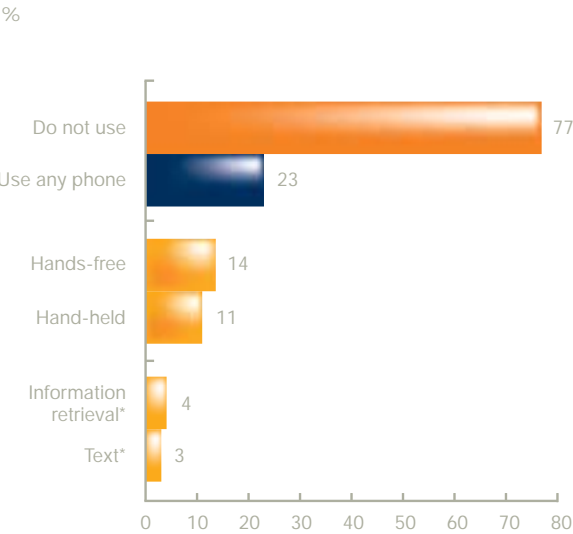
Almost no one uses their mobile phone while driving for texting (4% occasionally or frequently) or information retrieval (3%) – the source of much media coverage following some particularly tragic incidents.

Thus while many people have observed dangerous driving exacerbated by the use of a mobile phone (63% of motorists say they often see such behaviour, across all types of roads and locations), this is the result of a small number of ‘hard core’ hand-held users. The government estimates that 2% of all car users on the road at any given time are using mobile phones.

“A woman was trying to park her car at the shops while she was on the phone and managed to hit the cars on either side of her”

“I recently saw someone with a fag in one hand, a mobile in the other, steering with their elbow”

Figure 1.1  
Use of mobile phones while driving



\*occasionally or frequently  
Base: All motorists (500)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys

The importance of calls is often low

Although occasionally calls are of critical importance – an important family or business matter, or an emergency – most calls are to and from partners, family or colleagues.

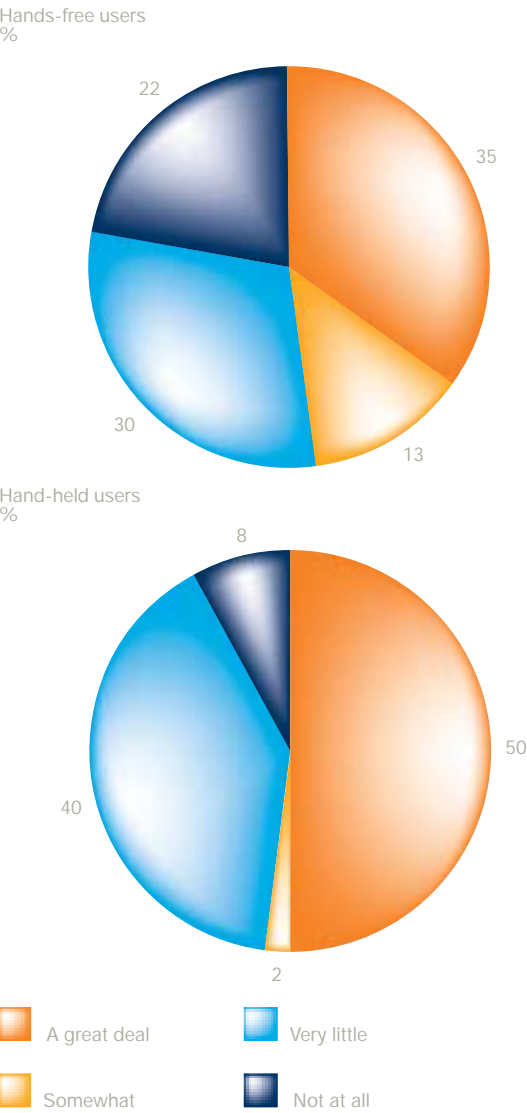
While one might imagine that the majority of hand-held mobile phone users are company car drivers, in reality many business calls are made on hands-free sets supplied by the company. 87% of business supplied phones are hands-free (compared to 38% of privately supplied phones) and two thirds of companies enforce a hands-free phone only policy.

In line with the low importance of many of the calls people make, the majority of users of hand-held phones say not being able to use the phone in the car would have little or no impact on their life (80%). This is in stark contrast to those who have a hands-free phone (who often have to make business calls), where 4 in 10 say it would have a significant impact on their life.

The Government also wants to make it an offence to ‘make someone’ use a mobile phone while driving. In practical terms this will mean an employer being more responsible for an employee’s behaviour in the car. The research however shows little evidence of widespread external pressure on drivers to make calls while on the road.

Of the quarter who use their mobile while driving, 25% say they are under pressure to use the phone while on the road. However, this pressure is felt mostly by those with a phone supplied by work – which are largely hands-free.

Figure 1.2  
The impact of a mobile phone ban on day-to-day life



Base: All users of mobile phones while driving (105)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys

Using mobiles while driving is dangerous (though it does not affect my driving)

There is widespread Government and academic research suggesting the use of mobiles while driving is dangerous. Work by Redelmeier and Tibshirani in Canada suggests that it increases the risk of a collision four-fold, with the increased risk continuing for some time even after the call has finished.

These risks are widely appreciated by motorists, even by those who currently use mobile phones while driving. Two thirds of motorists believe the use of hand-held phones while driving has a great deal of effect on driving ability, while only 1 in 5 believe the use of hands-free phones has a similar level of impact on driver behaviour.

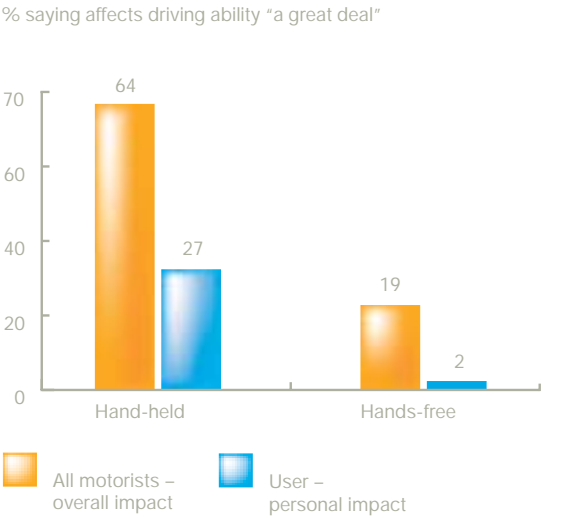
There are, however, classic symptoms of denial among users. Only 27% of those who use hand-held phones while driving believe it has a significant effect on their own driving ability with half saying it has little or no effect.

Keep it in perspective

Although the vast majority of the motoring public believe using a hand-held mobile phone while driving is dangerous – it is not seen as the only threat to road safety caused by driver multi-tasking. When asked if various activities were more, less or equally dangerous to using a hand-held mobile phone when driving – putting make-up on and reading a map or document were on balance seen as more risky.

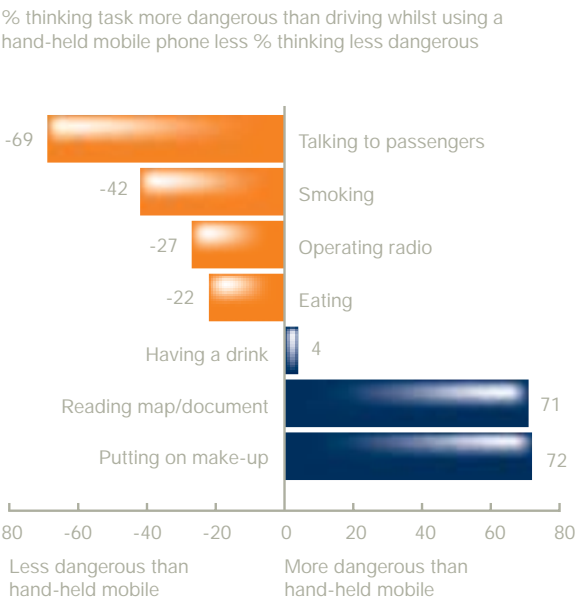
While putting make-up on while driving may be quite rare, reading a map while driving is relatively common – and, as with the use of mobile phones – this is currently only covered by general legislation on ‘proper control of the vehicle’.

Figure 1.3  
Impact on driving ability



Base: All motorists (500)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys

Figure 1.4  
The dangers of multi-tasking at the wheel



Base: All motorists (500)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys

There is overwhelming support for a ban

When asked if they would support the introduction of legislation specifically banning the use of hand-held phones while driving (the current Government proposal), there is almost universal support – even among those who are currently hand-held users.

9 in 10 drivers support banning hand-held mobile phones, with 8 in 10 strongly supporting the introduction of this legislation. Nearly 9 in 10 who currently use mobile phones in their car also support a ban, with over half of those who admit to using a hand-held phone while driving strongly supporting a ban.

Support falls away dramatically if the ban is extended to all mobile phones – not just hand-held – with only 6 in 10 supporting this idea and only 4 in 10 strongly supporting the proposal.

While an outright ban on the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving would be welcomed, there is a desire for the Government and the police to be sensible in its application. A third of motorists explicitly stated that it should be acceptable for a driver to use a phone in an emergency, such as a traffic accident.

Fine offenders and give them penalty points

If a ban is introduced, the majority of motorists would like to see a punishment that is effective but not draconian. 7 in 10 would like to see either a fine, penalty points or both – along the lines of a punishment for a more minor speeding offence.

A tiny minority (5%) would like to see more severe punishment of offenders, with an automatic driving ban the result of being caught.

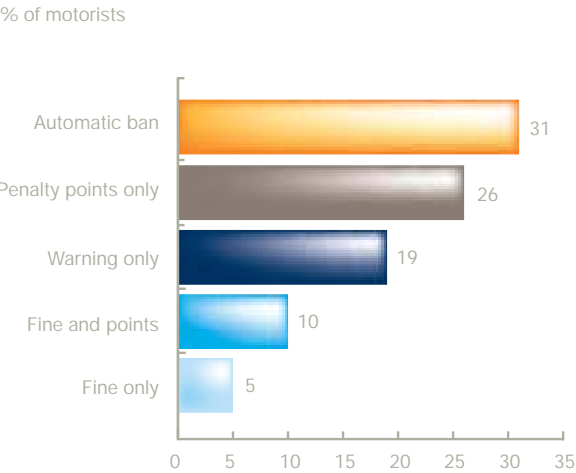
At the other end of the scale 1 in 5 believe that offenders should just be given a warning. Further examination, however, shows that many of these are potential offenders worrying about being caught. 36% of current hand-held users went for ‘a warning’ as their preferred option, compared with 16% of those who do not use a mobile while driving.

Figure 1.5  
Support for legislation banning mobile phones in the car



Base: All motorists (500)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys

Figure 1.6  
The preferred penalty for use of mobile phones while driving



Base: All motorists (500)  
Source: RAC Report on Motoring Special Surveys



