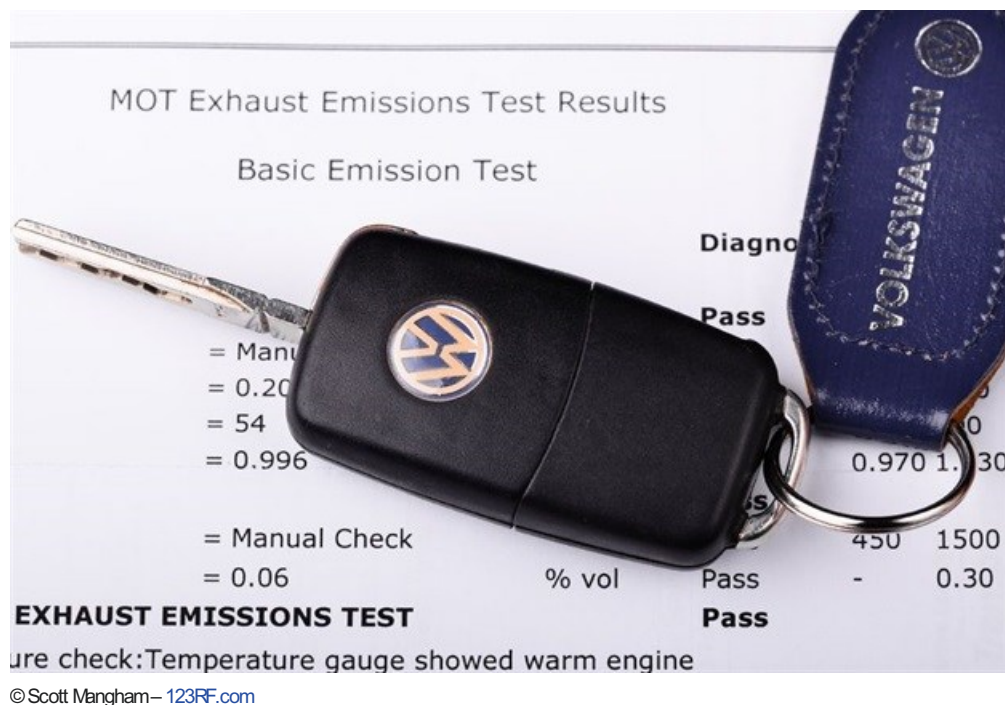


Volkswagen in UK court over 'dieselgate'

LONDON, UK - Thousands of British Volkswagen car owners took their compensation battle to London's High Court on Tuesday over the emissions-cheating "dieselgate" scandal that has plagued the German carmaker.



Law firm Slater and Gordon began a three-day hearing for a group litigation order in what could be the largest consumer action in British legal history, it said.

"It has been over two years since the scandal was exposed and UK consumers have waited in vain for Volkswagen to respond to their complaints fairly," Gareth Pope, lawyer at Slater and Gordon, said in a statement.

The firm represents more than 40,000 current and past owners of Audi, Seat, Skoda and Volkswagen vehicles, making it the largest group of claimants in the collective legal action, it added.

The scandal that erupted in 2015 when Volkswagen admitted to installing cheating devices in millions of cars, secretly spewing far more nitrogen oxide than legally allowed, affected some 1.2 million cars in Britain.

Slater and Gordon on Tuesday added that more than one million of the affected car owners in the UK have yet to join its

legal action.

But it noted that should the litigation order be granted, all affected British car owners would be able to have their claims managed by the same court, rather than every owner being forced to take individual legal action.

About 11 million vehicles worldwide were fitted with the cheating device.

The High Court could by Thursday also decide whether to issue a deadline for complaints -- and appoint a lead lawyer to manage the class action.

Outside the court, supporters of environmental group Greenpeace gathered to protest against Volkswagen as the hearing got under way.

"VW: Clean air cheats," read a banner carried by the supporters.

The law firm, citing its own survey data, also argued that Volkswagen's technical remedy does not work -- a claim denied by the company.

"Volkswagen's only response has been to offer consumers in the UK a 'fix' that our clients are telling us doesn't work," Pope said.

"The survey results are deeply troubling but confirm what clients have been telling us that many have suffered technical problems following the fix."

Volkswagen has argued that such survey data provided by Slater, which it has not seen, has "not been reliable or representative of the experience of owners of affected vehicles in the UK or elsewhere in Europe".

"We have implemented the technical measures in over 840,000 vehicles in the UK and in over 6.4 million vehicles across Europe, and the overwhelming majority of customers with these vehicles are satisfied," said a spokesperson.

VW has set aside more than 22 billion euros (\$27 billion) to cover repairs, buy-backs and legal costs linked to the scandal, but experts believe the final bill will be much higher.

The scandal sparked an avalanche of compensation demands from customers, investors and regulatory authorities.

Source: AFP