

The complaint

Mr S had a motor insurance policy with Advantage Insurance Company Limited, which he arranged through Hastings Direct (Hastings). He's unhappy at how Hastings handled the claim on his policy after he was involved in an accident.

What happened

Mr S was involved in a road traffic accident on 2 September 2019, where his car was recovered by the police. He reported this to Hastings the following day, and he was told they'd log a notification until the police released the car. This happened on 12 September and Hastings arranged for the car to be collected and taken to the repairers.

The repairer refused to accept the car because the handbrake was on and they didn't have the keys. So they couldn't move the car to a safe place while it was awaiting repair. This happened again on 17 September, and it was not until this point that Mr S was asked for the keys.

Mr S couldn't have a courtesy car until the repairs had accepted his car, and had to rely on lifts from his disabled father to get around and to work. And when Hastings gave Mr S a courtesy car it was a manual - his licence only allowed him to drive an automatic. It wasn't until 19 September that Mr S received a car he could drive.

Mr S has complained that Hastings didn't chase the police to have his car released sooner. He's also complained about the delay in him getting a suitable courtesy car, and the inconvenience this caused him.

Our investigator found that the car was with the police until 12 September because they were still completing the relevant paperwork. So he felt that Hastings hadn't done anything wrong by not chasing – they couldn't control how long the police took to deal with the paperwork, and they couldn't influence the police to do this sooner. As Mr S's car was released at the earliest opportunity, he didn't think Hastings needed to do anything more.

But the investigator found that Hastings could've done better when dealing with the courtesy car. He felt that they could've asked Mr S for his car keys as soon as they knew the repairers needed these. He also felt they should've asked Mr S enough questions at the outset to establish his needs. Hastings offered Mr S £75 to compensate him for the inconvenience caused by the delays and lack of courtesy car. But the investigator said, because Mr S's health condition was made worse by the stress of the situation, this should be increased to £150.

Hastings didn't agree with the investigator. They feel that the £75 they offered was sufficient for the trouble and upset Mr S was caused by their service failings. Because of this, the case has been passed to me to make a final decision.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. Having done so, I have reached the same overall conclusions as the investigator, and for broadly the same reasons.

The basic facts of this case aren't disputed and, in their complaint response letter, Hastings acknowledged there was a delay caused as a result of the service they provided. So my decision will concentrate on what's a fair remedy in the circumstances.

I've seen that Hastings arranged for Mr S to have a hire car, when a courtesy car wasn't available from the repairers, to try and lessen the impact of him being without one. While this meant that Mr S received alternative transport a few days earlier than he otherwise might have done, there was still a delay, and this delay was caused by Hastings.

Hastings also acknowledged that Mr S made numerous calls, and sent numerous emails, to Hastings while he was trying to sort this out. I agree with the investigator that this could've been avoided if Hastings had established that he needed an automatic car at the outset, and told him the repairers needed the keys to his car as soon as they knew. This would've meant that Mr S could've had the courtesy car much earlier than he did.

Mr S was inconvenienced by having to arrange lifts from a disabled relative while he was without a car, and this went on much longer than it should. Mr S also suffered from a medical condition that was exacerbated by stress, so the delay and the number of calls/emails he had to make didn't help this.

Putting things right

Considering all of these circumstances, I agree with the investigator that £150 is a fair remedy. Hastings should arrange to increase the compensation they've paid to Mr S from £75 to £150.

My final decision

For the reasons explained above I uphold Mr S's complaint. Advantage Insurance Company Limited must ensure that my directions above are followed.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 22 April 2020.

Andrew Burford

Ombudsman