

The complaint

Mr B complains that UK Insurance Limited – trading as Churchill Insurance – unfairly declined a claim and cancelled his motor insurance policy.

Mr B is represented in this matter by his father. I need to refer to both in my decision so, for clarity and to distinguish them, I've called his father 'Mr L'.

What happened

Mr B had a Churchill motor insurance policy, underwritten by UKI. In June 2025 he called UKI to report damage to the rear left of his car and make a claim on the policy. He thought someone must have hit the his car while it was parked and unattended the previous night.

Mr L called UKI the following day to provide more details about his son's claim. He explained that his son and his friend had returned to the car at about 2am and initially didn't notice the damage to the back of the car. His son tried to drive off, realised he had a flat tyre, and parked the car again. He and his friend slept in the car, intending to deal with the problem in the morning.

Mr L said his son was woken by a woman shouting at him, accusing him of hitting her van, and recording him on her phone. Mr L said the woman was "*really quite aggressive*" and, to defuse the situation, his son drove away. He only noticed the damage to his car after he'd returned to the campsite where he and his friend were staying. Mr L thought whoever hit his son's car must also have hit the van.

UKI was contacted by the van owner's insurer. It provided the van owner's detailed statement. This included a description of the accident and multiple images from the scene (photos and still images taken from the phone recording). The van owner said Mr B had reversed into his van and appeared "*heavily intoxicated*". The insurer also provided a statement from an independent witness, and a copy of a data request from police who were investigating the incident.

UKI declined Mr B's claim and cancelled the policy because it believed his version of events was "*completely false*". Mr L – on his son's behalf – thought this was unfair and complained to this service.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. He thought Mr B had withheld key details about the incident and there were inconsistencies in his account. He thought the evidence supported the van owner's version of events and was satisfied that UKI's decision to decline the claim was reasonable.

Mr L disputed our investigator's findings. He said, in summary:

- There are always inconsistencies in accounts.
- There were no witnesses to the collision: "*anyone claiming that they saw it is lying.*"
- Saying his son was intoxicated "*is an accusation without basis.*"

- There was debris on the ground from both vehicles because both vehicles were hit by the other vehicle.
- The police weren't taking any further action.
- There's no conclusive evidence to show the incident didn't happen the way his son described.

The complaint was 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.

First, ombudsmen decisions are published so are written in a way that prevents the customer from being identified. The circumstances of this claim are well known to both parties. I've been deliberately vague about some details. This is to keep Mr B from being identified, not because I've ignored them or think them irrelevant.

Page 36 of Mr B's policy booklet says: "*You must be honest in your dealings with us at all times. We may take action if you... provide false, incomplete, exaggerated or misleading information [or] make a false, fraudulent or exaggerated claim.*" The booklet explains the action UKI might take. This includes cancelling the policy, keeping premiums, and reporting the fraud to relevant authorities.

I've listened to Mr B's call when he reported the damage to UKI. He said he thought someone had hit his car when it was parked the previous night. When UKI's agent asked him if there were any witnesses, he said no. He later gave UKI a more detailed written statement which mentioned the confrontation with the van owner. This was broadly the same as what Mr L told UKI.

I think his statement raises some questions. For example, I think it's odd that he just parked up when the car's tyre pressure warning light came on, and didn't get out of the car to check which (if any) of the tyres was flat or see if it was possible to drive to the campsite, which was just over a mile away.

It's also clear that Mr B left some important details out of his initial account. I might reasonably have expected him to mention the confrontation with the van owner when he first spoke to UKI, particularly when UKI's agent asked him if there were any witnesses. I also think he might have dealt with the situation differently. He shouldn't have driven off without exchanging information with the van owner or before the police arrived.

But I can accept this was a stressful situation and – if Mr B is to be believed – he'd just been woken up by someone screaming at him. I can also accept that he might have been upset when he reported the damage and possibly still shaken by the incident, even several hours later. Mr L told UKI about the confrontation and the recording within 24 hours of his son's claim, and before UKI had been contacted by the other insurer. I also note his inexperience dealing with this sort of claim, as he explained to UKI's agent. So I'm willing to give Mr B a lot of leeway in his actions immediately after the incident and the inconsistencies in his statement.

There are two conflicting versions of what happened:

1. Mr B: an unknown vehicle hit both his car and the van he was parked next to sometime before 2am.
2. Van owner: Mr B reversed into his van at about 5.15am.

The van owner said he and his partner were in their van getting dressed when they “*felt a huge knock to the van*”. They looked outside and saw the rear passenger side of Mr B’s car attached to the front right of their van and “*struggling to move off.*” The car detached after “*around 10 seconds*” and parked in front of them. They began recording the scene and approached the driver.

I’ve reviewed the van owner’s statement and make the following points:

- It’s one of the most comprehensive witness statements I’ve seen, with supporting photos, screenshots of online communications, stills from CCTV footage, and other notes.
- Video and still images show: Mr B and his friend in the car, Mr B’s car lights on, the damage to both vehicles, debris on the ground (including Mr B’s broken taillight), red glass embedded in the van’s broken headlight that appears to be from Mr B’s taillight, paint transfer between the two vehicles, and Mr B driving away from the scene.
- The images taken by the van owner and his partner are all timestamped between 5.17am and 5.23am.
- The van owner pieced together the broken taillight. This was an exact match for the photos of Mr B’s taillight.
- The way the van’s front right panel was crushed backwards indicated that it was hit from the front, not from behind.
- He called the police at 5.19am, several minutes before Mr B left the scene.
- The photos don’t appear to show any debris from a third vehicle.
- The images are entirely consistent with the van owner’s description of the accident.

Another van owner – parked on the other side of Mr B’s car – provided a statement. He said he “*woke up to the sound of a crash while sleeping in my campervan.*” He got out and saw the confrontation between the van owner’s partner and the occupants of Mr B’s car. His statement corroborates the van owner’s account. Conversely, Mr B’s friend didn’t make a statement because, according to Mr B, he “*doesn’t wish to be involved*”. I don’t see any good reason for this witness not to provide a statement to support Mr B’s claim.

So the other parties present – the van owner, his partner, and the campervan owner – all directly contradict Mr B’s statement that the damage was done by an unknown vehicle sometime before he and his friend returned to the car at 2am.

I’ve also thought about how the damage happened. The damage to Mr B’s car is at the rear left. The damage to the van is at the front right. Mr B explained that when he thought he had a flat tyre, he turned around and parked his car in the same spot but facing the opposite direction. This means his car was originally parked facing the van and explains how there could have been damage to different sides of the vehicles.

But this means the unknown vehicle would have to have hit the front right corner of the van, miss the front left and entire left side of Mr B’s car, then hit the rear left corner of his car. I don’t see how that’s possible. It’s even less possible if the unknown vehicle was driving in the other direction and crossed from the other side of the road and hit the back of Mr B’s car, then the front of the van (which at least would be consistent with the van’s crushed panel).

The images also show Mr B’s broken taillight at the front of the van. Again, this isn’t possible if Mr B’s account is correct. If the unknown vehicle had hit his car where it was originally parked, his broken taillight would have been at least a car length away from the van.

The 'unknown vehicle' version also means the van owner and his partner either slept through the accident, were woken by the accident and decided not to phone the police until several hours later, or weren't in the van at the time of the accident and didn't notice the damage when they returned. I don't think any of these scenarios is realistic.

For the avoidance of doubt, I accept that the van owner, his partner, and the independent party didn't see the collision (although I'm satisfied that the van owner and his partner saw Mr B's car move away from their van). But this doesn't mean their testimony isn't valid, as Mr L seems to suggest. They've given statements about what they all heard and felt, and I think it was reasonable for UKI to give weight to them. I don't agree with Mr L's suggestion that they colluded to get their stories straight.

I make no finding on whether Mr B was intoxicated, and I note Mr L told us the police aren't taking further action. I also note both Mr B and Mr L's strength of feeling on this point. I've disregarded the CCTV footage provided by the van owner because I think it's inconclusive.

But this doesn't affect my decision. I think the statements provided by the other parties are persuasive and supported by the damage to both vehicles and photos/other images from the scene. I agree with UKI that the third-party insurer has provided overwhelming evidence that Mr B's car reversed into the van. I'm satisfied that UKI's decision to decline the claim and cancel the policy was fair and reasonable.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 5 October 2025.

Simon Begley
Ombudsman