

The complaint

Mrs B and Mr B complain about the service they received from RAC Insurance Limited (“RAC”) during a claim they made on their breakdown insurance policy.

Mr B has acted as the main representative during the claim and complaint process. So, for ease of reference, I will refer to any actions taken, or comments made, as those of “Mr B” throughout this decision.

What happened

Mr B held an insurance policy with RAC that included breakdown cover for his motorhome. He contacted them to raise a claim in January 2025 when his motorhome developed a gearbox fault while travelling through France. RAC arranged for a breakdown service to attend, and the motorhome was taken to a local garage the following day. The garage diagnosed a problem with the gearbox and said they needed replacement parts.

Over the next few days, the garage attempted repairs and removed and refitted the gearbox several times. Mr B says he noticed wiring being cut and, following a road test, he said the engine ran poorly and often stalled. The garage then told RAC they were unable to complete the work, and during this period, Mr B remained in the motorhome. RAC helped to arrange a hire car so he could stay with a friend in Luxembourg while the situation was resolved.

RAC later moved the motorhome to another garage, and after an inspection, this garage said the motorhome had an EGR valve and turbo fault. The garage estimated the cost of repairs to be in the region of around €5,000 to €7,000 and said the work could take between two to four weeks to complete. Mr B said he was concerned around the size of the estimated costs and believed the quoted faults were inaccurate, so he asked RAC about having the motorhome repatriated to the UK instead. RAC explained that under the policy wording, repatriation would only usually be authorised if the motorhome couldn't be repaired abroad before Mr B planned to return home, which was in April 2025. RAC said that as the garage had outlined repairs were possible within that time frame, repatriation would be declined.

Mr B ultimately decided that he no longer wished to continue with the holiday and chose to return to the UK. He later arranged for the motorhome to be brought back at his own expense and had further repairs carried out in the UK. Mr B said he felt that the difficulties he'd faced, the actions of the garages, and the size of the estimates meant RAC should have intervened sooner or arranged for repatriation when he asked for it. Mr B raised a complaint which included concerns around damage he said occurred during the transport of his vehicle back to the UK, and about the information and communication he received from RAC.

RAC considered the complaint but didn't uphold it. They maintained that Mr B's repatriation request would likely be declined due to Mr B's scheduled return date being in April and repairs being possible in that time. RAC concluded that the decisions made during the claim were in line with the policy's terms and conditions, and they were satisfied that they had acted based on the information provided by the garages where Mr B's vehicle was being held. Mr B remained unhappy with how RAC had handled his claim – so, he brought it to this Service.

An Investigator looked at what had happened but didn't think RAC needed to take any further action. He said he was satisfied that RAC had acted fairly by explaining they would only agree to repatriate the motorhome if it couldn't be repaired abroad before Mr B's planned return to the UK. He said this was because both garages had told RCS the repairs were possible within a matter of weeks, and before the planned return date. The Investigator also said other concerns raised by Mr B, including the conduct of the garages, the accuracy of the diagnosis of the repairs, and the later costs Mr B incurred, weren't issues we could look at as part of the complaint Mr B raised.

Mr B didn't agree with the Investigator's outcome. He said the core issues of his complaint hadn't been addressed, and he felt that RAC and their partners had acted unreasonably, that the garages were incompetent or misleading in their assessments, and that the repair estimates had forced him to abandon the holiday and return home at additional cost.

Mr B asked for an Ombudsman to consider the complaint – so, it's been passed to me to decide.

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've reached the same overall outcome as the Investigator, and I do not uphold this complaint. I appreciate this will be disappointing to Mr B – so, I've set out my reasoning below.

I want to start by acknowledging that I've summarised Mr B's complaint more briefly than he has presented it, so not everything that happened has been set out above and I haven't commented on each and every point raised. Instead, I've focussed on what I consider to be the key points I need to think about to reach a fair and reasonable outcome overall. I don't mean any discourtesy by this; it simply reflects the informal nature of this Service. I assure Mr B, however, that I have read and considered everything he's provided.

I thought carefully about how RAC handled the breakdown claim overall, including the request for repatriation. In doing so, I've considered what the policy required RAC to do, what information they reasonably relied on at the time, and what responsibilities they did and did not have for the actions of the independent garages involved in the repairs.

Mr B reported the breakdown and RAC arranged for a breakdown service to attend and for the motorhome to be taken to a local garage. When that garage said it couldn't complete the repairs, RAC arranged for the motorhome to be moved to another repairer. I haven't seen any persuasive evidence that demonstrates to me that there was undue delay by RAC in arranging these steps. And while I appreciate how difficult and disruptive this period must have been for Mr B and his wife, I think RAC's actions in arranging two separate garages to inspect the motorhome was fair, and consistent with what I would expect them to do.

In respect of Mr B's main concerns over the repair assessments and cost estimates themselves, these would be matters for the garages directly. RAC wasn't responsible for diagnosing mechanical faults or setting repair costs and I think they were entitled to take the garages' professional assessments into account when deciding what to do next. So, although I sincerely recognise Mr B strongly disagreed with the quoted costs and didn't feel the garages had acted competently, this isn't something I can fairly hold RAC responsible for.

Turning to Mr B's repatriation request, the key question I must be satisfied with is whether RAC acted fairly when they set out to Mr B why this wouldn't be something the policy covered. The policy terms say repatriation is usually authorised in the event the vehicle can't be repaired abroad before the policyholder's planned return to the UK. But here, Mr B's planned return date was in April 2025, and both garages had told RAC the repairs could be completed within a matter of weeks, and before that return date. So, because RAC had information indicating that the motorhome could be repaired abroad in time, I find that it was reasonable for them to rely on that information when making their claim decision.

Mr B has also set out that he incurred a number of costs because of what happened during the claim; including the cost of having his motorhome transported back to the UK, repair costs once it arrived, accommodation, and expenses connected to cutting the holiday short. But having looked at these costs in line with how RAC handled the claim, as well as the policy terms, I don't find that they are things that I can fairly direct RAC to reimburse.

Because the repatriation request wasn't authorised under the policy, any later costs Mr B paid to have the vehicle brought back to the UK himself are not something that RAC would be required to reimburse. I appreciate that Mr B believes the garages acted unreasonably and that this placed him in a position where he felt he had no realistic option other than to return home and make his own arrangements. But I must recognise that this was a choice he took himself. The policy terms outline that if the vehicle is repairable abroad, then repatriation will not be an option. It therefore follows that, based on the available evidence, I'm satisfied RAC applied the terms of the policy fairly and correctly.

I've also considered the losses Mr B has said resulted because of RAC's handling of his claim. While I don't doubt the stress and inconvenience this situation caused, I'm not satisfied I can fairly attribute the financial losses Mr B has outlined to anything RAC did or did not do. While Mr B feels strongly that the repair costs he was quoted were incorrect, I'm not persuaded this can be demonstrated on the available evidence I've considered. Additionally, while I appreciate Mr B has outlined that his motorhome was damaged during its return to the UK, this isn't something RAC arranged, so I can't fairly hold them responsible for anything that happened during that time.

I do appreciate that this has been a very difficult experience for Mr B and Mrs B, and I do not underestimate the impact this would have had on their holiday. But my role is to decide whether RAC acted fairly and in line with the policy terms when handling the breakdown claim and request for repatriation. Having considered all of the available evidence, I'm satisfied RAC fairly relied on the information they were given at the time and applied the policy terms correctly when declining repatriation. The additional costs Mr and Mrs B later incurred also aren't ones the policy requires RAC to cover.

I appreciate this is not the answer Mr and Mrs B were hoping for, but I trust my decision explains why I have reached the outcome I have.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given above, my final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint. Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B and Mrs B to accept or reject my decision before 7 January 2026.

Stephen Howard
Ombudsman