

The complaint

Mrs M has complained about her horsebox insurer AXA Insurance UK Plc because, in her view, it undervalued her stolen vehicle.

What happened

Ms M's horsebox, which comprised a driver's cab, human living space and stalls for two horses, was stolen in July 2025. A claim was made to AXA. It accepted the claim and initially offered £53,330, based on examples its engineer had found. Mrs M said those examples weren't like for like, explaining the quality of build was important – that one horsebox may look similar to another, but some are designed for larger, more powerful types of horses, like those she transports. She provided some examples of similar vehicles to AXA and a trade valuation from the coachbuilder/seller for the vehicle she'd had.

AXA reviewed the details Mrs M had provided. It said factoring those into the examples it had obtained, and averaging all but the upper and lower outlying values, gave a figure of £58,477. It paid this to Mrs M as an interim payment, along with £200 compensation. Mrs M still felt that was less than her vehicle had been worth and complained to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Our Investigator noted that AXA's examples were not of the same make and model as Mrs M's vehicle had been. So he felt they weren't like for like and couldn't reasonably be used to determine a fair market value for Mrs M's vehicle. Considering the like for like evidence Mrs M had provided, he said AXA should view the fair market value as £66,000. So he said AXA should pay Mrs M the difference between that sum and that it had paid her, plus interest applied from the date of the previous payment.

Mrs M indicated she was happy with that. AXA said it disagreed with it. It said, when determining a market value for a horsebox "the focus should be on the specification, rather than the model itself". It said the coachbuilder/seller had a vested interest in achieving a high market price, so its valuation was unreliable. It presented an example of a horsebox for sale of the same make and model as Mrs M's, but which was younger and with less mileage. It noted that was for sale at £65,000, indicating that it thought the market value put forward by our Investigator wasn't fair.

The complaint was referred for an Ombudsman's 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.

I note Mrs M has said she was reasonably satisfied, outside of the valuation dispute, with AXA's service. Also that she didn't raise any objection to our Investigator's suggested redress. As such my decision will focus on the valuation dispute.

Having considered that, for me this is a relatively simple issue – and one which I'm quite surprised to find AXA was inclined to refer for a decision. AXA, in my view has not shown that it provided a fair market value, not when taking into account what it has promised to offer in the policy. I've issued some brief findings below to explain this.

The policy says the most AXA will pay in the event of a loss is the fair market value for the insured vehicle. The policy defines market value as (my emphasis added) – “The cost of replacing your vehicle with another of the same **make and model** and of a similar age and condition at the time of the accident or loss.”

Mrs M's horsebox was not recovered. So it was a total loss meaning AXA was bound, under the policy, to pay her its fair market value. A fair market value might often be determined by reference to trade valuation guides. However, they don't cover specialist vehicles like this one. AXA then looked to other methods and sought to value Mrs M's vehicle by referencing a number of horseboxes all of a different make and model. And none of them were built by the same coachbuilder either. And even when it took Mrs M's like for like examples into account – it still left its non like for like examples in the average equation. Quite simply then AXA did not offer a fair settlement under the policy.

I note the late example AXA has provided, of a vehicle similar to Mrs M's. But it seems it found this several months after the loss occurred. Whereas Mrs M's examples were more contemporaneous.

Our Investigator, reviewing the details of the vehicles Mrs M had provided and which AXA had seen, was satisfied they were reasonably similar to the stolen vehicle such that they should be considered. I'm satisfied AXA hasn't presented anything to suggest they weren't, and I note it was convinced enough by them to factor them into its average calculation. What it should have done though – had it been wanting to offer a valuation which might have been viewed as fair – was to average only the examples given by Mrs M. Because they were the only like for like examples available which reasonably met the policy terms.

I've noted AXA's comments that it considers the coachbuilder has a vested interest when offering a valuation, although it hasn't particularly explained that point. But I'm not persuaded by its arguments here. I've seen no evidence that Mrs M has chosen to buy a replacement horsebox from this specific coachbuilder. And AXA hasn't provided evidence from a similarly expert source to counter the valuation provided. So I haven't seen any good reason to discount that value. Not least, as noted by our Investigator, it sits in the range of the two reasonably like for like examples offered by Mrs M. Having taken everything into account, I'm satisfied AXA should be viewing the fair market value of Mrs M's horsebox as £66,000.

Putting things right

AXA will now have to pay the difference to Mrs M between what I have found to be the fair market value of £66,000 and that it paid previously £58,477, which I calculate to be £7,523. To that outstanding amount, it will have to add interest, applied from the date the interim payment was made by it until it pays this settlement.

*Interest is at a rate of 8% simple per year and paid on the amounts specified and from/to the dates stated. HM Revenue & Customs may require AXA to take off tax from this interest. If asked, it must give Mrs M a certificate showing how much tax it's taken off.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint. I require AXA Insurance UK Plc to provide the redress set out above at "Putting things right".

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs M to accept or reject my decision before 15 May 2026.

Fiona Robinson
Ombudsman