

The complaint

Mr A has complained about delays by Autotrader Leasing Limited, trading as Vanarama (“Autotrader”), in dealing with his car finance application, and the addition of a hard search on his credit file for an application that was declined.

What happened

Mr A applied for car leasing finance through Autotrader at the end of November 2025. He is unhappy that it took 12 days to deal with the application, and during that time period, he kept being asked for further information. At the end of that process, his application was declined.

Mr A also said that he made a separate application with another provider, and that was accepted and approved in less than half an hour.

Mr A is also unhappy that a hard search was registered on his credit file in relation to the declined application. Overall, Mr A doesn’t believe that Autotrader met its regulatory requirements under the Consumer Duty.

He complained to Autotrader about this. Autotrader issued its final response letter on 16 December 2025, saying it didn’t uphold his complaint. It said the reason for the delay lay with the lender, as its underwriters were unable to verify the information it needed. Autotrader also said that the time period involved two weekends, when the lender’s office was closed. Autotrader also added that Mr A had agreed to the hard search being carried out. Otherwise, it said it had done all it could to get the application approved.

Mr A wasn’t happy with this, so he brought his complaint to this service. He would like the hard search to be removed from his credit record, and compensation for the distress and inconvenience this has caused.

Our investigator looked into Mr A’s complaint, but thought the complaint should not be upheld. Mr A disagreed and asked for the complaint to be reviewed by an ombudsman.

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’ve decided not to uphold Mr A’s complaint. I’ll explain why.

Autotrader sent in call recordings and details of Mr A’s finance application. Mr A sent in copies of email exchanges with Autotrader. I’ve listened to the calls and reviewed all of the documentary evidence.

I should say here that Autotrader was acting as the broker in this application, so it did not have control of the lending decision. From the phone calls, and information on its website, Autotrader says it works with a number of lenders, and directs applications to those lenders

based on the deals available. So it seems that the lender in this case was one of a number that might have been selected.

Mr A initially wanted to lease the vehicle through his limited company, but the Autotrader representative said the finance company wouldn't agree to this as Mr A's company was very new. So Mr A then decided to apply for the lease on a personal basis.

It seems that the hard search was registered on Mr A's credit file on 28 November 25, the day that Autotrader's records show that the application was sent to the lender. The search was not registered by Autotrader, so it seems to have been registered by the lender. The lender then asked for further information through Autotrader, and later issued further requests for information before eventually declining the application.

I can appreciate that Mr A found the whole process very frustrating, but having looked at all of the evidence, it seems that the delays originated from the lender needing to manually underwrite the application rather than using an automated process, and requiring more information to do so.

Autotrader was the broker here, so although I appreciate that Mr A's contact was with Autotrader representatives, it had no control over the registration of the hard search (and I understand that in any case Mr A had agreed to a search being made), or the lender's information requirements.

Overall, I can't fairly hold Autotrader responsible for the time taken to process the application, or the decision to register the hard search. Mr A may wish to make a complaint to the lender on these points if he remains unhappy.

I accept that Mr A was able to get speedy approval for finance with another lender. But lenders have individual lending criteria, so I can't draw any particular conclusions from that. I've also seen nothing to suggest that Autotrader ought reasonably to have anticipated that Mr A's finance application might not be approved.

I've also considered whether Autotrader acted unfairly or unreasonably in some other way, given the issues Mr A has raised, including whether it met its regulatory responsibilities under the Consumer Duty. However, for the same reasons I've explained above, I've not seen anything that makes me think this was likely to have been the case.

I understand Mr A's frustration with the situation. But I don't have evidence to say that Autotrader has acted unfairly, and therefore I've decided not to uphold Mr A's complaint.

My final decision

For the reasons given above, I have decided not to uphold Mr A's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 28 April 2026.

Jan Ferrari
Ombudsman