

“The growing gap means consumers spend a lot more money on fuels than anticipated. According to studies by our members, motorists pay in average an extra 400€ per year for fuel”

Environmental Action Germany (Deutsche Umwelthilfe, DUH) and Transport and Environment (T&E) are currently running the EU campaign “Get Real” to demand honest fuel consumption figures of passenger cars.

The change to the WLTP test cycle is expected to lead to more realistic fuel consumption figures, and is therefore particularly relevant for consumers. In this interview Dimitri Vergne, Senior Sustainable Transport Officer at European consumer organisation BEUC, highlights the stake of the change in test cycle and the way forward to regain consumers’ trust in advertised fuel consumption figures.

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T&E: The gap between official and on-road CO2 emissions of cars have increased over the past years. What is in your opinion the reason for this evolution?

Dimitri Vergne: The gap has grown to almost 45% today between real life measurements and laboratory. The main reason for this is the outdated NEDC test, established in the 70’s and implemented from the 80’s onwards, and which does not at all reflect average driving behaviours. Another reason is that carmakers got used to this test cycle and have optimized their cars to reach the lowest possible level of emissions during the tests. This optimization however does not translate into reality.

T&E: How are consumers impacted by this growing gap?

Dimitri Vergne: The main impact on consumers is quite clear, since fuel consumption is a direct function of CO2 emissions. The growing gap means consumers spend a lot more money on fuels than anticipated. According to studies by our members, motorists pay in average an extra 400€ per year for fuel.

T&E: What is needed to close the gap and give consumers accurate information on fuel consumption?

Dimitri Vergne: We have been advocating for a long time for a change in test cycle. From 1st September 2018, a new test called WLTP has been introduced and will reduce the gap between real driving and laboratory test, from around 40% down to between 15 and 20%. But in our opinion, we need to complement this test with a so-called real driving emission test in order to give consumers accurate information about their anticipated fuel consumptions. This will also be a key lever for the effectiveness of the EU regulation, because the targets that we’ll set to ourselves will be translated into reality.

T&E: What do you expect from the introduction of the WLTP?



Dimitri Vergne: WLTP will be more representative of normal driving conditions than the old NEDC, and should bring down the gap from 40% to 20%.

To what extent do you think the reform of the type approval framework regulation will improve the current situation?

Dimitri Vergne: The clear benefit of the new type approval framework regulation is that you have a number of additional checks to make sure that cars tested and approved at national level will comply with regulation once on the market. For instance, once this regulation will enter into force, the European Commission will have to audit the work of national type-approval authorities regularly. This is needed because the dieselpgate scandal showed that the cosy relationship between car manufacturers and type approval authorities led to cars being approved even if in our eyes they did not comply with the regulation. EU supervision with regular audits of the type approval authorities, and with a number of checks for cars (including emission tests) will ensure that cars that have been approved remain compliant.

The type approval framework regulation won't change drastically the situation with regards fuel consumption but it will give EU authorities more means to ensure that cars which are put on the market are compliant with the regulation, and this includes fuel consumption tests.

Where do you see legislative opportunities at EU level to reduce actual fuel consumption on the road?

Dimitri Vergne: There are 3 main initiatives:

- The adoption of post-2020 Cars CO₂ standards; the new standards will give the industry a perspective about the needed reduction of their CO₂ emissions and fuel consumption. For us it's a key priority to set high ambition level in order to ensure manufacturers are pushed to put much more zero and low emission cars, as well as more efficient conventional cars, on the road.
- Changing the way cars are tested: the entry into force of the new laboratory test WLTP represents a clear progress, provided we make sure tests cannot be manipulated. The implementation of WLTP should be complemented by a RDE test measuring fuel consumption. This RDE test already applies to polluting emissions such as NO_x and fine particles, it is urgent to extend it to CO₂.
- Reforming car labelling: consumers today don't really know what they're going to spend on fuel, and the current labelling don't give consumers a reliable picture of real consumption. Reforming the car labelling scheme through a harmonized European approach would give consumers the means to make more informed choices, and motivate them to buy more efficient cars

What can European consumers do when faced with fuel consumption figures that are higher than those advertised by manufacturers? Are there collective redress mechanisms?

Dimitri Vergne: That's the million-dollar question. Depending on the European country where you live in the situation is different. Some countries have introduced collective redress mechanisms, while others have not. Among our members Altroconsumo in Italy launched a class action in 2015 against Fiat for misleading fuel consumption figures, the procedure is ongoing. Beyond the issue of



misleading fuel consumption, five of our members have launched class actions against Volkswagen to claim compensation for consumers affected by the emissions scandal.

Today, only few EU consumers feel they have a realistic chance to get redress in a mass harm situation, such as misleading fuel consumption figures or dieselgate. In most countries and for most European consumers, access to justice in such situations is impossible. Last April, the European Commission introduced the “New Deal for consumers”, a set of proposals which include tougher sanctions for companies that act illegally and a limited collective compensation tool (collective redress) across the EU. Although we think this New Deal needs to be strengthened, it is an important first step to ensure that consumers across the EU will be able to claim compensation collectively in some cases.

Thank you very much for the interview.

The interview was conducted by Yoann Le Petit, clean vehicles officer at Transport & Environment

This interview is part of the Campaign “Get Real: demand fuel consumption figures you can trust” (LIFE15 GIC/DE/029, Close the gap). Get Real is supported by the European Commission’s Life program.



