# UK's largest diesel emissions trial begins with over 1.6 million claims against major manufacturers



More than a million motorists in the UK are set to have their legal claims against some of the world’s leading car manufacturers heard at the High Court from Monday in what is described as the largest case of its kind in English history. Approximately 1.6 million vehicle owners are suing over allegations that diesel cars made from 2009 onwards contained “prohibited defeat devices” (PDDs) — technology that permitted vehicles to detect when emissions tests were being conducted and subsequently alter their performance to meet regulatory limits, effectively cheating the system.

The legal action, believed to be worth at least £6 billion, targets over a dozen manufacturers including Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, Peugeot, Citroën, Volkswagen, BMW, Jaguar Land Rover, Toyota, and others. The claims involve some 1,500 defendants when dealerships are also taken into account, highlighting the unprecedented scale of the litigation. Those bringing the claims purchased, leased, or otherwise acquired affected diesel vehicles, primarily residing in England and Wales but also spanning other parts of the UK.

The trial, presided over by Lady Justice Cockerill, is set to begin at the Royal Courts of Justice in London and will initially focus on “sample vehicles” from five manufacturers: Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, and Peugeot/Citroën. The court's ruling in this initial phase is expected to bind the other manufacturers involved. The trial itself is slated to last about three months, concluding before Christmas, with further legal arguments scheduled for March 2026. A ruling on liability is anticipated next summer, followed by a separate trial to determine any compensation due, expected in the autumn of 2026.

Law firm Leigh Day, representing many of the claimants, has characterised the case as potentially exposing one of the most egregious breaches of corporate trust in modern times. Senior partner Martyn Day commented that if the claims are upheld, it would confirm that millions of people across the UK have been breathing in greater levels of harmful emissions than they were told, potentially jeopardising public health on a large scale.

The origins of these cases can be traced back to the 2015 Volkswagen emissions scandal, known widely as Dieselgate, when it was revealed that Volkswagen installed software to cheat emissions tests. Since then, investigations and legal actions have expanded globally, encompassing numerous other manufacturers and models suspected of similar practices.

The financial implications are significant, not only in terms of potential compensation payouts up to £6 billion, but also concerning the legal costs, which are projected to run into hundreds of millions of pounds for both claimants and defendants combined. Barrister Benjamin Williams KC estimated during earlier hearings that even a conservative valuation of £4,000 per claim would bring the total value of the litigation to 6 billion pounds.

Commenting on the matter, Mercedes owner Adam Kamenetzky emphasised the wider public interest at stake. Speaking to The Irish News, he said: “If these allegations are true, the regulators, the politicians and the public have been cheated by manufacturers who, it’s claimed, are profiting from their sale of diesel cars while flouting clean air laws and measures such as Ulez, which aim to improve public health.” He added that air pollution remains a leading cause of ill health and premature death worldwide and stressed the importance of holding those who may have lied or cheated accountable.

Campaign groups, including Mums for Lungs and over 50 other organisations, are also pressing for transparency and the full disclosure of documents believed to reveal the extent of the use of illegal defeat devices across the diesel vehicle market. They argue such disclosure is vital not only for legal proceedings but also for public awareness and health protection.

Defendants in the case have strongly denied the claims, resisting the allegations of installing defeat devices. The final outcomes of the trial and subsequent proceedings will have major ramifications for the automotive industry, regulators, and consumers alike, potentially setting significant precedents in corporate accountability and environmental law.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/trial-of-mass-legal-action-over-car-emissions-set-to-begin-at-the-high-court-BRDUWNSEFJPZJI5BM4KL3DRBAQ/), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html), [[6]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/06/11/dieselgate-emissions-claims-worth-at-least-6bn-high-court-told/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/trial-of-mass-legal-action-over-car-emissions-set-to-begin-at-the-high-court-BRDUWNSEFJPZJI5BM4KL3DRBAQ/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-dieselgate-renault-english-mercedesbenz-b1163733.html), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/carmakers-face-uk-dieselgate-lawsuits-worth-least-76-bln-lawyers-say-2024-06-11/), [[6]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/06/11/dieselgate-emissions-claims-worth-at-least-6bn-high-court-told/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/trial-of-mass-legal-action-over-car-emissions-set-to-begin-at-the-high-court-BRDUWNSEFJPZJI5BM4KL3DRBAQ/), [[5]](https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news/2025-news/dieselgate-cheat-device-trial-to-begin-in-the-high-court/)
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2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-dieselgate-renault-english-mercedesbenz-b1163733.html> - The Standard reports on a £6 billion legal claim against over a dozen car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz, Renault, and Nissan, initiated by around 1.5 million UK motorists. The claim alleges that diesel vehicles from 2009 onwards were equipped with 'defeat devices' to cheat emissions tests. The High Court has been informed that the legal action is unprecedented in scale, involving more than 1,500 defendants, including dealerships. The trial is set to begin at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, with a ruling expected next summer and a further trial for compensation scheduled for autumn 2026.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/carmakers-face-uk-dieselgate-lawsuits-worth-least-76-bln-lawyers-say-2024-06-11/> - Reuters reports that major car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz and Ford, are facing 1.5 million lawsuits in the UK over alleged emissions test cheating, potentially costing them at least £6 billion. The lawsuits follow the 2015 Volkswagen scandal, where the company admitted to using 'defeat devices' to alter emissions levels during testing. The lawsuits involve 13 vehicle manufacturing groups, with each claim potentially worth £4,000. Legal expenses are also significant, with claimants' and defendants' costs projected to be hundreds of millions of pounds by a third trial slated for 2026.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/high-court-royal-courts-of-justice-english-ulez-mercedesbenz-b1252575.html> - The Standard reports on the upcoming High Court trial concerning mass legal action over car emissions. The case involves around 1.6 million motorists suing over allegations that their diesel vehicles, made from 2009 onwards, contained 'prohibited defeat devices' (PDDs) designed to cheat emissions tests. The trial, set to begin at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, will focus on sample vehicles from five manufacturers: Mercedes-Benz, Renault, Nissan, Ford, and Peugeot/Citroen. The ruling is expected next summer, with a further trial to determine compensation scheduled for autumn 2026.
5. <https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news/2025-news/dieselgate-cheat-device-trial-to-begin-in-the-high-court/> - Leigh Day announces the commencement of the Dieselgate cheat device trial at the High Court, starting on 13 October 2025. The trial will address allegations that diesel vehicles sold by Mercedes, Ford, Renault, Nissan, and Peugeot/Citroen from 2009 contained technology designed to cheat official emissions tests. The vehicle owners claim that software, known as 'cheat devices' or 'prohibited defeat devices (PDDs)', was installed within the engine management systems, allowing cars to detect test conditions and adjust emissions accordingly. The trial is expected to conclude before Christmas, with legal arguments to be heard in March 2026.
6. <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/06/11/dieselgate-emissions-claims-worth-at-least-6bn-high-court-told/> - The Express & Star reports on the £6 billion legal claim against over a dozen car manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz, Renault, and Nissan, initiated by around 1.5 million UK motorists. The claim alleges that diesel vehicles from 2009 onwards were equipped with 'defeat devices' to cheat emissions tests. The High Court has been informed that the legal action is unprecedented in scale, involving more than 1,500 defendants, including dealerships. The trial is set to begin at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, with a ruling expected next summer and a further trial for compensation scheduled for autumn 2026.
7. <https://www.honestjohn.co.uk/news/legal/2025-03/largest-ever-class-action-aims-to-expose-diesel-emissions/> - Honest John reports on the UK's largest-ever class action, involving 1.5 million vehicle owners, aiming to expose how many diesel cars used illegal 'defeat devices'. The High Court is set to hear the case, which will decide what documents, said to be in the public interest, can be released ahead of a full court case in the autumn. Campaign group Mums for Lungs is among more than 50 organisations that want all documents to be disclosed, to expose just how many diesel cars were using illegal 'defeat devices' to cheat emissions tests.