

# Dud car complaints rev up

Tough economic times have seen a spike in complaints to the Motor Industry Ombudsman of South Africa's office, but many consumers are just looking for a way to back out of a car deal they can no longer afford.



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This is according to the industry's ombudsman, Johan van Vreden, who in a foreword to his 2016 annual report said "more often than not" consumers saw their complaint as "a way of getting out of the deal that they entered into when times were good".

"It is in this area where the newly established Motor Industry Ombudsman of SA has proved its mettle. Staff have to determine the legitimacy of the complaint before it's given to a case manager for processing," Van Vreden said.

The office's 10 case managers and their eight assistants handled just under 6000 cases last year, and closed more than 8000 (many of which were held over from 2015), with both figures being an increase on the previous year.

## Single biggest "problem group"

The single biggest "problem group" by far, making up more than 3000 complaints, was what the ombud's office called "poor service".

The next biggest complaints category, with fewer than 1000 complaints, related to engine issues.

Under half of the cases - about 45% - dealt with by the office last year were settled in consumers' favour.

Since January 2015 it has been compulsory for all motor industry companies - from motor dealerships, panel shops, spares suppliers and filling stations to roadworthy centres - to adhere to the motor industry's code of conduct, as published as a Consumer Protection Act regulation.

## **Smaller players defying the code and the ombud**

But two-and-a-half years later many of the smaller players in the industry are still brazenly defying the code and the ombud.

"Certain businesses - including many used car lots - refuse to accept the recommendations of MIOSA," Van Vreden said.

In that case, the complaint has to be referred to the National Consumer Tribunal for a ruling - a long process - or the consumer can go the costly legal route.

"MIOSA is adamant in its threat to publicise findings and businesses that fail to comply with our recommendations. We're very close to naming and shaming," Van Vreden said.

*Source: The Times*

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