

Attack on 4x4s is off track

Discriminating against 4x4s for populist gain will impose yet more car tax on rural drivers who often have very good reason to rely on off-road vehicles for unmade roads and tracks or dealing with difficult driving conditions in the country. Other drivers also have a need for 4x4s when pulling trailers, horse boxes, boats or for regular travel to the country at the weekend.

In cities, mums often choose 4x4s because they feel safer and can carry large amounts of school kit and other daily baggage. In many instances, families make the sensible choice of using the 4x4 for local runs while the partner who drives longer distances for work uses the smaller and more fuel efficient car. The Department of Transport's own Focus on Personal Travel 2005 shows that London car owners drive considerably less further than other drivers in the UK. Freedom in choosing schools has encouraged greater mileages as families with two or more children often have to drop them off at schools miles apart.

"Generalisations are generally wrong, and Malcolm Wicks' blanket attack on 4x4s is simply playing to a crowd who fail to see 4x4s in the context of other road vehicles and CO2 emissions from other sources, such as the home," says Ruth Bridger of The AA Motoring Trust.

"Private cars generate only 13 per cent of the CO2 emissions produced in the UK, a level that has remained consistent for the last 10 years despite a growth of 4.8 million cars in the same period. Car owners who have switched to diesel cars that produce 20 per cent less CO2 continue to pay a 10 surcharge on their road tax even though Euro IV technology has addressed particulate and NOx concerns.

"Clearly, some of the bigger-engined 4x4s emit more than their fair share of carbon dioxide but some people carriers and sports cars are equally capable of producing much higher than average amounts of CO2. Road tax bands that penalise owners on the basis of emissions not type of vehicle is a far fairer system. Drivers have freedom of choice and choosing to own a 4x4 should not be a cause of victimisation. With tax bands directing them to similar vehicles with cleaner emissions, car owners can make the choice whether to buy more efficient vehicles and pay less tax or go for the "gas-guzzlers" and pay the penalty."

Notes to editors:

Carbon dioxide emissions for new 4x4s range from 174 g/km to 387 g/km, for people carriers from 157 to 319 g/km and for sports cars from 151 to 500 g/km.

In 2003, 22 per cent of total CO2 emissions in the UK was from road transport made up of:

Passenger Cars 13 per cent
Light duty vehicles 3 per cent
Buses 1 per cent
HGVs 5 per cent

In 1993 and 2003, 19.8 million tonnes of carbon were emitted from passenger vehicles. In 1993, the number of licensed motor vehicles was 20.102 million. In 2003, the number had increased to 24.985 million.