

Petrol station mystery shopping research 2014

Summary

This report provides the research data from a Rica mystery shopping survey of petrol stations which was commissioned by [Assist –Mi](#) a company that developed a smartphone application.

Rica is a UK consumer research charity that works with older and disabled people:

www.rica.org.uk

In October 2014, 6 disabled drivers selected from [Rica's consumer research panel](#) visited 20 petrol stations - BP, Esso, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Shell, and Tesco - and recorded their experiences. The drivers were asked to visit petrol stations that were unfamiliar and were asked to wait for 15 minutes if they were not served.

The research found:

- **70%** of petrol stations had no signage indicating assistance for disabled motorists
- In **20%** of visits the lack of provision meant that the disabled driver was unable to buy fuel
- In **80%** of visits it took more than three minutes and 20% eight minutes or more.
- In one instance, staff acknowledged the driver, but after 15 minutes of waiting and repeatedly sounding the horn, the driver was still without any help from staff.
- Pay by card was only available in **15%** of garages, with the customer having to pay cash or unable to pay at all

In the **70%** of garages without signage the disabled motorist had to either sound the horn or flash the headlights and wave their Blue Badge in order to get attention. Although it was noted that there were often helpful staff and customers, willing to help with filling the cars up with fuel, the difficulties obtaining assistance were substantial.

The time taken to get assistance varied, but staff often didn't know if there was a service call system in place and often if there was one identified, it was deemed unusable or faulty.

The research highlights the fact that there is lack of provision with confusing options and no universal solution available at petrol stations for disabled people. At numerous stations it was observed that having only one member of staff in the station meant that they were unable to cater for the disabled motorist.

Filling station mystery shopping exercise

Brands inspected

BP	4
Esso	2
Morrisons	3
Sainsburys	3
Shell	4
Tesco	4
Total	20

Were you able to buy fuel?

Yes: 16/20

Yesses by brand:	
BP	3
Esso	2
Morrisons	2
Sainsburys	3
Shell	2
Tesco	4
Total	16

Getting attention

Was there any sign you could see from your car giving instructions on how to get assistance?

Yes: 6/20

Yesses by brand:	
BP	1
Esso	0
Morrisons	1
Sainsburys	2
Shell	0
Tesco	2
Total	6

What did the sign say?

HAD A SERVICE CALL TO SOUND HORN

Sign Saying "Disabled assistance in large font and the remainder in small font. I was unable to read it from the driver position

Wheelchair Symbol on the pump print too small to read. Sure signal box in the window.

There was a disabled sign on the side of the pump saying sound horn for assistance.

Clear sign saying they have the Service Call. Another clear sign to sound your horn put on hazards and have blue badge on display.

Sign Saying "Disabled assistance" rest was too small to read

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What did you do to call for assistance?

Sound horn	19
Put on hazard lights	0
Flash headlights	1
Wave blue badge/other card	20
Other	3

Did anyone come?

Yes: 17/20

Yesses by brand:	
BP	4
Esso	2
Morrisons	2
Sainsburys	3
Shell	2
Tesco	4
Total	17

How long did they take?	
1 min	2
2 min	2
3 min	6
4 min	3
5 min	1
6 min	2
7 min	0
8 min	1
Total	17

Payment options

Cash	12
Card and signature	0
Card and pin	3
Other	6

Staff treated me with respect.

Strongly disagree	2
Disagree	2
Agree	5
Strongly agree	11
Total	20

In your own words, explain what happened during your visit.

There was only a sign saying 'We use a contact system', beside a disabled sign. So I looked towards the cashier, pipped my horn and raised my disabled badge. No signs of recognition. I then pipped my horn again and looked meaningfully at the cashier and she gave me what I interpreted as a nod. A few seconds later a man appeared at my car and I requested £10.00 of diesel. I did have cash with me. He duly checked I wanted diesel and put in the exact amount. He took my money and club card and said he would bring the receipt back. When he returned I asked him about the so called contact system and he told me it was like a job that you can buy for about £10.00 but you have to go to Customer Services in the main Store. I thanked him for his services.

I sat at the pump and looked around for any instructions and could not find any. So I pipped my horn and waved my badge out of the window to try and attract the cashiers attention. Nothing. I tried again, feeling a little foolish waving my badge, nothing. Then I could see a customer was pointing at me from inside. So I waited and looked around again. I was just on the point of asking a customer to enlighten someone inside for me when a man came out in a reflective jacket. I said to him I did not know how else to get attention. Could you see me from inside. He said the cashier called him and he was out the back so that took a few minutes. He put the £10.00 diesel in for me and took my Nectar card inside to get me a receipt. I said is there any other way of alerting you because I felt awful pipping all the time and he repeated the cashier called me and I was out the back, so I thanked him for his services. If I had not positioned myself so I could see the cashiers I am not sure of what they can see. They do have number plate recognition though. But no system for the disabled. So you really have to draw attention to yourself which I find a little embarrassing and I am sure other disabled people would as well.

On the way home I passed this station which had been shut for refurbishment earlier in the week. So I thought I would try mainly because I had run out of cash and I wanted to see what they could do for me. I pipped and held up my card about three times with a rest in between. I landed up waving it out the window as well but no good. In desperation I asked a young lad on his way into the shop to alert an assistant for me. He at first offered to get the fuel for me, but I said my Thank you's and assured him that I must have an attendant from the station to take my payment. I thought I had not chosen wisely as the young lad started arguing with his mate over who was going in to pay. I just waited a while but give him his due he did get someone to come out. I said to the attendant I need some diesel but I only have card payment. Can I do it that way. He said only if you come inside I'm afraid. I assured him I was unable to do that so I would have to go elsewhere. He said sorry about that and left.

Again I placed myself near to the cashier's office. I was lucky there was a space. It was still some distance from the car but I pipped my horn and held up my badge. Nothing. I tried twice more before the busy girl looked over and realized what I was trying to communicate. I took this as acknowledgment and waited. It turned out that she was the only one on the desk so she had to call her manager who took over her position and she came out to me. She was a very polite Lady and put in the fuel for me. She took my £10.00 and came out with a receipt for me and a card for feedback. I had said to her I did not know how to get her attention and there doesn't seem to be any bells or buzzers to push. She said there is nothing but if you want to give some feedback maybe they will think about doing something for this situation. I thanked her and I will fill in the feedback.

Sounded horn and waived my blue badge the guy looked towards me and turned away. I waited for a couple of minutes thinking he may of called someone to help me. Sounded horn again and waived badge. This time he acknowledged and came straight away and apologised several times. Asked what payment options where available. Cash and card and pin. Card and pin I would need to come into the shop. Put the fuel in and gave cash. He bought out my change and again apologised.

Used Service call, the blue light didn't respond to indicate a signal was received. Tried again same no light, sounded horn and waived blue badge. Came out promptly even though they were very busy. I told the assistant sure signal wasn't working and he said it did. I mentioned that they should acknowledge the driver. Asked about payment options. Take card with pin, and pay at pump. This would entail the driver going to the till or pump to use these options. Paid by cash. Very polite.

On arrival I could not see any sign of assistance. Couldn't see assistant as cash till. I sounded my horn and a lady came and asked if I wanted assistance. I asked her to get someone for me. Arrived promptly. I asked how do disabled people get their attention? Told they drive up to the front of the shop and sound horn. I stated instructions should be made clear when entering as how are people to know. He said they used to have a signal that alerted them but no longer there (sure signal I assume). Told the only way I could pay is by cash unless I came into the shop. On Leaving I thought I saw something that might have been a signal box at the very top of a window but wasn't obvious from the pumps

Pressed sure signal 6 times, blue light flashed but no acknowledgement. waited 5 minutes then sounded the horn flashed blue badge and hazard lights. Responded to this and acknowledged. No apology. I asked if he knew what the signal was for, he didn't realise someone wanted assistance. Explained I was a wheelchair user prior to asking what methods of payments. Told me I can use a card, cash or pay at the pump. I asked how that would work for me, he said can't you reach the pump from the passenger seat. He hadn't got a clue. Paid by cash.

No sign of assistance. Used horn and he acknowledged me, I waited and wondered if anyone was going to come out to me. He did but he was on his own, no other assistant in the shop. Cash was the only option to pay, he put in the fuel and was polite.

When I arrived I honked my horn and showed my blue badge. He looked up from the till but did not acknowledge that he had understood what I wanted. Having said that he was in the shop on his own. I waited 15 minutes and each time he looked out I held up my blue badge.

I arrived and honked my horn and held up my blue badge. He was in the shop on his own and held up his hand to indicate he would be with me as he was serving a customer. As soon as he had served the customer he came out and asked me if I wanted help. I said yes please could he give me £10 worth of petrol. This he did.

I honked my horn and showed my blue badge. I could see someone waving from inside although the sunlight was shining and I was unable to see what they were trying to tell me. A customer was getting petrol and I asked him to see what the person was trying to say. He went into the shop and came out and told me that she said she was on her own and could I go to another garage.

I honked my horn and showed my blue badge. The guy was on his own but waved to acknowledge he had seen me. He was serving a customer and when he had finished he came out and asked if I needed any help. I said yes and he put petrol in my car.

I sounded my horn and waved my blue badge. A young lad came out with hand towels so I sounded my horn again. He came over and asked if I wanted filling up I said yes please and he put my petrol in.

I used the service call 6 times and there was no response. An assistant came out to speak to another employee on the forecourt but didn't call them over as it wouldn't have given a true indication of the service they provide for people with disabilities. Sounded my horn, still no response. Sounded my horn again and the assistant that was on the forecourt came over to me. I asked if the service call was working and she said do you want fuel. Again I asked if it was working and she said probably not. Asked what payment options were available and this was only cash unless I went into the shop. Again I asked about the service call and she didn't seem interested. She asked if I wanted anything else. I said no thank you she took my cash and returned with a receipt. Was pleasant and polite but I felt she didn't seem to want to know about the service call system.

After I had paid I was told about the FUEL GENIE system + given a leaflet. This is like a credit card (accepted at Morrisons + other major supermarkets). Just swipe card + get bill(s) monthly. No PIN.

It was v windy. She was not keen to take my PIN number for my credit card + suggested I bring cash next time.

Attendant saw me + a customer came out to say he had sent a message to say he could not leave till to come out to me. Customer asked if I could get out of car + when I showed him wheelchair, he offered to put fuel in for me, Wasn't sure what to do so I thanked him and declined offer.

Operator was alone in office + came straight out to me. He was so polite, friendly, helpful. Had to keep going back to desk to serve others as he was on his own + we joked about it. He said he didn't need my PIN number for £10 - could just scan credit card in which he did.

I waved blue card + attendant waved + put thumb up. She came out + was friendly - chatting + joking while putting fuel in vehicle. She said only way of paying was cash - took money and brought change and receipt.

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