



Over the last three years the European Consumer Centre has received hundreds of complaints from consumers affected by vehicle matching scams, and this month's ebulletin offers advice on how to recognize this scam and what to do to avoid it.

Our consumer query of the month concerns problems that may arise when ordering goods in Sterling.

If you have had a problem with a purchase from another EU country, please contact us on 01 8090600 or at [info@eccireland.ie](mailto:info@eccireland.ie). For information on your consumer rights in Europe, see [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie)

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### **1. Vehicle matching .... don't get scammed**

If you are selling your car and have placed an ad in a magazine or online you may receive a call from a UK-based company offering to find a buyer for the car. These "vehicle matching" companies claim to provide a service matching car buyers with sellers and will tell you that they have buyers in your area looking for your model of car and prepared to pay your asking price. In return for a once only fee of €100 to €120 the company will offer to match you with the buyer or to keep matching the vehicle with potential buyers until it is sold. Terms like "guaranteed to sell" are used by the company in the phone conversation. The consumer is asked to provide their credit card details to pay the administration fee and the card is debited, however the consumer then finds that there is no buyer for their car. When they contact the company to ask for a refund they are referred to the terms and conditions on the company's website which clearly state that they do not guarantee a buyer, which is in direct conflict with the promises made over the phone. The consumer therefore finds there is no way to cancel the contract and they are not entitled to a refund.

This is a large scale scam affecting thousands of consumers both in the UK and Ireland. In the UK there were more than 1,600 complaints about this practice last year alone and in Ireland the European Consumer Centre receives hundreds of complaints every year about this. In order to address the problem the Office of Fair Trading recently organized a day of action against rogue vehicle matching companies, which involved raids on the companies, and combined actions by the UK police, local authority Trading Standard Services and consumer bodies. The Office of Fair Trading has also warned employees of these companies that they will be individually liable for prosecution for misleading consumers "knowingly and dishonestly".

So if you have a car for sale how do you avoid being targeted by such scams?

- If you are cold called and asked to pay money up-front for a service, stop, think and be sceptical
- Don't give out you credit card or debit card details over the phone to unknown callers

- Stop, think and be sceptical if promises are made that give the impression that there are buyers for your car, that finance has already been arranged for potential buyers, that buyers are willing to pay even more than your asking price, that there are buyers ready to view your car immediately or that you will be offered a refund if the car does not sell
- Don't be pressurized into anything and if in doubt about a phonecall just hang up

Remember, If it sounds too good to be true – then it probably is.

For more information see our website [www.eccireland.ie/news/whats\\_new.html](http://www.eccireland.ie/news/whats_new.html)

**2. I have ordered a computer from a shop in Northern Ireland and was quoted a price in Euro. I accepted the price and paid a deposit on it in Euro. Now the computer has arrived but the shop has told me that the remaining amount has to be paid in Sterling which means that the computer is actually costing me more than the price agreed in Euro. What are my rights in this situation?**

While the ECC appreciates your frustration, we are afraid that on this occasion if you do not have any written evidence that the original price quoted was in Euro rather than Sterling, there is nothing that you can do. We would recommend all consumers to always ask for confirmation of the price in writing and this is even more important if the trader is looking for a deposit on the item.

**If you want more information about this or any other cross-border consumer issue you can contact us on 01 8090600 or at [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie).**

The European Consumer Centre is funded by the European Commission and the National Consumer Agency.

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