



# Good Carma

Report by Auto Trader



We are the UK's largest digital automotive marketplace for new and used cars, helping millions of drivers find their next car.

The modern world is full of pitfalls, problems and stress – and now with a global pandemic on our hands, feelings of relaxation and security are scarcer than ever.

This report combines insights from a Chartered Psychologist with British drivers' attitudes towards stress.

The following pages identify the more common causes of stress in modern day Britain, as well as the preferred methods for its effective management, including the positive benefits of driving, avoiding social media, getting organised, and more.

Source:

Psychology of driving report (July 2020) by Dr Sandi Mann, Chartered Psychologist and author of The Science of Boredom. Consumer data taken from the findings of a nationally representative survey of 2,023 UK drivers, July 2020.

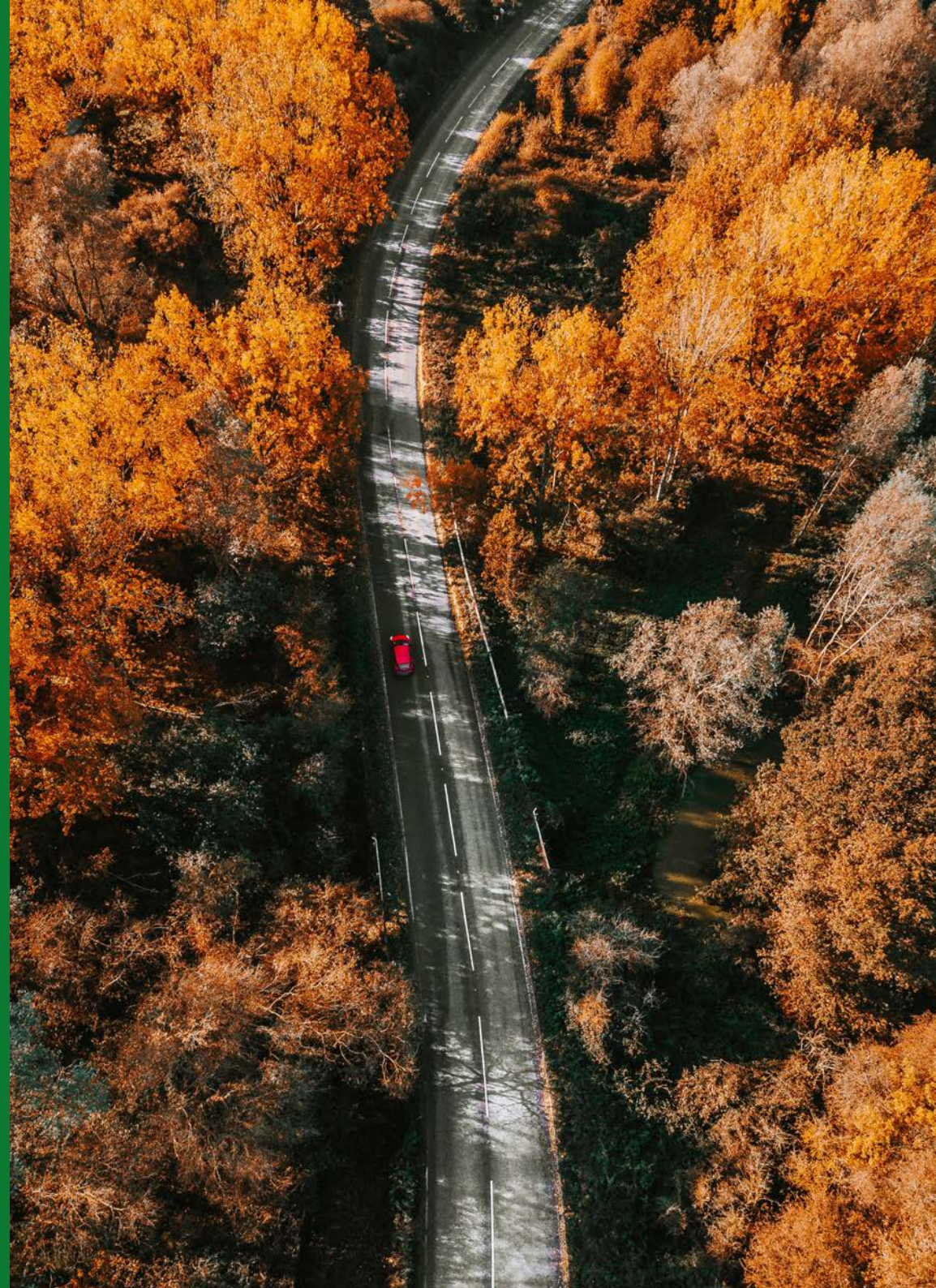


## Good Karma – Psychologist Insights

If you own a car you will probably know that it can be far more than a means to get from A to B.

For many of us our car is a place of escape, of freedom and of relaxation.

Some people even find driving to be a therapeutic way of dealing with life's stresses, such as those many of us are facing now as we emerge from lockdown. Here are some of the reasons why.





## Putting you in the driving seat

Humans like to be in control. In fact, feeling in control is proven to contribute to our well-being. Some researchers even suggest that the perception of control or having 'self-determination', is an important psychological need and reward centres in the brain may even be activated when we feel in control.<sup>1</sup>

One of the big benefits of driving is that it affords us a relatively rare chance to feel like we are in charge of our own destiny. We can pick where we are going and when. We can control the speed of the car and decide when to stop and have a break.

We can choose the in-car entertainment and even control the temperature. Unlike the rest of the time, when we are burdened by external control of our actions (deadlines, duties, chores, other people's demands), when you are in your car you can literally steer yourself through life.

Never has the need for being in control and free from constraint been more relevant than in the current climate. As we emerge from lockdown where we have had to endure our basic freedoms being controlled and constrained, the lure of being in the driving seat of both life and our car, has never been greater. We can ease ourselves back into the outside world at our own pace and in accordance with our own desires – we are back in control.

Part of what puts us in control is the privacy afforded by being in our own vehicle. Humans are territorial creatures and having our own space with which we can do as we please, is a basic instinct. As long as we do not endanger others, we are free to control our own perfect bubble – and take it with us wherever we want.

We can whack the heating or aircon up if we wish, eat smelly foods (when we are parked up) or wind the windows down and feel the breeze in our hair. We can use our car as an office, a picnic area or even a rest area. The choice is ours and how wonderful and rewarding to have that ability to choose!

Driving can make you feel more in control in other ways too. Many of us lead hectic, fast-paced lives where we rush from one meeting, activity or 'zone' to another. Time spent in a car getting from one place to another can allow us transition time to process what has happened and prepare us for what is coming next. This quiet, private space can thus make us feel more in control of our busy lives.



1. Leotti, L. A., Iyengar, S. S., & Ochsner, K. N. (2010). Born to choose: the origins and value of the need for control. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 14(10), 457–463.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2010.08.001>

## Optimal in-car environment

If our home is our castle, then our car is probably our haven. But making our car a haven means paying attention to the in-car environment and making sure it is the most conducive for a relaxing experience.

My top tips include keeping the car as clean and tidy as possible; a clutter-free environment is far calmer than a busy one. This is because when things are out of place and messy, this can transfer to how we feel about our lives – disordered and confusing.

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Slower music, even classical, can be ideal for those pensive times when you need to work things through in your head.

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Smells can be very evocative so maintain that 'showroom-fresh' scent to remind yourself of the excitement of that new-car feeling. Use air fresheners or car scents to create the right ambience or use a fragrance that transports you back to a happy, carefree time, such as the smell of chocolate, baking or freshly cut grass.

Our olfactory sense is directly connected to the emotion centres in our brain so experiment with fragrances that make you feel good. Or try the scent of pine which is thought to be very calming, or vanilla which can lift your mood.

Choose your in-car entertainment carefully and have a selection of genres for different moods. The uplifting king-of-the-road anthems are great for maintaining positive emotions when things are going well – and good for a much-needed boost when you are feeling low.

Slower music, even classical, can be ideal for those pensive times when you need to work things through in your head.







Watching the world go by whilst you figure things out to soothing melodies can be very therapeutic. Much loved songs from your youth or even childhood can also be comforting to play when you need a bit of TLC; as British dramatist William Congreve put it in 1697, “Music has charms to soothe a savage beast.”

Indeed, many studies have proven the scientific benefits of music on stress so make the most of this when driving in your car.

The best time to set off for a therapeutic drive depends on many factors, but as long as your drive doesn’t coincide with rush-hour, traffic jams and hold-ups, you probably can’t go wrong.

Coasting along at sunrise or sunset can bring a real feel-good factor, whilst it might be a good idea to avoid an early afternoon drive when the ‘post-lunch’ slump hits.

Your view through the windscreen is also important in terms of the therapeutic benefits offered. Coasts, gleaming skyscrapers and views of our ‘green and pleasant’ lands are usually very pleasing on the eye and can meet an ancient need for visual stimulation.

We are primed to delight in novel and interesting sights and indeed, sight-seeing is probably one of the oldest past-times (though probably not always via a car).

Cars can also be perfect tools for calming fractious babies and lulling them to sleep; many a parent has resorted to strapping a screaming infant into a car and allowing the motion and white noise of the engine to soothe their tears (of both baby and parent!).

Alternatively, if things get too stressful with the kids and you have someone willing to cover for you, the car can provide the perfect respite whilst you regroup in peace.

## Driving the boredom away

People today seem to suffer from chronic boredom and this is largely because we have become used to constant high levels of fast-moving stimulation.

Our world is characterised by novelty and we are always seeking out new and exciting things to grab our attention. This is because we are primed to seek out novelty – we get a dopamine hit in our brains when we see or experience something new.

The problem is that dopamine is very addictive – the more we get, the more we crave. And this means that we are constantly seeking more novelty which means that we feel bored with a slower pace of life.

The solution then is to introduce less novelty not more, so that we can get used to less dopamine. Going for a long familiar drive slows down our need for dopamine and raises our tolerance for boredom.

The outcome of this is that we don't need as much constant stimulation to be satisfied – we can start to enjoy a slower pace of life and will not be bored as easily.

Maximise the benefits then by minimising any stimulation that can disrupt your flow – turn the radio off or put low background music on. And turn off your phone!





## Home remedies for relaxation

It isn't just the car that can be a source of relaxation. The modern world offers a range of techniques to manage the stresses and strains of, well, the modern world.

1

**Switch off to switch on;** have a digital detox day every week. We are all so constantly connected that we end up living our lives through a screen and are always on call.

This is especially so in these COVID-19 times with so many of us working from home and doing more and more via a screen – even socialising. The effect of this is that we can never really relax or connect with the real world.

A digital detox recharges our batteries (as well as those of your device) whilst freeing us from the demands of being constantly available. Can't manage a whole day? Try an hour a day at the very least!

2

**Avoid FOMO;** fear of missing out is a powerful driver but one that can leave us feeling stressed and anxious as we endeavour to do it all, lest we miss anything.

This can even make decision-making difficult and stressful – suppose I make the wrong choice of which Zoom event to join and end up missing the best 'Zoom pub quiz of the year??' Reduce the pressure by adopting a JOMO stance – joy of missing out.

Accept that you can't do it all but enjoy being in the moment with what you have. Switching off social media can help with this by reducing our ability to compare with others.

3

**Use Apps;** there are many wonderful innovative Apps that you can download to help you chill these days.

Try Stress & Anxiety Companion, which is an NHS recommended free app using breathing exercises, relaxing music and games designed to help calm the mind and change negative thoughts to help you cope better with life's up and downs.

AntiStressAnxietyReliefGame is another innovative approach to managing stress by offering simple soothing games to distract you from your worries.

If you prefer to meditate your way out of anxiety, Headspace is probably the App for you.





4

**Rejoice in nature;** if there is one benefit to being in lockdown for many, it was the ability to rediscover nature. Since lockdown began, I discovered miles and miles of parklands within walking distance of my house that I never even knew were there (despite living in the area over 20 years).

Becoming at one with nature is proven to reduce stress levels; one recent study found that just 20 minutes outdoors every day can lower the stress hormone cortisol.

You can do anything you like – sitting, walking, jogging – as long as you are in a nature-type environment. So, use your lunch-hour wisely by finding a park, wood or patch of grass to explore.



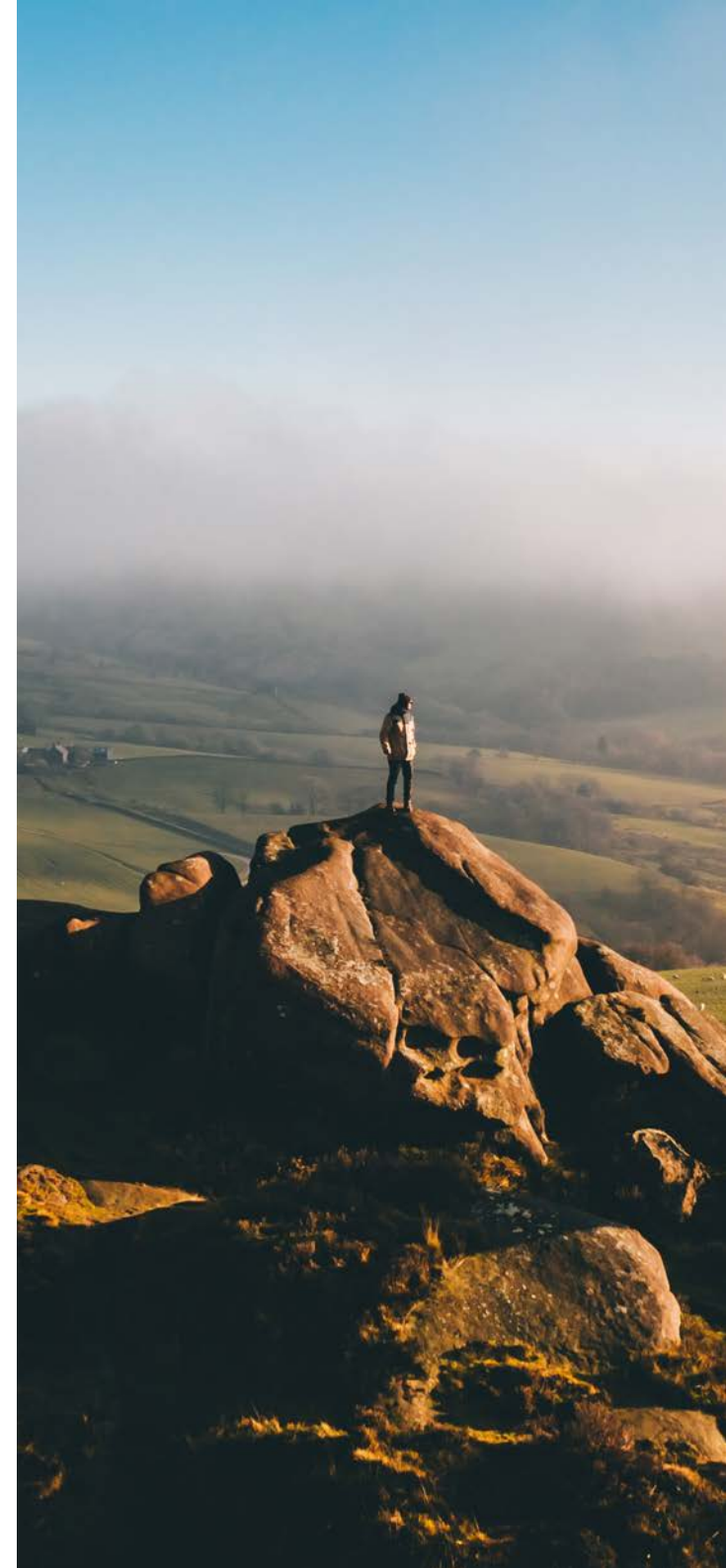
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**Appreciate the mundane;** the poet William Henry Davies famously lamented in the early 1900s that ‘we have no time to stand and stare’ and never is this more true than today. In a world jam-packed with stimulation, take time to appreciate the more mundane things in life.

Notice the clouds, the buds blossoming on the trees, the different smells as you go about your day. Appreciate the feel of the sun on your skin or going barefoot after work. Value the shapes and patterns around you, whether of bird formations or of drain covers in the road.

There is so much to enjoy, if we could only take the time out from our busy schedules to notice.

Appreciating the mundane means we don’t need to constantly crave the excitement and thrills that can end up driving our stress.







### **Good Carma – Public Opinion**

The following chapter draws on drivers' own insights to expand on the psychology presented in chapter one. We asked Britain's motorists to identify their key struggles with daily life and preferred methods for stress reduction, including harnessing driving as therapy.



## Stress Statistics

It's a very rare person who doesn't ever feel the effects of stress, particularly in modern society where there seem to be new problems, politics and pandemics around every corner.

According to our data, 1 in 3 adults feels the effects of stress on a regular basis. Indeed, 22% say they regularly feel stressed and 11% go as far as to say they feel constantly under stress.

When we asked about the causes of stress, lack of sleep came out on top. 39% of respondents said that lack of sleep was a key contributor to stress, followed by financial problems / bills (32%) and struggling to keep on top of their weight (27%).

Mental health and social anxiety also appeared near the top of the list of modern day struggles, 27% and 23% of respondents respectively.

**1 in 3** adults feels the effects of stress on a regular basis.



## Top 20 Causes of Modern-Day Stress:

Lack of sleep	39%
Finances / bills	32%
Weight / level of fitness	27%
Mental health struggles	23%
Social anxiety	22%
Being overworked	16%
Diet	15%
Housework	14%
Relationship troubles with a family member	13%
Illness	12%
Not feeling confident at work	11%
Looking after young children	11%
Relationship troubles with a partner	11%
Problematic neighbours	10%
Social media	10%
Traffic	9%
Unrealistic deadlines	7%
Safety in the neighbourhood	7%
Relationship troubles with a friend	6%
Not getting on with colleagues	5%

A blessed five percent of people claim to never feel stressed – we'll have what they're having!





## The Impact of Social Media

Whilst it doesn't appear to be having a severe impact on the majority of UK adults, social media is proving to be another key cause of stress and anxiety for many of the younger generation who have grown up with social media platforms playing an integral part of their social development.

The addictive powers of social media can have a negative impact on those aged 16-34 who, according to the data, average 2 hours 57 minutes of scrolling through social feeds each day.

The data suggests that as many as 28% of this age group are well and truly hooked and find it hard to stop checking social media, whilst 1 in 5 say the use of social media regularly causes them to compare themselves to others, which they feel contributes to their stress and anxiety levels.

A further 1 in 4 (24%) believe that spending time on social media before bed affects their sleep, which as we revealed earlier is the key cause of stress in the UK, according to our respondents.

Time to take notice of Dr Mann's tips for reducing stress by switching off to switch on.



**2 hours  
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So how much time do we actually spend feeling stressed?

Over the course of a week, the average adult claims to spend **12 hours 35 minutes** feeling under stress.

This equates to 655 hours over a year - or approximately **27 days**.

In other words, the average person in this country is spending almost an entire month of the year feeling stressed out.

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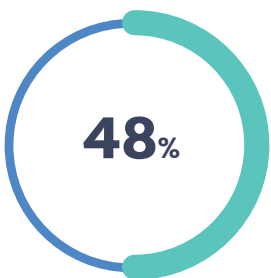
# Stress Busting

We are problem solving creatures by nature and, in this instance, stress is the problem - so what solutions do we come up with?

Getting back to nature with some fresh air is an age-old remedy for soothing a troubled mind and almost half of our respondents (48%) agree – going for a walk was found to be the nation’s preferred stress-busting trick.

Exercising (32%) and listening to music or a podcast (30%) were the second and third most popular choices, both of which have been proven to release endorphins (the body’s happy hormones) into the brain to help quell symptoms of anxiety and have a euphoric effect.

Again, the theme of mind-wandering presents itself, as sedentary tasks where the body can be still whilst the mind is transported elsewhere were popular methods of unwinding. These include activities such as watching a movie or reading a book (27% and 25% respectively).



48% agree – going for a walk was found to be the nation’s preferred stress-busting trick.



## Top 10 Home Remedies For Stress:

Go for a walk	48%
Exercise	32%
Listen to music or a podcast	30%
Watch a movie	27%
Read a book	25%
Talk with family and friends	24%
Have a nap	23%
Take a hot bath	20%
Have something to eat	19%
Pour yourself a drink	18%



Dr Mann's previous chapter *Putting You In The Driving Seat* suggests that finding ways to be in control is a common occurrence amongst those looking for ways to de-stress.

To compliment this notion we asked our respondents about the activities they might do to help them to feel more in control, as a form of stress relief, and 37% said that exercising to get into shape is a good way to feel in control and reduce stress, as is completing household chores such as cleaning and ironing, to create an organised environment (32%).

Our survey also found that as many as 59% of the UK's drivers would consider going out for a drive in order to reduce their stress levels and feel more relaxed – in fact, 41% of motorists say they have already done this in the past.

Naturally, at Auto Trader, we were eager to find out more about how people in the UK are using driving as therapy.

Read on to learn more about the ways motorists are harnessing the psychological benefits of driving to unwind and destress.



59% of the UK's drivers would consider going out for a drive in order to reduce their stress levels.







# The Getaway Car

*“If you don’t know where you are going,  
any road will get you there.”*

- Lewis Carroll

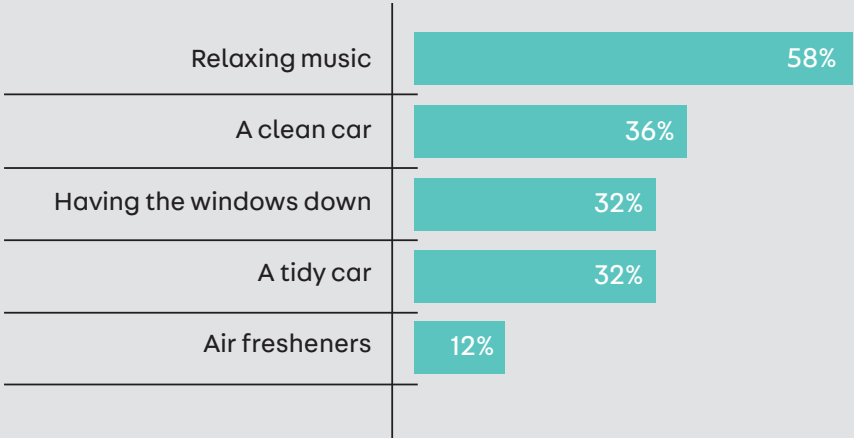
For many of the UK’s drivers, getting behind the wheel is more than just a way of getting from A to B, it’s also a means to get away from the stresses of everyday life.

Whether commuting to work, doing the weekly shop or simply escaping reality for a short while, the average driver is currently spending 3 hours 22 minutes behind the wheel each week.

With this in mind, there are things to consider to enhance the psychological benefits of driving and reclaim this time for vital rest and recuperation.

We asked our respondents about the factors that help them to unwind on the road when they have been feeling stressed. The results show a clear desire for soothing music, cleanliness and a bit of fresh air.

## Top 5 Motoring Relaxants:



The average driver  
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Our sample also shared with us their preferred driving environments and best times to escape to the peace and quiet of the open road.

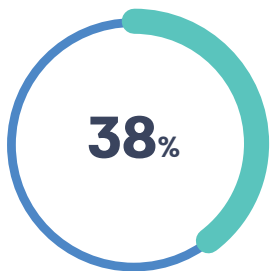
Perhaps unsurprisingly, more natural landscapes took the top spots, including the countryside (48%), the coast (38%), forested areas (23%) and riverside roads (22%). A meagre 4% of drivers claim to find city driving relaxing.

Quieter times of day that typically yield less traffic, such as the early evening (between 6pm-10pm) has been found to be the preferred time to enjoy a leisurely drive amongst motorists, followed by the post-lunch/pre-rush hour time slot, between 2pm and 4pm.

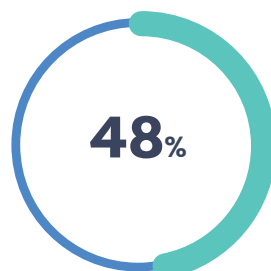
1 in 4 agree that a leisurely drive is a good way to relax and help clear the mind and 1 in 5 say it is the privacy of going for a solo drive that lets them properly switch off and unwind.

The positive psychological benefits of driving have also proven particularly prominent for parents of young children, for whom a solo drive can be a much-needed oasis of calm. 1 in 5 say that going for a leisurely drive has helped them relax after a day of childcare.

Many parents also see driving with kids as a way to ease daily pressures. Of the 1,352 parents included in our sample, 38% agree that taking the kids for a drive helps their children to fall asleep and 24% enjoy taking the kids out in the car as it provides a way to keep them distracted for a while.



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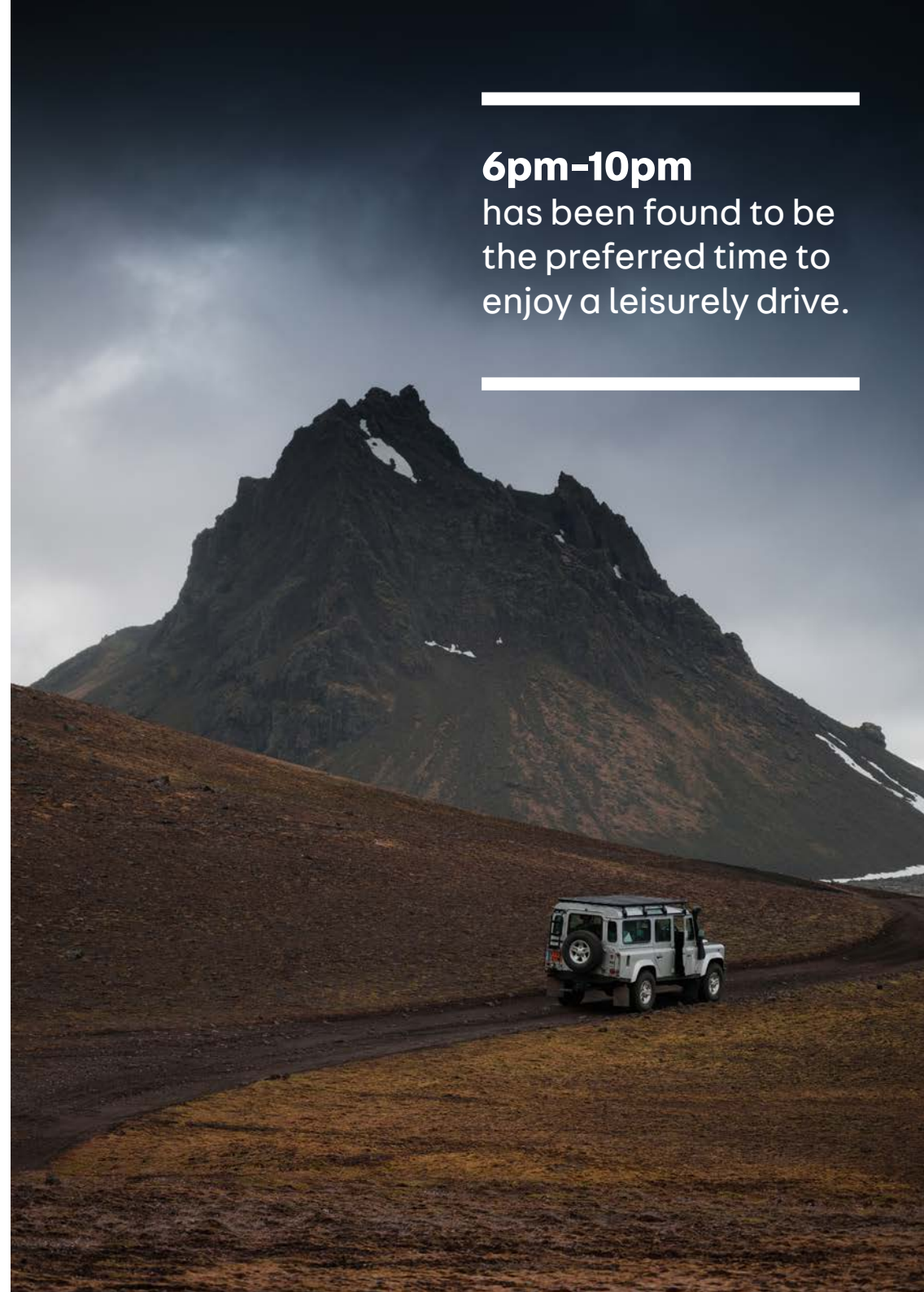
48% of drivers said a countryside landscape is their preferred driving environment.

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## 6pm-10pm

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## Summary


Stress will continue to be a part of everyday life for the foreseeable future – that's for certain.

Whether faced with a viral pandemic, an approaching recession, or even just the trivial problems of daily life that somehow seem to stack up to feel overwhelming, stress is here to stay – at least for 95% of us anyway!

How we choose to deal with stress is individual to each of us and truth be told there is no right or wrong way to cope with its impact – but hopefully this report has helped to explain some of the psychology behind stress to help you understand it.

It may have even given you some new ideas for how you might like to tackle the beast next time you're faced with a particularly stressful scenario.

Perhaps it's time to take the car for a spin, dust off those running shoes, or switch off to switch on.

A close-up, low-angle shot of the front left side of a dark-colored car. The car's headlight is prominent, featuring a series of horizontal LED light bars. The car's body is highly reflective, showing highlights from the environment. In the background, a white wall and a portion of a motorcycle are visible, suggesting an indoor setting like a showroom or garage.

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features many listed at pre-haggled prices.