



# Car companion apps

*State of UX review*

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# Introduction

Following our previous two studies into the state of UX for public and destination EV charging apps, and then home EV charging apps in the UK, we now turn our attention to the "companion apps" provided by car manufacturers themselves.

With our keen interest in design for automotive — especially EV — companion apps felt like a perfect place to end the trilogy of mobile app UX reviews related to the EV experience.

Around 780,000 public reviews across both iOS and Android platforms for ten major car manufacturer companion apps fed into this review in some form. We used this data to provide a general view of the current state of these apps in the UK market.

This report looks at the current state of UX for car companion apps, based on an analysis of public user reviews and feedback. As with our previous reports, we set out to highlight strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement by identifying common themes across reviews.

Our aim, as always, is to drive (no pun intended) better app design and a better car ownership experience. As the market matures and expands beyond early adopters, apps designed to assist car owners must offer a reliable, low-friction experience. It isn't a stretch to see how a useful, helpful companion app may be key to supporting the adoption of EVs beyond the established 'EV geek' community.

## Companion apps

Car companion apps are crucial for many car owners, offering a range of features from remote vehicle control to maintenance scheduling. Where conventional ICE car owners may view these apps as largely or entirely optional, for EV owners these apps often provide essential functions related to battery management and monitoring state of charge.

With the ZEV mandate on the horizon and the corresponding increase in the number of EVs on the road, the importance of well-designed, user-friendly companion apps will only increase over time.

# Approach and scope

For this review we selected a range of ten companion apps from major car manufacturers operating in the UK market. The app sample was chosen to reflect the top ten manufacturers by EV registrations across the whole of last year (2023) according to SMMT data: Tesla, MG iSmart, MyBMW, MyAudi, VW, MercedesMe, Kia, Hyundai Bluelink, Polestar and MyVauxhall.

For each manufacturer's app, all app store reviews from both Google Play and Apple were used in the star rating comparison. Then, for detailed qualitative analysis, from each brand's app we sampled the 130 most recent reviews from each store, making 260 reviews per brand and 2,600 in total. Reviews were sampled on the 9th September 2024.

The reviews of course cover both EV and ICE vehicles. In some cases (i.e. Tesla) it is easy to know whether a particular review refers to an EV experience, but mostly this is something we do not know for sure. To provide a first-pass hypothesis we looked for content and keywords that would reveal, with a degree of confidence, whether the reviewer was an EV driver — letting us draw some lines of comparison between the EV and ICE experience for each app.

An EV-keyword pass over each app's reviews also lets us gauge how "EV-heavy" each app's audience is. The most recurring keywords and key phrases were as follows:

1. **Charging / charge** — 1,247 mentions
2. **Battery / state of charge** — 983 mentions
3. **Range / miles remaining** — 856 mentions
4. **Electricity / electric** — 623 mentions
5. **Preconditioning / pre-heating** — 412 mentions
6. **Plug-in / plugged in** — 378 mentions
7. **kWh (kilowatt-hours)** — 201 mentions
8. **EV-specific driving modes** (e.g. Eco mode) — 173 mentions
9. **Regenerative braking** — 89 mentions

## Notes on method

We are aware EV-keyword identification is far from an exact science and will bias the sample of EV data toward 'deep EV' topics. However, the data is real and still valid, so long as we keep that bias in mind during interpretation.

With human oversight and quality checking, we used Claude 3.5 Sonnet to analyse the data, asking questions to surface the pains, gains and jobs-to-be-done common across the apps in scope.

Analysing this volume of reviews would have been far more difficult and time-consuming before this generation of AI tools became available, which shows their value in user research.

An earlier draft was rebuilt from scratch: our QA flagged a high hallucination rate from the first model we tried, so we switched to Claude and found improved ease of use and results across the board — a reminder that AI output in research needs rigorous checking, prioritising accuracy over speed.

As always, our intention is not to single out any provider for praise or criticism; the focus is the market as a whole and how it is meeting the needs of the end user.

## THE SAMPLE

Top ten EV brands (2023), ordered by the proportion of EV-related reviews.

|    |                  |         |
|----|------------------|---------|
| 1  | Tesla            | 100% EV |
| 2  | Polestar         | 88% EV  |
| 3  | MG iSmart        | 58% EV  |
| 4  | Hyundai Bluelink | 47% EV  |
| 5  | KIA              | 38% EV  |
| 6  | Volkswagen       | 38% EV  |
| 7  | MyVauxhall       | 33% EV  |
| 8  | MyBMW            | 28% EV  |
| 9  | MyAudi           | 23% EV  |
| 10 | MercedesMe       | 18% EV  |

This selection gives us a range of manufacturers with different levels of EV focus, letting us compare experiences across vehicle types.

Top ten manufacturers by 2023 EV registrations (SMMT). Reviews sampled 9 September 2024 across Apple App Store and Google Play (UK).

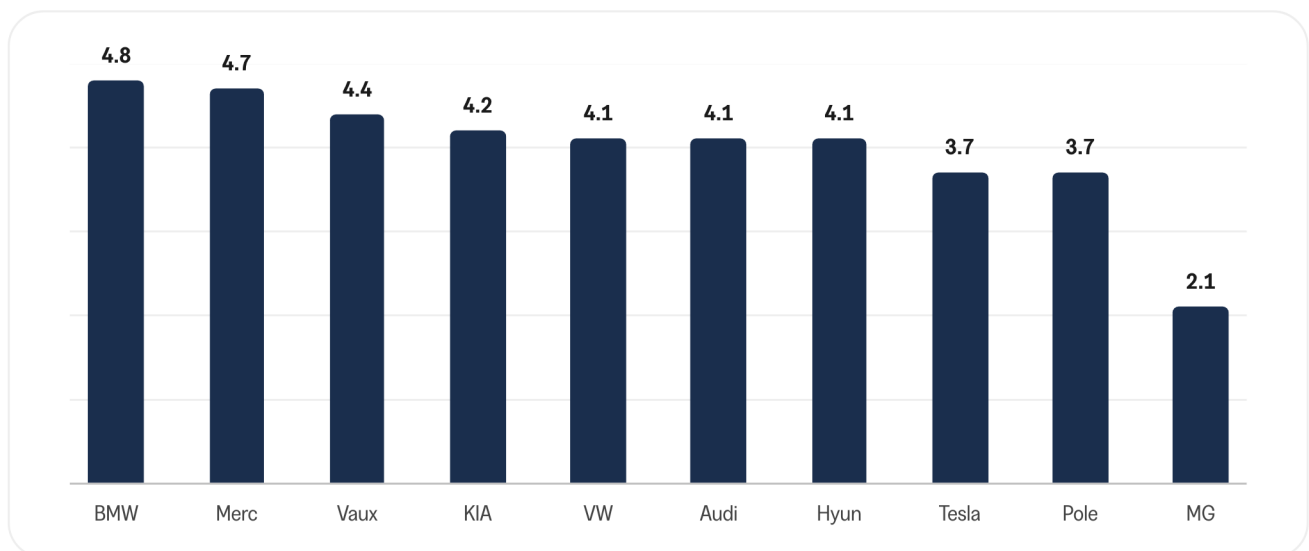
# App store ratings

As always, our first insights come from the star ratings left by reviewers on the Apple and Google Play stores. All ratings are correct as of the 2nd September 2024 and weighted according to the number of reviews.

The average, weighted rating for all apps across all stores is a fairly decent 3.9 out of 5, a more positive picture than our previous studies, but still with room for improvement.

At the time of writing, BMW lead with a weighted rating of 4.8 and most of the other brands are not too far behind, with only a 1.1 difference between BMW in the #1 slot and Tesla and Polestar in positions #8 and #9. MG iSmart is the notable laggard at #10, managing only a rating of 2.1, a full 2.7 points behind BMW.

FIG. 1 · COMBINED WEIGHTED RATING, BY BRAND



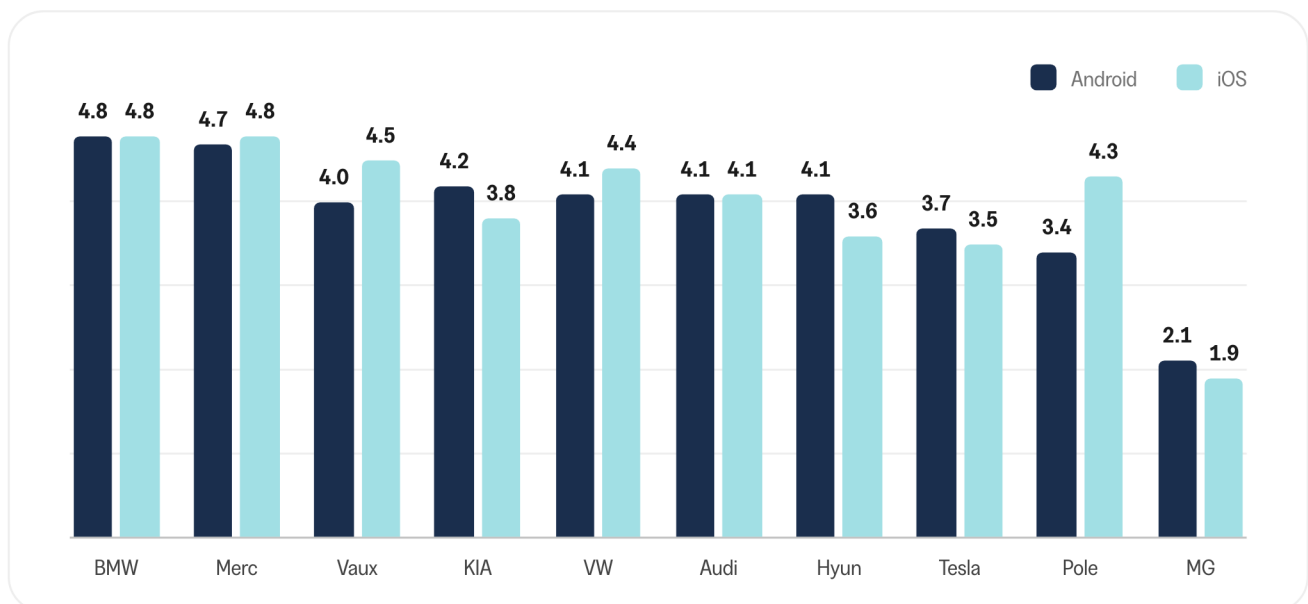
Combined average weighted reviews for the ten apps across Google Play and Apple stores, out of 5. Correct as of 2 September 2024.

# The split between iOS and Android

The average rating on iOS (4.0) is marginally higher than on Android (3.9). But diving deeper, we can see that this isn't reflective of the general experience. Several brands have notably different ratings between versions, for example Polestar (0.9 difference from iOS to Android). Vauxhall and Hyundai both favour one version by 0.5 points. Only BMW and Audi have exactly equivalent ratings on both platforms.

We noted with interest that Tesla and Polestar, both flagship EV manufacturers, fall into the lower half of the ratings despite their reputation for technological innovation.

FIG. 2 · AVERAGE RATING, SPLIT BY PLATFORM



Average reviews for the ten companion apps split by Google Play (Android) and Apple (iOS) stores, out of 5.

## TAKEAWAYS

- An average of 3.9 out of 5 suggests that, taken as a whole, users are generally satisfied — if not exactly delighted.
- The average hides some interesting ranges, indicating a large experience gap between some brands.
- EV-only brands don't necessarily lead in app satisfaction, suggesting EV specialisation doesn't guarantee a better app experience — or reflecting the higher demands of EV owners.
- Some brands show notable discrepancies between iOS and Android ratings, so the experience can vary widely depending on your mobile OS of choice.

# Insights from user reviews

Ratings give us a fast, high-level view of customer feedback, but the real insights are found within the reviews themselves.

## Executive summary (TL;DR)

What are the top insights from the dataset as a whole?

1. **Core issues:** connectivity, synchronisation and UI design are major pain points found in user reviews.
2. **Most needs are underserved:** Jobs-to-be-Done analysis shows most could be better served, presenting an opportunity for differentiation.
3. **Apps impact loyalty:** poor app experiences can negatively influence future purchase decisions.
4. **EV owners are more impacted:** EV drivers rely heavily on apps for critical functions like charging management, making app performance crucial to their ownership experience.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

As vehicles become more connected, manufacturers must prioritise app development to meet rising user expectations and maintain competitive advantage, particularly in the growing EV market.

# When everything goes right

*"Love this! Works consistently and seamlessly with my car. Great for checking that I have locked it up and the fuel status."*

— Android user

Whilst we have found areas for improvement, it is worth focusing also on the elements praised or appreciated commonly in reviews. Based on the user feedback across various car companion apps, here are the top five elements users praise or find useful:

1. **Remote climate control.** Frequently praised for its convenience, allowing users to pre-condition their vehicle before entering. Especially appreciated in extreme weather, and practical for EVs by warming the battery for optimal cold-weather performance.
2. **Vehicle status monitoring.** Users appreciate checking battery charge, fuel level and lock status remotely — peace of mind that helps them plan journeys, particularly valued by EV owners for monitoring charging status.
3. **Navigation and route planning.** Planning routes and sending destinations to the car's navigation through the app aids trip preparation, and integration with the infotainment system enhances the overall driving experience.
4. **Remote locking / unlocking.** A convenient safety feature, valued by users who feel vulnerable approaching their vehicle, and a useful backup when keys are forgotten or misplaced.
5. **Charging management (for EVs).** Checking charging status, setting schedules and receiving completion notifications helps owners optimise routines and manage costs, especially on time-of-use electricity rates.

These features are consistently highlighted as adding value to the ownership experience, enhancing convenience and providing peace of mind. Users often express that these capabilities make their interactions with their vehicles smoother and more enjoyable. However, it's worth noting that the effectiveness and reliability of these features can vary significantly between different manufacturers' apps, as evidenced by the range of ratings and feedback in the reviews.

# When things go wrong

*"A very basic app that falls short compared to other car manufacturer equivalents. Also does not always work when trying to operate climate control remotely. Like the car itself, has been done on the cheap."*

— Android user

Taking the alternative view, what are the most common pain points users experience and mention in their reviews?

1. **Connectivity and synchronisation issues.** By far the most common complaint: apps failing to connect to the vehicle or sync data, so users cannot access real-time information or control functions remotely when needed — defeating the core purpose of a companion app.
2. **Limited functionality compared to expectations.** Many users are disappointed that apps lack features they expect, or that are available in competitors' apps, leaving them feeling short-changed and unable to fully use their vehicle's potential through the app.
3. **Unreliable remote functions.** When remote features like climate control or charging are available, they often work inconsistently, wasting time and energy and potentially leaving users in uncomfortable or inconvenient situations.
4. **Poor user interface and navigation.** Unintuitive layouts, confusing menus and difficulty finding key functions increase cognitive load, turning what should be quick, simple tasks into frustrating ordeals.
5. **Inaccurate or outdated information.** Apps frequently display incorrect or outdated information about vehicle status, location or charge levels, eroding trust and prompting anxiety or poor decisions about usage and charging.

Having to manually check your vehicle's state of charge is, frankly, a pain.

*"Our app has so many glitches and some nights it doesn't charge properly so we are reduced to checking it in the night. It's just awful."*

— iOS user

The disparity in app quality across manufacturers is a shame, with some offering reliable, feature-rich experiences while others struggle with basic functionality. This inconsistency in the market could become a key differentiator in purchase decisions, especially as EVs become more mainstream. Manufacturers need to recognise that in the age of connected vehicles, software experiences are as crucial as hardware quality in shaping customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

To improve, manufacturers should focus on ensuring rock-solid reliability for core functions, expanding feature sets to match or exceed competitor offerings, and investing in user-centric design to enhance usability. They should also consider the app an integral part of the vehicle development process, not an afterthought, to ensure proper integration and reliable functionality.

#### TAKEAWAYS

The car companion app plays an important role in the overall ownership experience, especially for electric vehicles. When executed well, these apps can significantly enhance convenience, provide peace of mind, and help improve brand loyalty and engagement. When poorly implemented, they become a major source of frustration that detracts from the ownership experience.

For EVs in particular, a well-designed companion app is not just a nice-to-have, but an important part of the ownership experience. Features like charging management, battery status monitoring and climate pre-conditioning are, if not essential, then significantly beneficial to the day-to-day use of an EV.

When these features work reliably, they can significantly ease the transition to electric mobility. However, when they fail or are poorly implemented, they can exacerbate range anxiety and make EV ownership feel more complicated than conventional vehicles.

# Top UX / UI design issues

*"It's a mess of confounding options, extras, non-available functions... paid options, subscription services, marshalled by a byzantine UI; you'll lose the will."*

— Android user

As we often find with our app industry reviews, the user interface is listed as a top pain point for our cohort. Design is subjective to a certain extent, and how you view its quality depends on what users are trying to accomplish. Connectivity and syncing aside, diving deeper into the design of our app cohort, several themes emerge where users are more likely to have problems:

- 1. Cluttered and confusing layouts.** Many users complain about overcrowded screens and difficulty finding key information. *"Clunky"* is a word that recurs. The organisation of features and settings is often criticised as illogical or overly complex — interfaces that lack a clear visual hierarchy and fail to prioritise the most important features.
- 2. Inconsistent design elements.** Users report inconsistencies in how information is presented or how functions work across different sections of the app. As one iOS user noted: *"There is no consistency."*
- 3. Overemphasis on marketing content.** Some users feel too much screen space is dedicated to promotional content rather than useful features. An Android user noted it *"seems primarily designed to upsell service packages and locate nearby service centres, rather than provide a seamless user experience."*
- 4. Difficulty using maps and location features.** Whilst reviews are mixed, users often criticise the implementation of maps within the apps, citing issues with accuracy, loading times and the ability to interact with location data effectively.

*"The app feels like it wasn't tested in real life with a user."*

— Android user

It's a shame that proper UX and UI design still seems to be an area of underinvestment in so many cases. This is a relative experience, both between the apps and between customers' perception of the value of their purchase: in particular, users are likely to criticise an app for appearing cheap or badly made **in contrast to the car**.

Ultimately, poor UI design can lead to frustration, reduced usage of the app and a diminished perception of the vehicle's technological capabilities. In some cases, users explicitly state that the poor app experience makes them reconsider their loyalty to the brand for future purchases. For example, an Android user stated: *"I would seriously reconsider having another [car brand] in the future if I had to use this app again."*

This highlights how crucial a well-designed app interface is to the overall ownership experience and brand perception in today's connected automotive landscape.

# User requests and questions

If you're trying to understand more about customer expectations, and how an app fits into their real-life experiences and customer journey, it can be effective to look at the questions users ask in their reviews. Aside from topics already discussed (connectivity and synchronisation with the car is again our top complaint), here are some of the most common question themes that appeared in our analysis.

## 1 · Feature requests

Users frequently ask when certain features will be added — *"When can we expect scheduled charging?"*, *"When will you add remote locking/unlocking?"*, *"Can you add the ability to set charging limits from the app?"* — and ask for feature parity between brands: *"This is available on Brand X, why not on Brand Y?"*

As well as multi-car households, this demonstrates that users can exhibit 'switchy' behaviours and take their expectations with them. Given the prevalence of leasing and short-term car rental in the UK (in 2023, 38% of car 'purchases' in the UK were private leases according to CarWow), brands should be wary of offering poor ownership experiences. Users do make direct comparisons between the app experiences.

*"We also have a [rival brand] and the difference between both companies' apps is clearly noticeable straight away... I'd go as far as saying the app is so bad it's useless most of the time."*

— iOS user

*"So pointless having the app should have stayed with [rival brand] least that app works!"*

— iOS user

If users expect the app to offer comprehensive control over their vehicle, particularly for electric vehicles, the absence of these features suggests a disconnect between user expectations and the current functionality of many apps. If reviewers are true to their words, the companion app experience could well be a decision factor in a customer's next choice of vehicle.

A final note of opportunity for the brands we covered: analysing the feature requests in your own store reviews is an effective way to gauge demand and prioritise development.

## 2 · Feature access and support requests

Many users ask for guidance on setting up or activating features — *"How do I set up the digital key?"*, *"How do I activate [specific service]?"* — suggesting onboarding is not intuitive enough. It also reinforces the information-architecture challenge noted in the previous section. Mentions of dealerships indicate guidance at handover is often lacking, and that support frequently can't resolve issues, with users passed between disconnected, siloed teams.

*"I'm a bit disappointed in this app as I was told by the dealership that it would make everything so much easier and seamless... the app won't stay synced to the car and even when the app is connected I can't schedule my charging or precondition the car as I was told I could... So frustrating as I spent nearly €80k on the car."*

— Android user

*"After the last update, the warnings and notifications section is displaying an alert... Told digital support said I must visit the dealer and pay to have the issue fixed. This is a paid-for service and nothing to do with the dealer. [Brand] needs to take responsibility and stop making changes without testing."*

— iOS user

### 3 · Feature removal complaints

Users question why features have been removed or stopped working after an update — *"Why can't I see my battery percentage anymore?"*, *"Where has [feature] gone?"* — showing they become reliant on features and are frustrated when they disappear, often without clear communication. It also suggests some updates aren't thoroughly tested or communicated, causing confusion and dissatisfaction.

*"The latest update removed estimated charging end time... Will this be fixed in the next update?"*

— Android user

*"The older version of this app would let you set a timer for when you wanted the air on to start, and also the temperature. This was VERY useful. I could set the temp higher in chilly mornings and cooler for when I left work in the afternoon. There was also a function to lock doors AND close windows. This seems to have been removed too. Can these features be added back?"*

— iOS user

#### 4 · Adding support for new devices or platforms

Frequent requests for Apple Watch apps and Android Auto integration reflect an expectation that the vehicle app integrates cleanly with the rest of a user's connected ecosystem. The expectation that these integrations will exist is strong, and reinforces the earlier point that users track features across the market and expect parity.

*"Would be nice to have a connection between app and Apple Watch e.g. notification on watch about charge status, location, lock and unlock via watch app."*

— iOS user

*"Very disappointed that Android Auto is deactivated and will have to pay for activation to be restored... this was not mentioned to me when I purchased the car."*

— Android user

The full list of the most common questions and requests is shown below.

#### TAKEAWAYS

These questions and requests reveal several things about the relationship between vehicle apps and ownership. Users expect their app to be a comprehensive control centre for their car, integrating cleanly with their digital lives.

But many struggle to set up and fully use their apps, pointing to a need for better onboarding and user education. Users also quickly come to rely on features and are frustrated when these are removed or changed without clear communication.

Overall, there is a significant gap between user expectations and the current state of many companion apps. Users see these apps as integral to ownership, yet the apps often fall short on functionality, reliability and ease of use.

It is clear many users are well aware of features available from other brands, and this may well be a decision factor when choosing their next vehicle. How far it drives brand loyalty isn't clear from this research, but it is a factor nonetheless.

FIG. 3 · MOST COMMON QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS

## Most common questions and requests

| Question / request                                                               | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Why can't I connect to my car? / Why is the app not syncing with my car?         | 78    |
| When will you add [specific feature]? (e.g. remote locking, scheduling charging) | 62    |
| How do I set up / activate [specific feature]?                                   | 53    |
| Why has [feature] been removed? / Where has [feature] gone?                      | 41    |
| Why doesn't [specific feature] work? (e.g. climate control, charging schedule)   | 39    |
| Can you add support for [device / platform]? (e.g. Apple Watch, Android Auto)    | 35    |
| How do I change my payment details for subscriptions?                            | 27    |
| Why is the app showing incorrect information? (e.g. charge status, location)     | 25    |
| How do I update the app / car software?                                          | 22    |
| Why does the app drain my phone battery so quickly?                              | 18    |
| How can I add a second user / profile to my car in the app?                      | 16    |
| Why does the app keep logging me out?                                            | 15    |
| How do I contact customer support through the app?                               | 14    |
| Why can't I see my car's location?                                               | 13    |
| How do I reset the app / clear its data?                                         | 11    |

Table showing the most common questions / requests with a count of mentions. Source: qualitative review sample, this report.

# Jobs-to-be-Done

The Jobs-to-be-Done (JTBD) framework is a powerful approach for understanding customer needs and motivations. It focuses on uncovering the underlying "job" that customers are trying to accomplish, rather than superficial demographics or product features.

In this instance, companion apps will be 'hired' by the user to complete or help complete one or more jobs. How satisfied the user is with the solution offered is directly linked to the 'stickiness' of a product: a poor solution will have a much lower switching hurdle than a good one.

It is clear the apps themselves are not always the solution, but rather act in conjunction with the car, which is considered to be the real solution 'hired'. The app, therefore, is a '**multiplier**' to the car's ability to effectively serve a job (or otherwise). If the apps themselves are a solution, it is a solution to a more emotional job or need, perhaps:

*Manage my life efficiently*

or

*Reduce stress related to car ownership*

We add to these a number of lower-level 'multiplier' jobs. To understand where jobs are well served or underserved, we rank them against three five-point scales — **importance** (1 = not important, 5 = very important), **satisfaction** (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied) and **frequency** (1 = very rarely, 5 = very often) — and from this create an overall measure of priority according to the user.

FIG. 4 · IMPORTANCE, SATISFACTION AND FREQUENCY

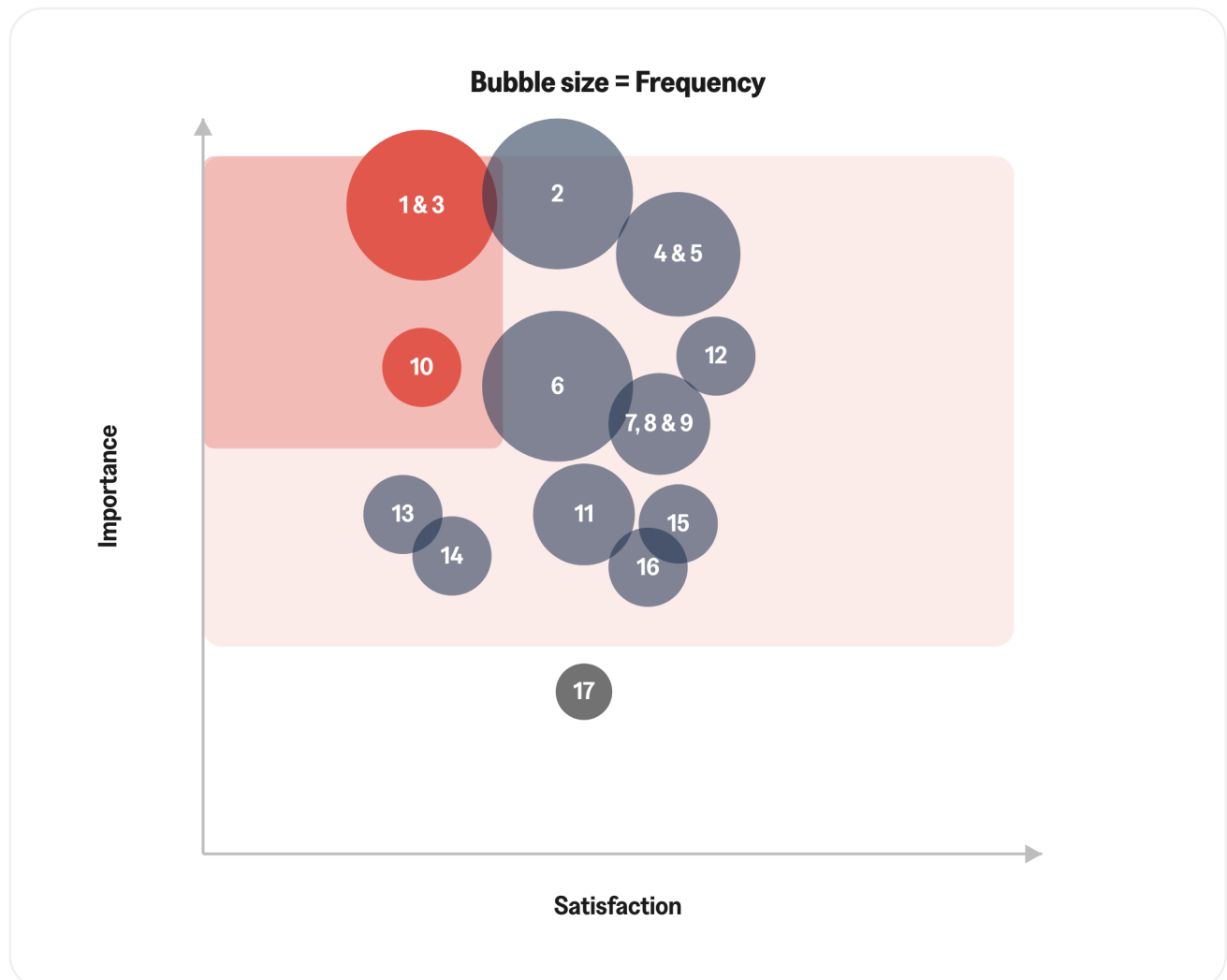
## Jobs-to-be-Done garnered from user reviews

| #  | Job-to-be-Done                                 | Imp. | Sat. | Freq. | Priority |
|----|------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------|----------|
| 1  | Reduce stress related to car ownership         | 5    | 2    | 5     | High     |
| 2  | Manage my life efficiently                     | 5    | 3    | 5     | High     |
| 3  | Optimise my electric vehicle's charging        | 5    | 2    | 5     | High     |
| 4  | Monitor my car's status remotely               | 5    | 3    | 4     | High     |
| 5  | Ensure my car is secure when I'm away from it  | 5    | 3    | 4     | High     |
| 6  | Access my car without physical keys            | 4    | 3    | 5     | High     |
| 7  | Prepare my car for use before I arrive         | 4    | 3    | 3     | Medium   |
| 8  | Plan and optimise my journeys                  | 4    | 3    | 3     | Medium   |
| 9  | Control my car's functions remotely            | 4    | 3    | 3     | Medium   |
| 10 | Diagnose and troubleshoot car issues           | 4    | 2    | 2     | Medium   |
| 11 | Track my driving performance and efficiency    | 3    | 3    | 3     | Medium   |
| 12 | Locate my car in unfamiliar places             | 4    | 3    | 2     | Medium   |
| 13 | Manage my car-related expenses                 | 3    | 2    | 2     | Medium   |
| 14 | Stay updated on my car's software and features | 3    | 2    | 2     | Medium   |
| 15 | Manage my car's maintenance schedule           | 3    | 3    | 2     | Low      |
| 16 | Customise my car's settings to my preferences  | 3    | 3    | 2     | Low      |
| 17 | Share access to my car with others             | 2    | 3    | 1     | Low      |

Seventeen jobs garnered from user reviews, scored for importance, satisfaction and frequency (each 1–5) to produce a priority ranking. The first two are the emotional umbrella jobs.

Then, by mapping the jobs onto a 5×5 matrix as below, we can more easily see that the vast majority of these jobs are considered 'underserved' (high importance / low satisfaction).

FIG. 5 · IMPORTANCE VS SATISFACTION



5×5 mapping highlighting that the majority of jobs are at least partially underserved. Numbers refer to the jobs in Fig. 4; shaded region = importance exceeds satisfaction.

FIG. 6 · THE THREE FULLY UNDERSERVED JOBS

| #  | Job-to-be-Done                          | Imp. | Sat. | Freq. | Priority |
|----|-----------------------------------------|------|------|-------|----------|
| 1  | Reduce stress related to car ownership  | 5    | 2    | 5     | High     |
| 3  | Optimise my electric vehicle's charging | 5    | 2    | 5     | High     |
| 10 | Diagnose and troubleshoot car issues    | 4    | 2    | 2     | Medium   |

The three fully underserved jobs (1, 3 and 10 from Fig. 4).

As we can see, only "share access to my car with others" appears to be served right given its importance (though this is likely due to the relative infrequency of this job). The vast majority of jobs are at least partially underserved considering their priority, with jobs 1, 3 and 10 to be considered as fully underserved.

It is notable to see an EV-specific use case appearing among the underserved jobs, reinforcing our general view that EV drivers have a particularly great need for these apps to be effective, and are disproportionately disadvantaged when they underperform.

We must consider this against the top-line review scores we looked at in the first section. Is there a contradiction? How can apps be generally well reviewed but still partially underserve most jobs? Yes and no. As we've stated before, this is not an exact science, intended to provide a sketch perspective rather than acute clarity. However, it must be considered that we can be somewhat satisfied with a solution to our need, but still quickly switch in favour of a better solution when it appears.

We should also remember this is an overview of the market as a whole; there will be differences between brands for each individual job. Any brand featured here is welcome to get in touch for more specific feedback.

The quality of companion apps strongly influences the overall ownership experience. A poor app can detract from even the best vehicles, while an excellent one can lift the experience of a less premium model.

If apps act as 'multipliers' for the car as the real solution to a user's job, a good app can raise the car's ability to meet and exceed expectations, and a mediocre one does the opposite. Manufacturers should treat app development as a core part of the vehicle offering, not an afterthought.

With many user needs underserved, there's significant opportunity for manufacturers to differentiate themselves through improved app functionality and reliability. Focusing on the most underserved user needs (of which there are many) could yield the highest return on investment in app development.

Our analysis supports our general conclusion that EV owners are disproportionately impacted by poor app performance, as they rely more heavily on these tools for critical functions like charging management and range monitoring. With the industry steadily electrifying, this should be something for all automotive brands to think carefully on.

# Conclusion

This review highlights the pivotal role automotive companion apps play in the modern vehicle ownership experience, especially for EV owners in the UK. As the industry accelerates towards electrification and increased connectivity, these apps have transitioned from optional conveniences to essential tools that significantly influence customer satisfaction, brand perception and loyalty.

Our analysis of 780,000 public reviews across ten major car manufacturers reveals a nuanced landscape. While an average rating of 3.9 out of 5 suggests general contentment, this masks significant disparities among brands. Surprisingly, EV-only manufacturers like Tesla and Polestar do not lead in app satisfaction. This may indicate that specialisation in electric vehicles does not automatically translate to superior app experiences, and reinforces our belief that EV owners tend to have raised expectations of quality.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- App quality varies widely between manufacturers, with significant disparities in user satisfaction hidden behind the average rating.
- Core functionality issues, particularly around connectivity and synchronisation, remain a major pain point for users across brands.
- User interface design is often criticised as cluttered, confusing and inconsistent, detracting from the overall user experience.
- Users expect feature parity between brands and smooth integration with their broader digital ecosystem, including wearables and in-car systems.
- Poor app experiences can significantly detract from the overall car ownership experience, potentially influencing future purchase decisions and brand loyalty.
- The majority of user needs identified through Jobs-to-Be-Done analysis are at least partially underserved, presenting opportunities for manufacturers to differentiate themselves.

Users highly value features such as remote climate control, vehicle status monitoring, navigation and route planning, remote locking/unlocking and charging management. These functionalities enhance convenience and are particularly crucial for EV owners who rely on them for battery management and charging efficiency. However, common pain points such as connectivity issues, limited functionality, unreliable remote operations, poor user interfaces and inaccurate information significantly detract from the user experience. Such shortcomings not only frustrate users but also erode trust and can adversely affect brand perception.

If we have a main thesis emerging from this analysis, it is that car companion apps have become an integral part of the modern vehicle ownership experience, acting as a critical touchpoint between consumers and manufacturers. In the era of connected vehicles and electrification, the software experience is as crucial as the hardware. A well-designed, reliable app can enhance the appeal of a vehicle, while a poor one can diminish even the most premium models.

As the market matures and moves beyond early adopters, particularly in the EV segment, user expectations will only intensify.

Manufacturers have a real opportunity to invest in user-centred app development, focused on reliability, broader feature sets and intuitive design. By addressing the underserved needs identified in this review, they can improve customer satisfaction, build brand loyalty and support the wider adoption of electric vehicles.

For manufacturers, investing in reliable, user-friendly companion apps is no longer optional but essential.

Those who deliver reliable, feature-rich apps that genuinely improve ownership stand to gain an advantage in an increasingly digital-first market.

The challenge now is to close the gap between user expectations and current app capabilities — treating these digital tools not as afterthoughts, but as core components of their vehicle offerings.

In conclusion, delivering a superior companion app experience is not just an added benefit but a necessity in today's automotive landscape. Manufacturers who act on this will meet rising customer expectations and pull ahead of those who don't.

#### WORK WITH US

Are you one of the manufacturers we featured in this study — or unhappy to be left out? Either way, if you'd like a more detailed report with insights and recommendations specific to your app, we'd be happy to oblige. Drop us a line at [wearesystematic.com/contact](https://wearesystematic.com/contact) or find us on LinkedIn.



"Superb car... does such a good job for the use I need. Wish I could say the same for this app."

iOS user · Car companion apps: state of UX review

## About the author



### Ed Roberts

PARTNER & CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER

Ed Roberts leads strategic direction at We Are Systematic across its work in regulated and operationally complex sectors. His focus is how design decisions carry commercial and increasingly legal consequences for the businesses that ship them. He writes regularly on the business of strategy and design in complex industries.

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# About We Are Systematic

We Are Systematic is a UK-based strategic UX consultancy. We do strategy-first, evidence-based design work for organisations building safety-critical, regulated or operationally demanding products: automotive and mobility, IoT and AI products, financial systems and energy infrastructure. The throughline across our work is that the surface most users interact with is the smallest visible part of a much larger system, and the design decisions on that surface carry consequences far beyond aesthetics. Our job is to reduce the risk in those decisions: to help teams get the high-stakes ones right before they are expensive to change.

Car companion apps: state of UX review is our read on the digital experience manufacturers wrap around the modern, increasingly electric car. It completes a trilogy of mobile-app UX reviews related to the EV experience, applying the same evidence-based discipline our team brings to regulated, operationally complex products.

This report draws on large-scale qualitative analysis of public app store reviews — around 780,000 across ten manufacturer apps, with a 2,600-review qualitative sample — supported by the Claude 3.5 Sonnet language model with multi-layered human QA. Any interpretive errors remain our own.

## SECTORS

Automotive and mobility · IoT and AI · Financial services · Energy and electrification

## CAPABILITIES

Product strategy · UX/UI design · User research · Rapid prototyping · Proposition testing · Product optimisation

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