

# Beware French petrol, British tourists are told

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in Brussels  
and Peter Allen in Paris

BRITISH tourists were warned yesterday that a new "environmentally friendly" fuel on sale in French petrol stations could damage their cars and cause breakdowns.

Holidaymakers may unwittingly ruin their vehicles' engines if they fill up with the recently introduced biofuel.

The petrol – 95-E10 – is a mixture of regular unleaded fuel and ethanol.

It is suitable for new cars but can damage vehicles registered before the year 2000, according to motoring bodies.

The biofuel sits alongside the commonly used and similarly named unleaded Euro 95 in many garages across France. A public awareness campaign has avoided confusion among the French, but British holidaymakers face the prospect of unwittingly picking the wrong pump.

Motoring associations, including the RAC, said anyone preparing to travel to France should be aware of the biofuel, which is 90 per cent

regular unleaded and 10 per cent ethanol.

Paul Biggs, a director at the Association of British Drivers, said: "If drivers can confuse diesel and petrol at the pumps, as they often do, then they could just as easily confuse ordinary unleaded with unleaded containing 10 per cent ethanol in France."

"There is obviously the potential for a ruined holiday if your car breaks down or is damaged."

The biofuel has been gradually distributed across stations in France since April 1.

The French government has admitted that it is incompatible with 40 per cent of vehicles on the road.

Holland's national automobile association, the ANWB, said the fuel can damage cars registered before 2000. Markus van Tol, a spokesman for the Dutch breakdown repair service, said "filling up just a few tanks of the new biofuel could lead to problems with pipes and connectors". Regular use could leave long-lasting damage, he added.

Ethanol is highly corrosive and wears away the metal fuel tanks common in cars regis-

tered before 2000, leading to leaks.

Most new cars have plastic tanks and are therefore not be affected by corrosion.

A spokesman for the RAC said: "Most newer cars should not experience any problems but owners, particularly of older vehicles, should check with the manufacturer for compatibility before using the fuel."

"I would advise motorists to look for any signage, such as E10, or the letters 'bio' to guide them in making a choice of which fuel to use."

The introduction of the petrol follows a European Union directive relating to the quality of fuels, which states that all petrol must include between five and 10 per cent of ethanol by 2013. The French energy ministry advised motorists with cars older than nine years to continue using Euro 98 or Euro 95.

Almost one third of cars on the roads in Britain today were registered before 2000. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders there are 9,579,000 cars out of 31,105,988 which pre-date the year 2000.