



The 15 most-shorted UK stocks in March 2026

Rising oil prices are creating opportunities for hedge funds.

Update
27 March 2026

When I started penning this article at around 10am on Monday (23/03/2026), Asian and European stock markets had opened down heavily (the FTSE 100 had fallen c. 2.5% at one point). About an hour later, the FTSE 100 had risen c. 3.5% from that low after the US President had tweeted that the strikes on Iranian oil facilities he'd threatened had been postponed for five days after Iran had agreed to talks.

The point, essentially, is that newsflow is moving fast – and markets are responding just as rapidly. Investing when the outlook is murky isn't easy. While many will want to buy the dip, arguably taking a beat and not rushing into any rash decision may prove the most prudent course of action.

Still, it's good timing for the latest edition of our run-through of the UK companies that hedge funds are most heavily shorting. There's been plenty of movement since October, that's for sure.

It's been a good six-month period for the UK stock market, with the FTSE 100 soaring to within touching distance of 11,000, a level it's never come close to before. Some steam has come out of that momentum since the Iran war started, with the blue-chip bourse now trading back around 10,000, down 8.5% from its high.

The energy shock, with crude oil climbing to c. \$100 per barrel, has particularly hit the more domestically oriented FTSE 250, with the mid-cap index into correction territory at c. 11% from its most recent high (which, in turn, remains below its all-time high set back in 2021).

As a reminder, shorting a stock is, essentially, the act of betting that an individual company's share price will fall, rather than rise (the opposite of what most investors will do).

As we commented last time, we absolutely do not think that ordinary investors can successfully run a book of short positions – and that's especially true in choppy waters such as now.

However, we do think that it's a good idea for investors to know which of the stocks in which they invest are being bet against. Exploring the bear case for all of one's individual long positions can be a good way to play devil's advocate and ensure you're happy with your position, or if you think your initial investment thesis has run its course.

Regulations ensures that short positions of 0.5% or greater of a stock must be disclosed and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) tracks these disclosures. The website ShortTracker, which

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Top 15 Most Shorted UK -Listed Stocks

COMPANY	% SHORT	NUMBER OF FUNDS SHORT	POSITION IN OCTOBER
Wizz Air Holdings	15.70%	13	6
Greggs	13.30%	14	8
Ibstock	12.20%	13	10
WH Smith	9.50%	11	13
NCC Group	9.10%	13	4
Auto Trader	8.20%	11	New entry
B&M European Value Retail	8.00%	10	New entry
Future	7.80%	7	New entry
Ocado Group	7.00%	9	9
Kingfisher	6.90%	9	14
Land Securities	6.60%	6	New entry
Tate & Lyle	6.60%	7	New entry
easyJet	6.40%	7	New entry
J. Sainsbury	6.00%	5	2
Whitbread	6.00%	7	New entry

Source: Shorttracker.co.uk, as at 23/03/2026



is run by Castellain Capital, is a good resource to quickly ascertain how much of a company's shares are being shorted.

The UK's most-shortened stocks

Oil fluctuations

Considering the choppiness of global stock markets, it's perhaps unsurprising that we've seen a lot of change since our last update six months ago. In particular, companies where fortunes are tied, whether directly or indirectly, to the oil price have seen movement.

Ashtead Technology (AT), which rents out subsea technology systems to the global offshore energy industry, was top of the chart in October. At one point, almost 10% of its shares were being sold short. That number has fallen significantly as short positions have been taken off. Now, less than 4% and the company has fallen out of the top 15.

The current conflict in the Middle East has seen the closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, with oil prices spiking around a third over the past month. This has been a boon for oil producers and potentially provides a constructive backdrop for AT's services.

On the flipside, a higher oil price – and war in the Middle East more generally – is a bad thing for the leisure sector, particularly airlines, for a couple of reasons. First, we've seen some flights to popular destinations such as Dubai cancelled because of safety fears.

More pertinently, fuel is a key component of their airlines' business models because they need to fuel every plane they fly. Hence, higher gas prices mean it's more expensive to fly, which crimps their (already razor-thin) profit margins.

It's no surprise, then, that **Wizz Air (WIZZ)** has climbed from sixth place in October to top of the charts in March. At the start of the conflict in Iran, c. 9% of WIZZ's shares were being sold short; in the space of three weeks that's risen to c. 16% - higher than we've seen at any point in the past 10 years. The low-cost carrier easyJet (EZJ) also crept into the list, with short positions rising from 0.6% at the start of the war to 6.4% now.

It's possible that this has also contributed to the rise in **WH Smith (SMWH)** up our leaderboard (from 13th in October to fourth this month). The firm recently retrenched from its iconic place on UK high streets in favour of its travel division, where it has units at airports and train stations across the country. If fewer people fly or travel by train for whatever reason, its outlook will probably wane.

UK economy

There remains a prevalence of UK domestically focused businesses on our list, where the short-sellers seem fearful that the current energy crisis will spiral into a resurgence of inflation and crimp consumer spending, sending us into a recession.

Greggs (GRG), the seller of low-cost pastries and sandwiches, has been under pressure for a while and climbed from eighth to second, while the brickmaker Ibstock jumped from tenth to third.

New entrants to the list also fit the bill, including the used car marketplace **Auto Trader (AUTO)**, the discount supermarket **B&M (BME)**, and the magazine publisher **Future (FUTR)**.

Bricks and mortar

One interesting new entrant this month has been **Land Securities (LAND)**, which owns a portfolio of commercial properties including offices, shopping centres and leisure parks.

Despite the KTI team having noted a growing number of UK equity income portfolio managers starting to take positions in real estate investment trusts (REITs) with a plethora of long-term structural drivers for the sector remaining in place, LAND seems to be bucking that trend.

LAND owns Cardinal Place in London's Victoria, which hosts offices and shops, Kent's Bluewater and Liverpool's Liverpool One shopping centres, Brighton Marina, and Salford's MediaCity complex, which hosts BBC studios.

Still, many remain cautious on offices thanks to home-working arrangements remaining largely in place as well as the risk of artificial intelligence displacing jobs. It's also possible that LAND's decision to establish a residential retail business may not have been well-received, while the potential for rising interest rates thanks to the Middle East conflict is also a concern because property, as a high-yielding asset, is sensitive to bond yields.

How shorting works

Shorting is typically the domain of hedge funds. The process is that the shorter will borrow shares of a particular company from a stockbroker or an investment bank, then sell those shares at the current share price. If the share price falls as they expect, they can then buy the shares back at a lower price, return the shares they borrowed back to their original owner and pocket the difference.



As a worked example, let's say you borrow 10,000 shares in a company whose share price is £1. You sell those for £10,000 and the share price then falls to 50p. You can buy shares in the open market for £5,000 and return them to whoever you borrowed them for and you have a £5,000 profit, minus the fee you paid to loan the shares and other trading costs.

The risk, of course, is that the share price actually rises. If the share price goes to £2, you'll spend £20,000 buying them back, giving you a loss of £10,000.

Indeed, the biggest risk involved in short-selling is that your losses can be potentially unlimited: when going long, the most you can lose is 100% of your capital, but share prices can theoretically rise to infinity. Say the share price in our example went to £10, you'd then be facing a loss of £90,000. In percentage terms, that's a 900% loss.



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