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# ngmw News

The newsletter of the Northern Group of Motoring Writers

Summer 2023

# It's a cracker!

How we celebrated our golden anniversary in style...

# To the Manor born



Members gather for a photo-op outside Aldwark Manor where Kia assembled an impressive array of its latest models.

BY ANY standards, our golden anniversary celebrations were a real record breaker.

Staged in the opulent surroundings of the Aldwark Manor Estate near York and generously supported by Kia with a fleet of 13 of its latest models to put to the test, the event culminated in a lavish dinner which was followed by a spectacular fireworks display.

But there was work to do before the celebrations could begin and group members kept the assembled Kia models - which included the impressive new EV6 GT and several examples of the brand's latest EVs - extremely busy. Almost 90 test drives were notched up over the course of the day - thought to be the highest achieved at the annual Kia driving event - covering more than 1,000 miles on local roads.

When the driving was done members assembled for the group's annual general meeting at which Andrew Evans took over as chair from Andy Harris with Anabelle Quirk appointed as the group's new vice chair. A total of 29 members attended the meeting - the highest number ever recorded in the group's 50 year history.

Business over, it was time to celebrate the group's 50th anniversary in style. Members and their partners joined Kia press and PR supremo Dan Sayles and his friendly and efficient press office team to feast on a superb, seven-course tasting menu all topped off by a specially made birthday cake featuring the group's 50th anniversary logo.



## ngmw NEWS

OUR 50th anniversary celebrations continue apace with several key events scheduled over the coming months.

Our now traditional pre-SMMT northern test day barbeque will once again provide guests with lively banter and food; our Northern Car of the Year deliberations are well under way and members will be getting racy in a Grand Prix style karting challenge.

You'll find full details inside this summer edition of Northern Group News along with fascinating insights into what our members have been up to from investing in movie star cars to educating school kids in the joys of motoring journalism - with the help of one of the most desirable supercars out there.

- David Whinyates  
Editor

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NGMW News is produced by the Northern

- Group of Motoring Writers, Britain's longest established regional motoring writers' group. The group represents journalists working for print and digital media with regional, national and worldwide audiences.
- Opinions expressed in NGMW News are those of the individual contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Northern Group of Motoring Writers.
- Main contributor: Alan Domville.
- Contributors: Andrew Evans, Andy Harris, George Loveridge, Tom Sharpe, Jonathan Smith, Damian Turner and Martin Ward.
- Contributions are always welcome - send your stories and pictures to Alan Domville at e.domville@btinternet.com

# A golden celebration

**IT WAS a historic event and, with the generous help of Kia's PR supremo Dan Sayles and his team, the Northern Group's golden anniversary was celebrated in some style.**

There were no fewer than 13 of the latest Kia models to test drive in between a

plethora of foodie treats - two breakfasts, a barbecue lunch, cream tea and a seven-course dinner - and our members turned out in record numbers to mark the occasion.

Our pictures show, right, from top: Bill and Joy Duckworth enjoy a pre-dinner drink with Les and Evelyn Oliver and Frederic Manby; Dan Sayles, Alan Domville and new group chairman Andrew Evans make the announcements; Jon and Lynn Smith enjoy lunch; afternoon tea served in front of a vintage double decker bus.

Below: Kia PR ladies Chloe Farmer, left, and Milissa Ordonea relax after a hard day's work and the scene at dinner as guests tuck in to a seven course tasting menu.

Left, from top: A regal wave from former group member and retired Kia PR director Steve Kitson who was invited as guest of honour with his wife, Sue; Keith Ward, Maurice Glover and Jon Smith share launch memories; the lunchtime barbie-queue as members and their partners take a break from driving.





Flashback to 2021 when the Toyota Yaris GR was voted Northern Car of the Year.

# Come and join us for our relaxing pre-SMMT knees-up

MEMBERS of the group do love a social occasion and we are fortunate enough to be frequently hosted by car manufacturers when we attend their car launches and other events.

Away from the serious business of testing the newly launched vehicle in question, there is usually the opportunity to relax over dinner, with a few drinks to follow.

These past few years, as a way of repaying the hospitality, we have hosted a barbecue and social evening in the suitably swish surroundings of the Wood Hall Hotel (below), on the evening before the SMMT's annual test day north at Wetherby Racecourse.



Always a very jolly occasion, even if the weather rarely plays ball, it is our intention to stage this event once again this September. Invitations will be sent out shortly and all PRs who are journeying north will be very welcome to attend.

Wood Hall always ensures that we are well fed, and there will be wine and beer aplenty, plus soft drinks for those who need to drive or wish to keep a clear head in advance of the driving day to come.

The main purpose of the evening is to allow our members and guests to relax in informal surroundings and that was certainly the case last year. Do join us again this year.

THE result of the 2023 Northern Car of the Year competition will be revealed at the SMMT's Test Day North in September.

The competition format remains unchanged with the top three models in six different categories initially chosen from a list of all new and significantly modified models which have been launched over the past year.

This year's contenders, listed, right, cover a wide selection of brands including two models each from Hyundai, Porsche and Mercedes-Benz.

Two Chinese-built EVs, from MG and BYD, made the final listing in the electric vehicle category but electrically-powered models also feature strongly in four other categories.

Manufacturers have been asked to provide examples of the nominated models for our Car of the Year test day which will be staged early next month at the Coniston Hotel near Skipton.

A judging panel of group members will put the cars through their paces to determine the category winners and the overall Northern Car of the Year 2023.

# Northern Car of the Year contenders revealed

## Small Cars

Abarth 500e  
Hyundai Kona  
Smart #1

## Electric Vehicles

Hyundai Ioniq 6  
MG4 EV  
BYD Atto 3

## Family Cars

VW ID. Buzz  
Ford Tourneo Courier  
Renault Austral

## Luxury Cars

Porsche Cayenne  
Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV  
BMW 7 Series

## Fun Cars

Kia EV6 GT  
Maserati MC20 Cielo  
Porsche 911 Dakar

## SUVs

Lexus RX  
BMW X1  
Mercedes-Benz GLC

Former chairman Andy Harris, along with members Frederic Manby and Martin Ward, ventured south to attend the SMMT's summer fun evening. The SMMT invited manufacturers' press and PR departments, motoring writers and business and economy journalists to join them for the event held on a moored boat on the River Thames. Drinks and nibbles were offered, and there were lots of interesting conversations. "A cracking soirée," says Martin who, along with Frederic and Andy, extend thanks to the SMMT for its hospitality.



# Andrew's in the driving seat



□ New chairman Andrew Evans at the wheel and, below, receiving the group's legendary ferret mascot from outgoing chairman Andy Harris following the group's AGM at Aldwark Manor.

WELL, here I am! For the first time in four years, there's a new face here in the From the Chair column and - lucky you - it's mine.

It's a great privilege to be chair of the group at any time, but particularly now in such a landmark year as we move into our second half-century.

Over the past four years, I've served as the group's vice chairman, so I've had a box seat for most of the changes that have taken place under the capable hands of my predecessor Andy.

Andy and I joined the group at roughly the same time - part of a run on new members called Andrew - and were among a cohort of largely online writers.

Since then we've seen a constitutional change which has allowed 'new media', including podcasters and video journalists, to join our throng. The group also has its own website, which you can read more about later.

Andy also oversaw changes to our major events. Our Car of the Year award now features a driving day, with the group's voting whittling down every new car from the previous 12 months to a selection of finalists which a panel of judges then assess to choose an overall winner.

There's also our pre-SMMT Test Day North soiree, taking place the night before the event itself for the benefit of those of you who've made the long trip up to the middle of Yorkshire.

If you've not made it to the previous events, I'd implore you to attend this year as the food and company are always excellent.

You don't, of course, need me to remind you of

## FROM THE CHAIR with Andrew Evans



the challenges of the last four years either, with a twofold assault on the industry.

COVID significantly impacted press events and vehicle loans, while the semiconductor shortage stymied production of the myriad electronic components of modern L1/L2 vehicles - resulting in smaller press fleets than most of us would like. That, thankfully, appears to be at an end now

“ Andy has performed an admirable job and I've inherited the role with the group in fine shape. I hope I can carry on in the same manner ”

It's fair to say that Andy has had a tricky challenge on the good ship NGMW but he performed an admirable job and I've inherited the role with the group in fine shape indeed. Perhaps a weight of expectation too, but I hope I can carry on in the same manner.



There are yet more challenges to come, as manufacturers (or rather their engineers) scramble to meet electrification legislation in 2030 and 2035. We are already seeing the effects too, with three in five new cars sold having some form of battery involved in the powertrain and one in six now exclusively electric.

It's certainly an interesting time in the industry, and we may see a very different picture in two years when I pass on the role to our new vice-chair, Annabelle Quirk.

# Music maestro please

Music and motoring are the twin passions of the Northern Group's newest member, **GEORGE LOVERIDGE**.

Brought up around classic cars, it was, perhaps, a given that he would make a career out of his love of motoring, but here George tells how he has also turned his passion for the guitar into a money-spinner...

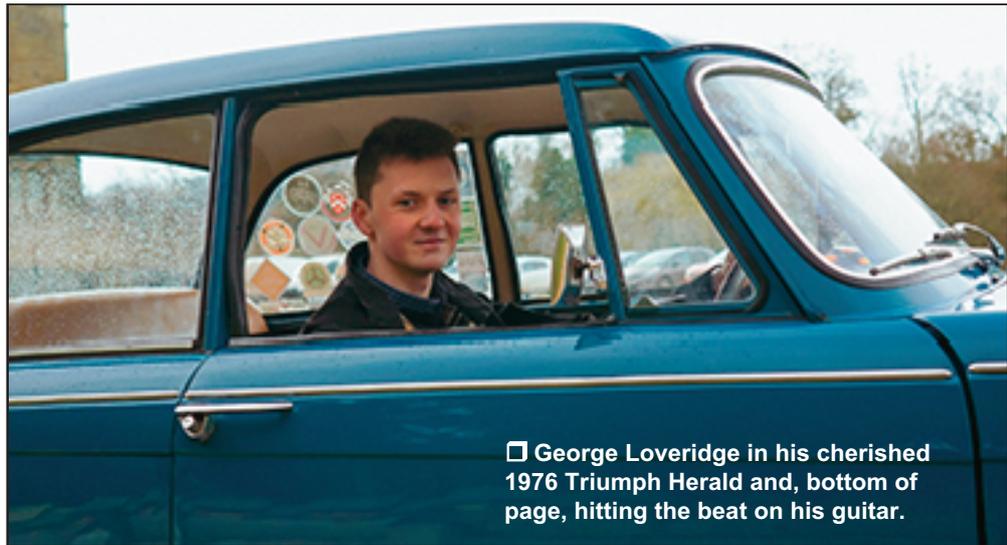
HOBBIES are great, aren't they? They're an excuse to indulge in something that you enjoy and are passionate about.

Hobbies don't always work out, but that's why we give them a go first. You don't have to be good or bad, gifted or talented. If you have fun doing it, then crack on.

Fortunately, I have been able to turn my hobbies - music and motoring - into career paths.

Music has always been prominent in my life. Having parents who regularly had 'proper' music playing as I grew up helped. Subsequently, I picked up the acoustic guitar when I was seven but I hadn't a clue where to start or what to do.

I started having lessons from one of my teachers at my first school. The following months must have been an interesting period for the rest of my family. Chord shapes, standard notation, riffs...



George Loveridge in his cherished 1976 Triumph Herald and, bottom of page, hitting the beat on his guitar.

I couldn't get the hang of it at all. After a teacher change, the penny eventually dropped.

During my GCSE year in high school, I was part of a five-piece covers band. We were called The Drive - I had nothing to do with the naming process, honest!

We never got anywhere; we just played the occasional birthday party, fundraiser, or pub gig. Most importantly, we played for the love of doing it. Me on lead guitar, my now partner Katie on vocals, and three other friends on guitar, bass and drums.

After we started our A-Levels, it became increasingly difficult to get five people in one room at the same time, with all of us being at different colleges and working different jobs. The Drive, therefore, was short-lived and died of natural causes.

Katie and I soon formed a duo called MissUnderstood and four years on we still perform in pubs, at parties and gin bars across West Yorkshire - even performing at the Prescott Hill Climb on one occasion.

Our new name is a nod to the band that Katie's parents were involved in back in the 1990s - MissChief.

My second guitar teacher, James, eventually became my boss. With almost 15 years of playing experience under my belt, my day job now sees me working as a guitar, ukulele and bass teacher at Kirklees Guitar School in Denby Dale, Huddersfield. Luckily James is a very chilled-out

person, which makes working for my old teacher much easier. With nearly 40 students per week, I am kept busy, but thoroughly enjoy teaching.

Cars, then, have also been extremely instrumental in who I am today. Growing up around various classic cars indoctrinated me into being a petrolhead through and through.

Attending car shows and motorsport events most weekends, I usually had a camera on hand. My profession as a motoring journalist and photographer started when I supplied photos for a Practical Classics feature in 2017. Since then, I have continued to take photos and add comments where necessary.

In 2021, I started my website called Driving Around, as contributing to other sites became increasingly difficult. Driving Around features new car reviews, classic car adventures and event reports - all run and contributed by me. Now a member of The Guild as well as the Northern Group, I take lots of time to create exciting content when I can.

Overall, music and motoring are me wrapped up. I have made it sound very easy, rolling hobbies into ways of making money. However, as anyone knows, turning things you enjoy into profitable endeavours is never easy. On occasion, it can be easy to lose that spark with the guitar, or not want to get up early to attend a racing event. But boy, are they both worth it.

◆ More from George on Page 15

**GEORGE** is already making his mark by helping organise a special event as part of the group's 50th birthday celebrations.

Scheduled to be held in October, it will give members the chance to race each other behind the wheel of SODI RT8 go-karts, which have been labelled as the 'best rental karts in the world'. Notably, these karts have fully adjustable seating positions, are notoriously reliable and, when unlimited, should hit up to 65mph!

The event will be staged in Grand Prix format

with practice sessions followed by three, eight-lap heats plus 12 time-based trial performance runs. There'll be medals and trophies for podium finishers.

The action takes place on Saturday October 14th at Wakefield F1 Indoor Go-Karting and places are still available at a cost of £45 per driver, plus the hire of helmets and balaclavas. To register an interest, please email Guy Loveridge at [gjcl69@aol.com](mailto:gjcl69@aol.com).

For more information on the venue go to: [www.wakefieldindoorkarting.co.uk/](http://www.wakefieldindoorkarting.co.uk/)

# We're spinning faster than ever on the web

Group chairman and website editor **ANDREW EVANS** reports on the latest developments which have provided a major boost to our on-line clicks...

LAST YEAR was a record year for the Northern Group's website and the first six months of 2023 have shown that the growth and public interest are still increasing.

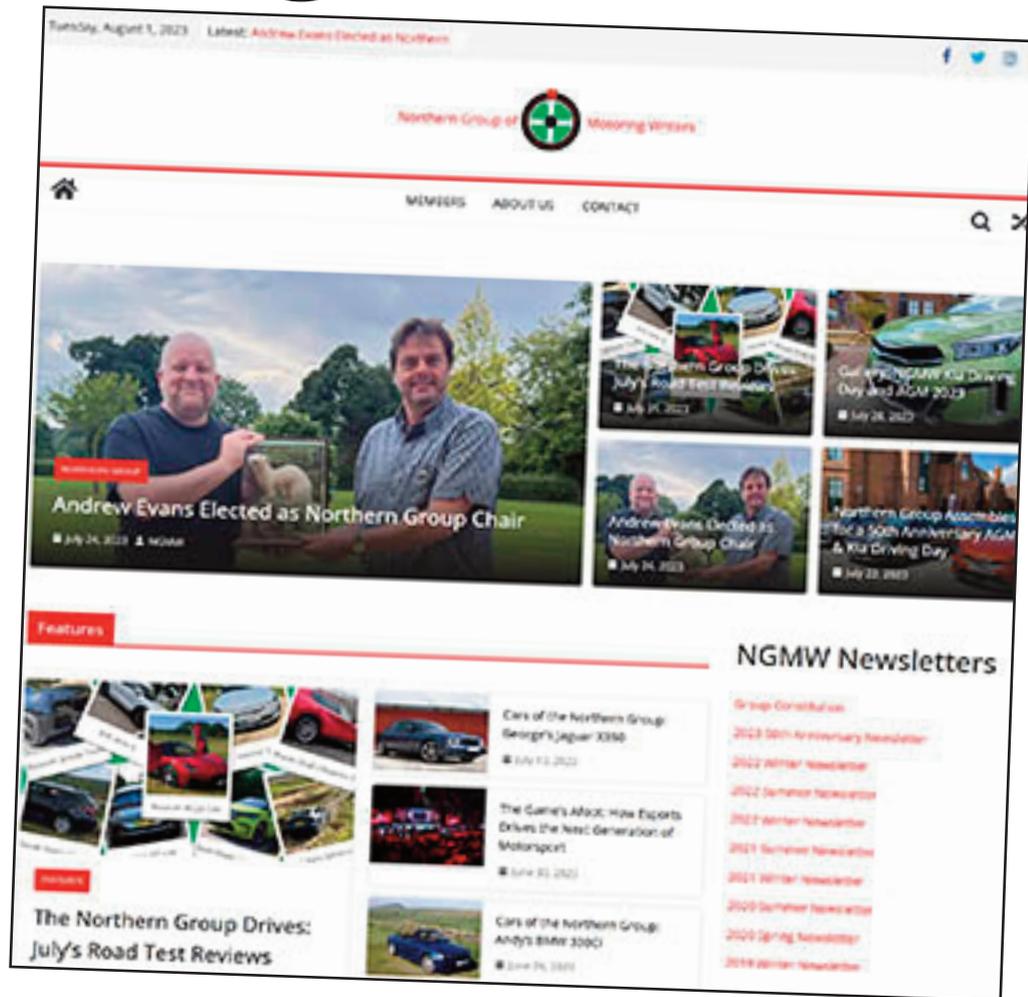
When I took over the website in 2019, it wasn't anything to shout about. It contained precious little information about the group itself or any of our activities – and hadn't been updated in around seven years. Little wonder then that its annual traffic was only in double-digits...

Today the site is made up of two core areas: the blog and the members' page.

The members' page features a full list of the current group membership – divided into group officers, regular members, and life members – combined with mugshots for us all. Every member also has a standard-format email address, of forename.surname@ngmw.co.uk, which redirects to a preferred real email address.

Over the last year, I've enhanced that with a 'bio' section. Clicking on an individual member's face takes you to a short biography which they have written themselves – not a task that many people relish – along with their outlets and social media accounts where applicable.

The blog is now a source for the Northern Group's own activities and anything industry-related that occurs in the north.



This is divided into four sections. At the top, you'll find 'Features', which covers feature articles on anything our members care to submit.

The section includes the Members' Cars feature, where you can read about the vehicles we drive between test cars and articles that appeared in previous newsletters and now also features a monthly round-up of reviews from across the Northern Group membership.

Below that is the Northern Group section with information about the group's activities and changes to personnel. That sits alongside the Events section, covering any manufacturer drive

days that either take place in the north or feature significant attendance from NGMW members. Galleries from these events also appear here.

Finally, there's a Northern News section that deals with anything affecting motoring in the north. This covers brands which have homes in the north, major facilities in the region, and anything else that might be relevant to the area.

According to my analytics, the latest developments have seen the site's traffic grow by four orders of magnitude since 2019. The total number of 'unique' users in 2022 was just under 24,000 with total site visits around ten times that.

Figures for this year so far show that 2023 has already blown well past that; we'd exceeded 2022's total figure in May and by the end of June we were already at 150 per cent of the total traffic figures of the previous year.

Independent site traffic analysis shows that the Northern Group's site is now the most-visited site of all the UK's regional motoring writers' groups, with monthly traffic close to 50 per cent higher than the next-best. Our own tools, now powered by Cloudflare, suggest that we're about 30 per cent busier even than that, while low bounce rates show that our visitors tend to have a good look around.

There's still more to come from the site, as I look to develop it further and in response to feedback from our colleagues in PR. For now, though, it's performing way beyond expectations!

## Alan's buggy buddy...



**GROUP** general secretary Alan Domville and wife Irene hit an unexpected snag on their way to the Kia driving day and group AGM at Aldwark Manor in July. His car's satnav route didn't take into account a bridge closure and he was faced with a detour of at least 45 minutes to get to the hotel. Alan phoned the hotel to report his late arrival and the hotel, which has its own golf course, saved the day - and Alan's time - by despatching a golf buggy to collect the stranded couple. Alan's car remained at the closed bridge for the duration of the event!

# Road trips are all Greek to me...

HAVING recently unearthed some old photographs, I was reminded of a road trip to Athens in the summer of 1987. It was my friend Neil's idea. My old car would be too thirsty so his mother's base model Peugeot 205 XE was commandeered for the journey.

I should at this point mention that Neil didn't drive, so I had a lot of miles ahead of me.

We left Kent early one morning and made it to the South of France before nightfall, the peppy little 954cc engine managing to cruise the autoroutes at a heady 75mph for hours on end. We camped in a service station, very hot and not very glamorous.

Day two saw us head around the coast to Venice, where we spent a morning taking in the sights before heading south into what was then Yugoslavia.

A warning light on the dashboard saw us make an unintended overnight stop in Zagreb, the only hotel we could easily find being a five-star Intercontinental. Quite what they thought of the two dusty, unwashed Brits I will never know.

We sought out the main Peugeot dealership the next day and were surprised to find it was little more than a back street garage with a couple of ramps. With much pointing, and a smattering of O-Level German, the issue was diagnosed as a loose wire, and we were soon on our way.

We arrived in Athens late in the evening, after a long day on what were then the poor roads that led south. We were hassled by German tourist buses who would pass us at breakneck speed, and encountered unlit lorries and private cars on the wrong side of the road – all very stressful for a then fairly inexperienced driver.

After three days it was time to head for home, but not before we had scrambled up to the Acropolis in the baking heat. I don't remember much apart from the fact we probably left the city with mild sunstroke.



**It was a question of Athens or bust for ANDY HARRIS when he set off with a non-driving pal on a marathon road trip in a bog-standard Peugeot 205.**



□ Posing with the Peugeot - a young Andy Harris by the Med and in the mountains

So, at 2pm or thereabouts on Friday afternoon, C205 DKN was pointed northwards, a new route plotted that would take us through Germany this time.

We drove more or less non-stop, pausing only when my eyes would stay open no longer, and made it back to the sleepy Kent village of Lenham for Sunday lunch. I feel exhausted at the very thought of all that driving, but such was the foolishness of youth.

And what of the 205? It covered the many thousands of miles without complaint, sipping petrol and remaining comfortable. We would have loved air conditioning, but at the time even reclining seats would have been a nice bonus.

The story of that 205 is not yet over as, a couple of years later, the car was offered for sale, and I bought it for my wife as a wedding present. She tells me many years later that she would rather have had jewellery!



My only other 205 experience was when I occasionally used to borrow a friend's 1.9-litre GTi model. It was exceptionally quick, but very twitchy when driven at speed. It was exciting and raw and I always felt it was just waiting for me to overstep the mark. I probably came close as I was (and probably still am) a confirmed speed freak.

Happy memories of 205 motoring and if anyone would care to lend me a GTi for a weekend, I promise to try and return it in one piece.

# Shooting an F1 star - it's kids' stuff!

NORTHERN Group member Tom Sharpe was among Goodwood Festival of Speed attendees left gutted after high-speed gusts of wind put paid to Saturday's celebration of performance cars.

But the only cancelled day in the 30-year-old event's history was thankfully followed by a fun-packed Sunday made possible by the hospitality of Genesis and impromptu encounters with a glut of motor racing superstars.

"It was disappointing for so many people losing the Saturday, but the winds were very severe and the organisers took the right decision," says Tom.

And he adds: "I guess it gave all the PRs a well-deserved rest after a busy Thursday and Friday, though, and for the Sharpe family it just piled on the pressure to make the most of our Sunday."

Tom, the motoring editor for the

Rotherham Advertiser and a UK Car of the Year judge, came up with a new tactic for getting closer than ever to the Festival of Speed stars during his family's Sunday at the event... deploying his 10-year-old son Charlie and six-year-old daughter Sienna as make-shift paparazzi.

Tom said: "I quickly realised that a 40-year-old bloke approaching people for selfies had less chance of delivering results than a pair of children, so I let Charlie and Sienna do their stuff."

The tactic yielded impressive results. On the F1 paddock's Williams stand, Charlie started the day by squeezing through the crowds to bag a picture with none-other than Jenson Button.

The meeting with the one-time F1 world champion was followed by an encounter with McLaren Racing's Oscar Piastri, who recently finished fourth in the British Grand Prix – a strong result in his debut season.

"Sienna wasn't paying attention at the time, but he said 'come on, she has to get in'," Charlie recalled of



Young Charlie Sharpe's tactics pay off as he snaps a selfie with Jenson Button

his encounter with the F1 rookie.

Not satisfied with that, Charlie and Sienna still had time to grab snaps with a gaggle of other racing stars before heading home.

Wacky Races legends Dick Dastardly and his dog Muttley, Penelope Pitstop and The Slag Brothers, and Rock and Gravel, all obliged for pictures.

Tom said: "Cheryl and I love the Festival of Speed, it's a highlight of our calendar, but while we go for the cars, for the kids it's more about the experience of the event itself.

"Seeing them really embrace it in 2023 and really get close to some legends of motorsport – especially after the recent memories of COVID lockdowns – was special."

## Indiana Jones and the suicide doors

I'VE ALWAYS wanted a classic Fiat 500 and it had to be a 500D with rear-opening suicide doors.

This particular model has become very rare over the past few years so when I heard about one – a 1964 model - I was quick to act.

The previous owner, according to the V5, was Pinewood Studios but that scant piece of information provided little indication of the tiny car's fascinating recent history.

I knew from the person acting on behalf of the seller that it had been driven on location in Sicily and then Pinewood. I discovered that it had been used in a car chase scene in the recently released Disney blockbuster, Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny.

In the movie it was driven by Harrison Ford accompanied by Fleabag actor Phoebe Waller-Bridge. They 'steal' it from a wedding, drive it down the narrow streets of Cefalu and use it as a getaway car. The scene doesn't last long, but

it was long enough to recognise the 500D and give it true star car status.

I agreed a price, and it was delivered up to Huddersfield. When it arrived on the transporter, it looked even better than in the photographs I had seen. To say it is immaculate and brand new is an understatement - Disney must have spent a fortune on completely renovating it. It drives like new too, which doesn't say a lot, as, even when new, they weren't that easy, or pleasurable to drive!

So, my classic car collection has now doubled in size, the little Fiat now joining the 1968 Mini Moke in my fleet. I was so lucky to find this near-perfect 59-year-old Fiat, but I won't be selling it any time soon, or the Moke!

- Martin Ward



Decked out for a wedding: Martin's movie star Fiat 500D

# A welcome in the hillsides



ON THE usual daily commute, the all-new Range Rover is pretty much what you should expect from a £120k 4x4 - an absolute dream.

It cocoons you from the outside world in serene opulence and fills parking spots with only millimetres to spare. But the Range Rover is also designed and built for adventure, so I took it on one.

After passing through Ruthin, North Wales, I took the B5105 and headed for Cerrigydrudion, then right towards Llyn Brenig where I tootled along the dirt road that circumnavigates this huge lake.

After stopping to take the odd photo I pulled over at a favourite spot for some dinner, or lunch if you're a southerner.

The weather had been quite grim with a mixture of light and heavy showers, but, as I perched myself on the Range Rover's tailgate, the clouds dispersed and the sun made an appearance. I do miss having a tailgate to sit on.

I was going to bring a stove with me and some other bits of kitchenware and cook something fancy, but I cheated and bought a sausage roll,

There's nothing **Damian Turner** likes more than an off-road adventure. The man behind TheMudLife website decided to put a luxurious Range Rover to the test in the Welsh mountains...



and a turkey and stuffing buttie, though I did bring a flask full of coffee.

The dirt roads around Llyn Brenig are just that, nothing arduous, just the odd water-filled hole to avoid, and quite often you'll find plenty of cars parked up as it's a popular place to fish.

Returning to the B4501, then A543, which forms part of the so-called EVO Triangle, I headed towards a green lane that would take me to the Lost Lake. Not sure why it's called that, maybe it's a dead-end and at some point everyone forgot

that it existed?

Anyhow, the lane leading up to the Lost Lake isn't that demanding, it's a sustainable gravel track that, with drainage ditches and sharp rocks on either side, can get a bit narrow in places, something to be wary of especially if you're in a wide 4x4, or you're exploring at night.

For these sections, I made good use of the Range Rover's camera system, especially those under the door mirrors that show the front wheels. They're an absolute godsend in these situations.

As a matter of course I raised the HSE's suspension and, just like any 4x4 riding on air suspension, at any speed over 10mph the Range Rover felt a bit thumpy.

It was a clear day and the higher I drove the more spectacular the views became. This is why I love Wales so much - that and the often-secluded roads.

After opening and closing many gates I eventually arrived at the lake and pulled in to take a few more photos and soak up the view. Despite hints of blue sky, the clouds in the distance looked quite menacing.

After devouring my custard cream with another mug of coffee, I set off on foot to have a look at the last section of the lane that takes you to an abandoned farmhouse.

The last 100 metres consist of deep water, steep angles and the odd large rock. The last time I drove it I was in a Jeep Wrangler Rubicon and the muddy water went over the bumper - and it's a tall bumper. I have to admit that the depth of the water didn't bother me as I was confident of the Range Rover's 900mm wading ability, but it was the steep lean and narrowness that had me concerned.

Despite my confidence in the Range Rover's off-road prowess, I was less confident that I would make it through without causing some panel damage so, for once, common sense prevailed and I walked back to the car for another brew. I was a little disappointed, but confident that I'd made the correct decision.



# McLaren on the school run



THE PHRASE I hear most often when my job comes up in conversation - aside from questions about the best car I've driven and what car I'd recommend to them - is something along the lines of how great a job that must be.

The most recent example came from the headteacher at my youngest daughter's primary school.

As the end of the school year approached and the Year 6s were about to leave for secondary - soon to make the major life choices on what they want to be when they're older - the school was holding a careers week.

It would involve parents, and some ex-pupils, coming to the school with any time they had to

**ANDREW EVANS**  
became the coolest dad  
in class when he paid a visit  
to his daughter's school  
to talk about his career...



spare, to talk to children of all ages about their jobs: the good, the bad, how they got there, and how the children themselves could tread the same path.

Having previously worked in schools myself I thought it might be a fun day, so I volunteered my time.

However, I couldn't very well turn up to talk about how great it is to drive cars for a living without bringing something flashy.

A few years back I accidentally won a supercar for a weekend. With apologies to my subsequent friend and colleague Sean Ward of the Southern Group, I set the fastest time on a racing game simulator during a UK-wide event staged by McLaren - not knowing that the prize was a 570S for a weekend. I did it again a couple of years later, although deliberately this time.

Faces have changed a little since then - Wayne Bruce was PR chief at McLaren at the time. He's now at Bentley where I had the good fortune to catch up with him earlier this year as Crewe hosted our January meeting, but McLaren's press office was happy to help out with a week's loan of a 720S for such a worthy event.

I thought I was quite happy with that outcome, but the headteacher was overjoyed and gave me top billing for the day - above the firefighters, police officers, doctor, nurse, and midwife. No pressure.

As it was a nice, dry day, we put the McLaren onto the sports field, allowing the kids to come out in groups to have a look - and one or two chances to sit in it, if they could beat the teachers and staff to it.

The older groups had to deal with a short presentation from me beforehand, about the pros and cons of the job and how it could be something they could do in the future.

I was surprised by how engaged the kids were too. A lot of them had questions, mostly about my experiences: how fast had I driven; what's the most expensive car I've been in; had I ever crashed a car; who's the most famous person I've interviewed? Plenty of questions too about the 720S - vital statistics aside, there's not much a kid loves more on a supercar than doors that go up!

For those of us with school-age children, it's something I can heartily recommend, particularly as we're often told youngsters are less and less interested in cars and driving.

I can tell you that the shouts to rev it as I left the car park, and the comments my daughter got when she got into it say otherwise - not to mention the cool dad points!



□ A lesson in speed for the children at Andrew's daughter's school



❑ Wizard of Oz: in Australia this Honda CR-V was £10K cheaper than the UK asking price

# Andy's Aussie odyssey

MANY folks find buying a new car a rather daunting experience. I have always seen it as a challenge and one which I enjoy. This might explain why I have owned so many cars and am always on the lookout for something new.

During a recent trip to Melbourne, my Aussie hosts needed a new family car, and I was only too happy to help. Boot space was a priority but my suggestion of an estate car was immediately rebuffed.

An SUV was required, the raised driving position being the draw. It's the same the world over, which is why this type of car now dominates the sales charts.

With a budget in mind, I began the search on the local Autotrader website. I lined up a few cars which were worth seeing and, as is so often the case, most of the dealerships were in the same neck of the woods.

First on the hit list was a Hyundai Tucson, for sale at a Mitsubishi garage. A quick walkaround and this car was immediately dismissed – you get a feeling.

Just across the road was garage number two, a car supermarket. They were offering not one, but three late Kia Sportage SUVs, all around the same price, spec and mileage.

We picked the nicest and the

A trip down under turned into something of a busman's holiday for former group chairman  
**ANDY HARRIS**



helpful salesman soon had us behind the wheel. The car drove nicely and back at base, a good part exchange allowance was offered.

We now had a possible contender. My only qualm was that we were told by the salesman it had been serviced outside the Kia dealer network and therefore the much-lauded seven-year warranty was null and void.

I was starting to run out of options as it seemed everyone was looking for the same type of vehicle as us. However, staring at me across the road was an MG dealer. A new HS was within budget, and I could see my companions had warmed to the idea of a brand-new car.

A quick test drive was uneventful and the appeal of a car with a high level of standard equipment was strong. I am still not taken with the build quality of Chinese cars and, with the boot on the small side, we resolved to return home and do some measuring.

There was one other car that had briefly caught my eye on the Autotrader website. The car in question was a new Honda CR-V which pushed the budget by a

further \$5,000, but I decided we should at least consider it.

With a new model on the horizon, the Japanese company was shifting all the existing models at good prices.

An appointment was made and bright and early the next day we met the lovely and extremely talkative Harry at West Melbourne Honda. He quickly informed us that there was only one Vi base spec model now left in the whole country. Sensing that we thought this was marketing twaddle, he showed us the Australian stock list to prove his point.

The car was too good to resist even though the part exchange allowance was not as much as we'd hoped for. This was countered by a generous seven-year warranty and half-price servicing for the same period. The deal was done, much to everyone's delight and the car was collected after my return to the UK.

On reflection, I reckon we got a bit of a bargain. Walk into your local friendly Honda dealership here and the cheapest CR-V on offer will cost over £30,000, yet down under we snaffled one for a smidgen over £18,000.

If Harry had been able to source another, I would have been tempted to buy it and put it in a shipping container, destination North Yorkshire.

Maybe there's a new business in the making, one which might supplement the income of an impoverished journo. Watch this space!

## OBITUARIES

### Julian Leyton

Julian, who headed up Citroen's PR department with Mark Raven, died at his home in April following a long battle with cancer. He was 66.

He lived with his wife Julia in the west country and his cycling commute to and from Citroen's Slough headquarters – a round trip of 240 miles – became legendary. He retired from the company in 2009 after 21 years.

### Ted Wilkinson

Ted, who had undergone the amputation of both of his legs six years ago, was 84.

He joined the long defunct News Chronicle when he was 16 and also worked for various magazines including Motor Sport and Motoring News along with the Enfield Advertiser for whom he was appointed a director.

He also provided a syndicated motoring column for the Central Press agency.

### Stuart Bladon

Known for his economy driving prowess, Stuart, who was 89, joined Autocar in the mid-1950s and he carried out road testing for the magazine for 28 years.

He was probably the last surviving motoring writer to have attended the launch of the original Mini in 1959.

He later contributed to a host of motoring magazines and was challenged to take the Jaguar E-Type up to 150mph prior to its introduction in 1962 - and he duly succeeded.

A year earlier he had sustained serious head injuries when he was thrown through the windscreen of a Sunbeam Alpine which crashed during the Acropolis Rally in Greece. He was given a blood transfusion at the scene and then taken to hospital where he was able to write his report on the rally a few days later.

Stuart was chairman of the Guild in 1977 and helped to found the Southern Group.

### Mike Bacon

Guild and Southern Group member Mike Bacon, who became well-known to us as a regular attender of new model launches, has died after a long illness. He was the motoring correspondent, chief sub and features editor at the Brighton Evening Argus.

□ Jon Smith with the latest family motors - a Beemer for himself and a Mazda for wife Lynn.



# I've become a back seat driver!

I'VE ALWAYS considered myself a fairly decisive sort of chap.

No dithering in clothes shops, a glance at a restaurant menu before ordering and no hesitation at the bar!

But when it comes to choosing what car to fork out for, well that's an altogether different matter.

The brunette, ie my wife Lynn, has little or no interest in motorised transport but prefers SUVs to drive - better visibility, she says - and entrusts me to do the homework before buying.

Me, I've always had sports cars, apart from a brief period when we towed a horsebox and I made the mistake of getting rid of a Porsche 944 in favour of a Land Rover Defender.

The list of tasty treats I've owned includes a TVR 2500M, two Honda S2000s, two Alfa GTVs and a BMW Z4 3.0S.

A couple of months ago, I reckoned it was time for renewal and to bid a final farewell to my second Porsche.

I'd had my Boxster for eight years - the longest I'd ever owned a single car. I loved it - a 2.7-litre flat-six, manual transmission, in red with black Carrera alloys and a black hood. With less than 20k on the clock from new - it was still in its prime.

But a new dog which had grown more than we had imagined meant that it was torture for the brunette to have on her knee. We needed a back seat, no matter how small. Oh yes, and we both wanted the new car to have a sunroof if it was a tin-top.

We'd had the wind through our hair for so many years, that we reckoned an opening sunroof was just about an acceptable compromise.

I forensically combed my auto knowledge and sifted through What Car spec pages for 2+2s that handled well, were within budget and had a bit of poke.

Audi TT RS, BMW 440 Coupe, Merc C-Class

**When a growing pet meant that Jonathan Smith was faced with giving up his cherished red Porsche Boxster rag-top he was faced with some tricky car buying decisions...**



Coupe, all came up on my radar. As did racy hatches like the new Type R Civic and Golf R.

I briefly considered a two-plus-two convertible like an Audi RS5 Cabriolet but it was, after all, a chopped-off coupe with inevitably compromised stiffness. The other thing was that many of the options on my list were just too big for our needs.

Then I had a new BMW M240i xDrive on test for a week from Mr Harrison at BMW HQ. Well, I fell for it big style. That straight six with twin turbos and a mighty 369bhp on tap was irresistible.

Here was a fairly compact, nimble and quick four-seater with big car comfort and similar acceleration figures to a 911, which would have been my first choice had I got £80k to spare!

Considerable investigation and a month later I located a demo M240i for sale with 2,000 miles on the clock in Brooklyn grey with tan leather upholstery and all the bells and whistles plus a glass sliding sunroof. Needless to say, I chopped in the Boxster (sadly) and bought the Beemer from Group One BMW in Cambridge.

The blow of saying goodbye to the Porsche was

slightly softened by its value increasing by £5k in the last six months.

Lynn's favoured wheels for the last three years had been a high-spec 1.6-litre petrol Qashqai. It swallowed up everything from prams for the grandchildren to the 10 hanging baskets which adorned our newly acquired cottage. It even acted as a storeroom for furniture yet to be placed in our new home.

Its replacement became a close call between a three-year-old Peugeot 3008 and a Mazda CX-5. In the end, the Mazda won.

Yes, maybe you've guessed it... the Maz we spotted, very smart in metallic dark blue, had a sliding glass sunroof. It also has electric seats, leather seating and a head-up display.

Almost three years old, it had just 14k miles on the clock and felt as new and pristine as Martine's glistening test cars.

It is proving a cracking, roomy, all-purpose transport on an everyday basis and is one of the best high-riders to drive.

So that's me done with car buying for a few years...

# Leader of the Renaulution

RENAULT, Alpine and Dacia will have a new man at the top of the press and PR team from next month when **Jim Holder** joins Renault Group UK as director of communications.

Previously the editorial director of Haymarket Automotive, publisher of leading automotive titles including What Car?, Autocar and PistonHeads, Jim will work with **Rachel Goodwin** – who will take on the role of head of media relations - and the current communications team which has also welcomed **Lauren Prema** back in her role of press relations manager following a year's family leave.

"The Renaulution era is transforming the company, and I'm thrilled to be part of it," says Jim. "From the Renault Scenic and Rafale through to the R5 and R4 and more, Renault is undergoing a period of incredible investment.

"Dacia is an amazing success story, boosted most recently by the Jogger and looking ahead to the all-new Bigster. Alpine, meanwhile, is on the cusp of an incredible reinvention as an all-electric brand with a range of vehicles. Together, I'm convinced they make Renault Group the most exciting automotive company to work for today."

The Škoda press office has said a sad goodbye to **Jo Catchpole**, who has left the Volkswagen Group after 14 years.

Jo started her motoring PR career at Porsche in 2009. She moved to Blakelands ten years ago and worked with both the Škoda and Audi press and PR teams.

Škoda's head of PR and communications, **Pietro Panarisi**, says: "I know that Jo's enthusiasm, organisational skills and energy will be missed by both the Škoda PR team and the motoring media as she embarks on new ventures away from the Group."

Jo's successor will be announced in due course, meanwhile **Charlotte Moss** continues in her role as PR manager for brand and product while **Clare Pleasants** remains our contact for test cars in her



□ Jim Holder

## Motor Industry News with Alan Domville

role as press fleet manager.

**Kate Thompson** has been appointed the head of Volkswagen Group UK's corporate and public relations department following the retirement in June of **Oliver Larkin**.

Kate has been with VW for more than 20 years, most recently as head of marketing, PR and communications for commercial vehicles.

She is succeeded in that role by **Eve Tyers** who joined the VW Group in 2003 and spent five years in Audi marketing before leaving to work with several fashion brands, most recently Victoria's Secret.

Within **Mike Orford**'s media-facing team, Grant McPherson has been promoted to the role of PR manager while **Trevor Rickwood** has joined the communications team as press officer for corporate and lifestyle affairs.

Trevor has been involved in journalism and PR for 30 years and since 2008 he has been editing website content for the VW Group's retailer networks.

**Richard Leonard**, who succeeded James Clark as head of press and public relations at Toyota in April, has now left the company "to take time out."

Before joining Toyota, Richard had provided consultancy services to Honda for whom he

directed motor shows, and Fiat Chrysler. He led the European introduction of the Fisker EV start-up and the global launch of Project Thunderball, Weissman's pure electric roadster. James left Toyota to join the National Farmers' Union.

**Sheena Hamilton** has retired from Mercedes-Benz after 28 years; most recently as PR manager concerned with brand and lifestyle affairs. The company has also said farewell to automotive PR manager **Hunter Skipworth**.

Hyundai has appointed **Emma Illman** as its PR coordinator. Emma was formerly a senior account executive with MPA Creative where she worked as media officer for the British Touring Car Championship.

The new press fleet manager with Honda is **Brad Beningfield** who has succeeded **Donovan van der Walt**. Brad is from South Africa where he worked for Volkswagen and Audi in various roles.

**Kevin Fitzpatrick**, who helped to oversee the creation of the Nissan factory in Sunderland 38 years ago has retired. He was one of the 22 original supervisors who welcomed us to the press launch of the facility back in 1985.

Kevin eventually became the company's senior vice president for manufacturing and supply for markets in Africa, the Middle East, India, Europe and Oceania.



□ Trevor Rickwood

# My hero? It's granddad's old Moggie!

**GEORGE LOVERIDGE** has driven plenty of cars but, he reveals, nothing compares with his granddad's 1956 Morgan which he first fell in love with as a three-year-old

A CHILDHOOD hero may be a film or music star, a sports personality or even a family member. For whatever reason, when we're young there's always someone or something that stands out as being so untouchably cool, and admirable.

Forever a car enthusiast, my childhood hero was always somewhat out of the ordinary.

My first-ever memory, as far as I can recall, was exploring my granddad's garage aged two or three.

What's so important about this? Well, for me, it was the first time I distinguished cars as something more than just an everyday tool.

For in this garage were a few motorcycles of which I have no real memory, an Austin 7 Cambridge Special and a 1956 Morgan Plus 4.

Eventually, I would learn to drive in the very same Austin 7. However, the Morgan in its Bugatti Blue paintwork with Lotus Yellow wheels caught my eye more than anything had done before.

Somewhere, there are photos of this occasion, maybe lost with the memories of those motorcycles. Despite not even having started school I was utterly captivated by this bizarre and wonderful machine.

Naturally, being in the family, I got to visit the car throughout my childhood. If I was lucky, my grandad and I would take it out for a spin and perhaps attend a local car show. Whatever the occasion, it was very special to me. A real sign of getting older was not being afraid of the car when it would backfire on numerous starting attempts.

But why did the car continue to be so captivating? In 2009, it was taken to be breathed on by the late Chris Lawrence - the very same man who took Morgan to success at Le Mans in 1962. Our previously sedate Morgan Plus 4 was converted to full Lawrence Tune specification with specs



matching those of the Le Mans-winning TOK 258 Plus Four Supersport.

To test the new twin Webber carburetors, four-branch exhaust manifold, racing camshaft and numerous other modifications, we took the car to the very first Bring Your Own Vehicle Day hosted by The Guild of Motoring Writers.

We covered hundreds of miles across scenic country roads, blasting down stretches of motorways and stopping for the occasional roadside repair. Although a passenger, I enjoyed that car more than ever that day. At the age of seven, I could never dream of driving something that I looked up to so much.

**“ I've driven more than 50 different cars and this is one of the only ones that I feel I can truly connect with. ”**

Fast forward almost 15 years, and I am now fortunate enough to find myself able to get behind the wheel of the very same car - the car that I had spent hours in the passenger seat of, hours cleaning and polishing and still more hours just looking at it.

They always say, 'never meet your heroes', and most people agree with this. But I had already met mine and was well acquainted with it. However, the driving experience was extremely different to anything I had experienced before.

Firstly, the huge steering wheel sits so close to

your chest that you must drive with your elbows at 90 degrees, just to turn it. Secondly, I'm a slim six-footer and there's a remarkable lack of space for me in the cabin. Thankfully we don't have the roof up very often so getting in and out is much easier, but still bordering on the undignified.

We can't forget that the Morgan dates back to 1956 and effectively has a race car set-up. As a result, every gear change must be calculated with the utmost precision. Don't feel like double de-clutching? Tough! If you don't put the effort in, the car lets you know!

With a fire-breathing set of Webbers, you can't drive how you'd expect. She only responds to but delicate throttle movements. Should you wish to slow down, you must inform the drum brakes a few weeks in advance.

With all that said, when you get it right, the car is an absolute dream to drive. It encourages and exudes a bygone era of motoring that I am so fortunate to have now sampled.

If you're sympathetic enough, you get the most rewarding results. Each gear change is satisfactory, especially on the way down. The torque from the tuned engine is so incredibly tall and with enough top-end power to get you in trouble if you're not careful!

I've driven more than 50 different cars, and this is one of the only ones that I feel I can truly connect with.

My granddad's now in his mid-80s and I can return the favour and take him to car shows - we've just swapped seating positions, but we're still in the same car.



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