



Crisis... what crisis?



No test cars, no events, but why not get your head out of the sand and have a laugh with us as we dredge up tales of launches past...

...and join us in paying tribute to the talents of our wittiest writer, the late Steve Orme.

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NORTHERN GROUP members turned out in force when we were offered the rare chance to visit Bentley's Crewe factory early in the new year.

Members gathered at the company's visitor centre and were able to admire some of the company's most memorable cars, including the oldest surviving Bentley - EXP2 from 1919 -

and the British Racing Green Speed 8 racer which came in second when Bentley scored a memorable 1-2 at Le Mans in 2003.

A factory tour highlighting the craftsmanship of the leather and wood trim shops followed a typically entertaining presentation by head of PR Wayne Bruce, while a second group of members took to the roads to test drive a selection of the company's latest models which included the new Bentayga Hybrid and the Continental GT.

Bentley boys...

ngmw News

Coronavirus has put the entire motor industry on the back foot. With no launches to attend and no cars to road test, motoring writers are also feeling the effects.

It's at times like this when we all need cheering up, so we've done our best to bring a little light relief to this edition of NGMW News with a selection of amusing tales from our members. Many of them provide recollections of launches past and some of the individuals who made them so memorable. Apologies for the quality of some of the pictures, but I hope they will put a smile on your face.

And, as much as anything, this fun edition is a fitting tribute to the talents of our late member and friend Steve Orme, who sadly passed away in February.

- David Whinyates
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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.
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- Contributions are always welcome - send your stories and pictures to Alan Domville at e.domville@btinternet.com



It takes how long? Steve Nelson quizzes one of Bentley's technicians during the factory visit.



Coronavirus has emptied our roads. It should be a motoring writer's dream but instead it's brought us to a standstill and all we can do is wait for the...



New challenges ahead for us all

FROM THE CHAIR
with Andy Harris



I HAVE worked from home for many years, so the current lockdown should not present me with too many issues. Aside from writing and other work-related issues, I am lucky enough to have a large garden which is finally being whipped into shape.

However, what I miss the most, and have perhaps always taken for granted, is the ability to go for a drive. Since passing my driving test more years ago than I care to remember, I have found time behind the wheel to be a tonic and a way to unwind.

Instead I must content myself with a twice weekly two-mile round trip to the supermarket. My Land Rover Discovery Sport test car seems to be coping with this challenge rather well, its capacious boot coping with the modest supplies needed by the Harris household. The Firenze red paintwork looks rather fetching in Booths' car park too!

There is also now time to catch up with my fleet of ageing cars. Tyres have been checked, fluid levels topped up and each one is getting a much overdue deep clean both inside and out. My battery trickle charger is working overtime too, so that when the time comes, all are ready for action.

Amongst the diary casualties was this year's Geneva Motor Show, cancelled at the last

moment. Already missing many major manufacturers, it is to be hoped that this excellent event will return next year, bigger and better than ever.

This October's biennial show in Paris will not follow its traditional format and is unlikely to



attract much interest from the world's motoring press.

All car launches are of course now on hold and it was going to be a busy year. The new Defender was high on my list of anticipated drives, but such delights will have to wait. I have also had to put off playing around with the latest Golf...

Since our last newsletter, and of far more importance, the group has said goodbye to one of its longest serving members. A packed crematorium was a good indication of how much Steve Orme was loved and admired by all. My last drive with him was on a Jeep event in the Lake District. The pouring rain and rough terrain did nothing to dampen the spirits, Steve's razor-sharp wit making light of the occasion. He will be much missed by all.

The Motor Industry will face many new challenges when this time of crisis is over. Many cash-strapped families will wonder whether having two cars on a PCP is such a good idea, though I suspect our love of new cars with the latest technology will see such trivialities soon overlooked.

There will be many new cars to drive, old friends to catch up with, but in the meantime, stay safe, keep well and perhaps find time to catch up on reading about cars. Our eclectic mix of members have a wonderful back catalogue of articles to keep you amused.

You only have to ask.



Our friend and colleague Steve Orme passed away in February after a brave fight against illness. His sense of humour and edgy writing style will be sorely missed. Here, his long-time friend JONATHAN SMITH recalls some of the fun times they shared together..

Steve Orme - a tribute

NOW, a couple of months after Steve's early death I find it possible to recall some of the many hilarious things that happened to us.

We probably shared cars on launches over tens of thousands of miles in the 40 years we had been buddies.

I must add that during many of those miles we were probably heading in the wrong direction – neither of our map-reading skills was much good.

I remember us being on a BMW launch in the South of France sharing a 7 Series and arriving at a beautiful chateau hotel.

We drew up on the gravel drive to

be greeted by a butler in black tie and carrying a tray of glasses of red wine.

Steve, uncharacteristically (!), grabbed the first glass as he got out of the car and sampled it. He coughed and spluttered, then promptly spat the contents of his mouth into a nearby bush, and told the Frenchman exactly what he thought of it.

The waiter was aghast and tried to convince Steve the wine was superb and the product of his uncle's vineyard, highly regarded in the region.

One or two other launch cars rocked up and were treated to similar hospitality. And several not only swigged the wine but asked for

more. One prominent Southern journalist even tried to tap the waiter for a free case.

Steve's sharp palette and incisive reaction got their reward when the PR boss, the legendary Raymond Playfoot, gathered the press corps together that evening and played a video of everyone's reactions to the spoof!

It turned out the waiter was an actor and the whole event had been filmed. The wine, it turned out, was cheap supermarket plonk diluted with vinegar.

Back in the Eighties and Nineties, us chaps were always expected to wear shirts and ties and a smart suit at launches and presentations.

Travelling on cramped private jets – remember those? – or by train, the shirts and jackets usually ended up like crumpled rags by the time we changed for dinner.

Always one to be dapper and well-turned out, Steve had the answer.

He would hang his shirt and jacket on the shower rail, just out of range of the water jets and turn the tap on hot to make the creases disappear.

At one such event we met, as usual, for a swift one at the bar before the evening press conference.

Steve was late (unusual) and when he arrived his face was flushed and his smart new shirt instead of being



Whether it was dressing up as chauffeur Parker for an exclusive drive of Ford's FAB1 Thunderbirds car (top), browsing the lingerie on a market stall (above) or dressing up with other Northern Group cowboys on a Toyota launch in Spain, Steve was always game for a laugh. He is second right in the Group shot (left) with, from left, Jonathan Smith, Bernard Gent, David Whinyates, Roger Stansfield and then NGMW member Steve Kitson.

light blue was transparent ...and sopping wet and steaming. Yes, it had fallen into the shower. Fortunately, the jacket hadn't suffered the same fate.

We had a laugh and thereafter we both settled for crumpled cotton!



STEVE ORME didn't just road test cars, he took his readers on a helter-skelter ride through the highways and byways of his terrific sense of humour.

He wrote for the Ormskirk Advertiser but his acerbically witty prose went nationwide with Trinity Mirror's Driving Force syndication service. When Driving Force was given the chance to be the first in Britain to drive the FAB1 car created by Ford for the new Thunderbirds movie in 2004, Steve was the obvious man for the job.

I make no apologies for reprinting his story here - for those who didn't see it at the time, please enjoy, remember and admire the talents of a man who's death has left a crater in the world of creative motoring journalism.

- David Whinyates

CHILDREN of the sixties, all scuffed shoes, short trousers and Mars Attack cards, will have fond memories of rushing home from school in anticipation of those few words that excited so much: "Five, four, three, two, one... your tea's ready."

No, sorry, that should have been... Thunderbirds are go.

It was the story of billionaire Jeff Tracy and his too-good-to-be-true sons jetting blondly where no blonde had jetted before, saving people who got their big toes stuck up impending nuclear disaster. International Rescue - to its members it was the fourth emergency service.

Scott, Virgil, John, Gordon and Alan. A sort of Bonanza with rockets. Puppets that flew into action dressed as Brooklyn hot-dog vendors and clearly supported by fishing line borrowed from the Japanese tuna fleet.

John and Alan flew solitary shifts in the IR communications space station. Perhaps it was something they ate. Scott flew TB1, Virgil flew TB2 and Gordon had won an Olympic swimming gold for the butterfly.



☐ Above and top: Steve Orme, as Parker, and colleague Jan Nethercote, as Lady Penelope, with Ford's FAB 1.



Yes, m'lady - I look a plant pot in this hat

Well you would learn to splash at quite a pace too if your swimming pool kept sliding away into a mountain. I loved the way they boarded their craft down a high-rise rubbish chute. But those sashes. They couldn't all have been Miss World, could they?

Then there was the posh totty. Lady Penelope Crichton-Ward and her old lag chauffeur, Parker, swanning about in a pink Roller rescuing cats trapped up trees. I reckon Jeff Tracy was pulling her strings.

Anyway, they're back. At a magic lantern theatre near you from this summer.

Every Thunderbirds fan had a favourite. Mine was TB2 and I built one from two cardboard boxes and stretched out a blanket to slide into it on. We crashed on take off. No, we crashed on take off.

Every fan would have loved to fly in a real Thunderbird. Well, all these years on I have. Not flown exactly. Actually, I've not flown at all because FAB 1 can't fly, can it?

Hand in hand with Pinewood Studios, Ford has built the film's FAB 1 which, along with a 16-metres long Thunderbird 2 and a specially constructed Tracy Island lake, form the main attraction on the company's Birmingham Motor Show stand.

At eight meters FAB 1 is not going to be provide an easy answer to the age old question: "Will it fit my garage". It's powered by a four-litre engine and has a column shift automatic gear change. And that, truly, is where the resemblance to anything spawned in Detroit ends.

True to the original it has six wheels - four front and two rear - but unlike the original there are no rocket launchers. It has an electrically retracting bubble canopy and, oh boy, it is very pink and very big. This is what a whale would look like turned inside out.

So what's it like to drive? Well, first a few rules apply. You must dress up as a complete plant pot and find a suitable Lady Penelope.

Sophia Myles, who plays the part in the film, had

to stay in and wash her hair. Starring credits then to Lady Jan Nethercote, looking every bit as stunning, whereas I look like the cargo section of Thunderbird 2.

When the film comes out the magic of the moving picture will capture a luxury motor car.

But FAB 1 is noisy, it weighs 2,100kgs so is cumbersome, and even with a full perspex canopy, has the visibility qualities of a caravan.

And that same canopy heats the interior to sauna-point in no time at all. Something that isn't helped by a total lack of ventilation.

Interior trim is tasteful 21st century fibreglass and hand laminated formica, with the steering gear from the Millennium Falcon.

I'd always imagined that, say, the bridge of the Starship Enterprise would be a tribute to imaginative engineering.

I know now it's more likely to be a tribute to AAA batteries and gaffer tape.

FAB1 isn't all dream world. The doors are double size like the Renault Avantime and open rearwards like the Mazda RX8 while Parker's seat swivels through 180 degrees just like almost every top shelf MPV. And the instrumentation would be considered passe by every French car designer.

Not that the whole package isn't as sci-fi as Spock's ears. If they took it on tour to Japan I could imagine people at the Tokyo motor show wondering when it would go into production.

Tiny snappers loved wondering when cars would look like this; if humans would go to the stars or build a rocket that went underwater and if ever a man called Brains would wear Deirdre Barlow's glasses.

Fab 1 remains true to the original which just shows how forward thinking Gerry and Sylvia Anderson were.

It's a chance to travel back to the days when using the word fab wouldn't have the next table in the restaurant in fits of giggles.

F.A.B.

The fun starts here...

We might be in self-isolation, but it's not all gloom and doom. The lack of new cars to drive has given Group members the chance to recall amusing motoring moments and adventures and to retell launch laughs from the days when social distancing meant staying within two metres of the PR person who was picking up the bill....



□ Blasted sand: George Fowler, left, and Frederic Manby

POSSIBLY my favourite car-launch location over the years has been Morocco.

I've been many times including on my first overseas event, in 1978, for the Chrysler Horizon, when I met young men who I later learned were members of the NGMW. At night we wandered carefree though the dark streets of Taroudant.

Later came Vauxhall for the Monterey, Renault with the Koleos, Range Rover, Alfa Romeo for the Spyder and Kia for the Sportage.

Peugeot, however, were the masters of launches in North Africa, where its cars, like the 404, were renowned for their toughness.

Co-drivers on events at times depended on who was left unclaimed or took a chance on me.

Sometimes I couldn't avoid driving with The Star's eminent George Fowler (Fleet Street via Macclesfield). In Morocco we shared the Spyder and, in October 2006, the Sportage, which George gallantly got stuck.

It had been fascinating event, with the Kia crew, led by ex-NGMW member Steve Kitson showing that they could compete with the best for excitement and enjoyment and, importantly, evaluation of the vehicle. It was arranged by their logistics expert, the late Brian Revill, a lovely chap. It was a Kia landmark.

The four-day rotations were between Marrakech and Casablanca with fine hotels in Ouarzazate and Marrakech and dinner in a 15th century palace.

On the middle night we slept in Berber tents at Flint Oasis. We had survived a three-hour drive, miles of it above a gorge where the track was narrow enough to give even George a little tremor of fear. Women washed clothes in tranquility in the river far below.

George, the life and soul and wonder of many a gathering, is in fact a very good driver. And so the next day he set off into the dunes at Erg Lihoudi

Dune buddies...

By Frederic Manby

with a confidence in himself and the Kia which I felt was ambitious, even if he had won a Paris-Dakar. Which, to date, he hasn't.

Street SUVs and lofty sand dunes mix poorly. One has to assess the route, the type of sand and get the speed just right. His eminence got all three of those things wrong and, churlishly, I allowed him to set off for help in the searing sun....

Other, perhaps, than a touch of sunburn for George, no one suffered any harm - but on another North African trip, I was involved in an unfortunate incident which, on reflection, could have killed me and my driver, Alan Fawcett.

The picture, below, shows Alan stumbling away from the Peugeot 306 Cabrio that had spun off into a rocky ditch in Jordan.

He'd just taken over the driving and set off at a lick, having left the route maps on top of the dashboard. They caught the wind and he made a grab for them. The car was by now exceeding 70mph and he lost control. It veered this way and that on the narrow road and then, as he braked, it spun backwards into the ditch, still with a lot of speed.

I braced my neck, certain that the car would somersault backwards onto the rocks. I expected to be badly hurt, crippled or dead, or all three. By chance and maybe a miracle, it came to rest upright, wedged in the ditch.

How did that happen? Group member Howard Hill who saw the spinning car and tyre smoke thought we'd had it. Howard had some cheroots and I started smoking again.

Although it looks relatively unscathed, the car was a chassis write-off. Alan and I continued driving together on the event. I was slightly wary if he went near the road edge.

Those Peugeot HQ events were elaborate and extravagant. Peugeot brought its own chefs and food from La belle France. That one, in 1994 I think, had started on a small airfield in Sinai and we crossed the Red Sea to Aqaba in Jordan by boat, on which we slept and caroused with those wandering birds of passage, Les Ecosais.

A highlight was visiting the ancient rock city of Petra, riding horses into the gorge. Ken Yeadon recalls falling off after some wild-west antics.

In Aqaba, Brian Longworth was one of many who bought a Swiss watch. Back on the boat he was proudly showing his Fake to John Murdoch. John had the real thing, (well he would, wouldn't he?) and dropped it in a glass of beer, inviting Brian to do the same. He didn't.

Alan Fawcett, a jovial member of the NGMW, died in 2002, aged just 50. I was proud when his widow Janine asked me to carry his coffin. My end dipped. Howard Hill, who died in 2000, was motoring editor and editorial director of the Derbyshire Times group.



Back in the USSR

IT was the winter of 1978, and several of us Northern Group members were among a mixed UK motoring press party visiting Russia courtesy of Lada, chaperoned by the PRO of importer Satra Motors, Roger Mercer.

The North was important to Lada. All cars for the UK market arrived directly from the East into the port of Hull and were prepared at a dedicated site on Carnaby Industrial Centre, Bridlington, for distribution to dealers.

Behind the Iron Curtain there remained a Cold War air of menace and intrigue - which for me added to the excitement of the trip - although the Soviet Union was opening up to tourism in the build-up to the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

Still, in our multi-storey Intourist hotel several of us experienced the well-known late-night "phantom" phone call to your room.

Nobody spoke at the other end - just checking up you were there. On each floor was, strategically stationed at a desk, a heavily-built dezurnaya or floor lady, a sort of Hattie Jacques without humour, who obviously brooked no hanky-panky from Western guests.

Our briefing had included: "You will find that soap and bath plugs are not always easily come by outside Moscow. In general, trains, planes, stations and airports are off limits for photography, as are military and (significantly) police installations..."

During our stay in Moscow, temperatures dropped as low as minus 20C. Fur hats replaced flat caps as order of the day. Flurries of snow swirled across the imposing Red Square and gathered there against the grim walls of the Kremlin and the precincts of the iconic onion-domed St Basil's Cathedral.

Our itinerary included a 600-mile internal flight to the Lada factory at Togliatti. Our visit had to be postponed by a day for the airport runways to be cleared of snow.

With a fair amount of trepidation our party eventually boarded an ancient Ilyushin which



KEITH WARD has warm memories of cold Moscow nights and phantom phone calls...

looked like it had seen plenty of cold war service. As did the stewardess - let's call her Olga - who was built like a Russian shotputter.

There was no alcohol on the plane to calm our nerves, so - on the advice of our PR host (sorry, Roger!) - some had secreted away small bottles of vodka with which to dilute Aeroflot's complimentary orange juice.

Big Olga spotted this flagrant breach of the rules and immediately confiscated the contraband. No one argued!

The factory itself was notable, compared to the West, for the high proportion of female employees on the assembly lines, for the heaviest of tasks. Explanation: A whole generation of men - 20 million in all - had perished in eventually repelling Hitler during the Second World War.

The social highlight of a fascinating week was a formal dinner given by our Russian hosts. We Brits were transported in a convoy of huge Zil limos (think American Packard) to a log cabin restaurant in a forest outside Moscow.

As the meal progressed it began to be punctuated by a series of hearty vodka toasts, the first in honour of the esteemed guests.

I remember responding as chairman of the still relatively new Northern Group, as well as to make our mark. Other factions in turn - Fleet Street, Irish, Scots, Welsh, American (what were they doing there?) followed suit. Much bending of the elbow.

In buoyant mood the proceedings elevated into a rowdy international joke session, the Russians contributing smutty stories in heavily accented English.

Eventually, lubricated to the gills, we were poured into the Zils, for return. The morning after, the itinerary restarted with a sobering appointment: Moscow's police headquarters for a press briefing with the Chief of Traffic Police, a hefty, beetle-browed Brezhnev type. Exuding menace.

We were arrayed around a long table, him at the head. Came the time for questions. A moment's silence. At his right hand was Roy Spicer, Sunday Mirror and a credential as ex-Liverpool Daily Post. Roy was a likeable, soft-spoken southerner. "Er - may I ask - do you have the breathalyser in Moscow?"

Of course, thundered the emphatic reply, bursting with national pride. He rapped out an order. A minion bustled in with a box of B-testers. Chief Brezhnev extracted one and thrust it at Spicer. "Here. You blow - there!"

Spicer hesitated, aware of the previous evening. Politely: "Ehm - no, thank you ever so much. I am aware..."

"YOU BLOW!!!"

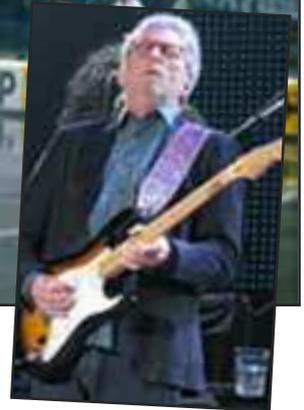
Spicer blew. The crystals promptly changed colour. Chief's eyebrows expressed surprise. A burst of applause from around the table.



Left: waiting for the limo. From left, Roger Mercer, Keith Ward, Ron Newell-Evans and David Whinyates. Right: Keith poses in front of St Basil's Cathedral.



Grands prix - great days



BACK in the day, when PR and marketing budgets were off the scale, we mere small-town motoring scribes were wined, dined and entertained in no-expense spared luxury courtesy of the British motor industry.

Over the years, we have mixed with the rich, famous and, sometimes, infamous at events and been treated to once in a lifetime experiences around the world.

The memories abound: a South African safari courtesy of Nissan; an epic off-road adventure with Toyota in Costa Rica; a good ol' boys three-day trek on Route 66 with Vauxhall; first class flights to Japan with Mitsubishi and Mazda - with R&R layovers (take that as you like - some did!) in Bangkok and Manila on the way; Mumbai and Bollywood with Ford.

And some of them, heaven forbid, didn't even involve driving.

In early June 1984 a small, but perfectly formed group of motoring hacks and their partners were invited to the Monaco Grand Prix by BMW.

Hosted by the company's legendary UK PR boss, Raymond Playfoot, and his charming wife Anne, it was going to be the jolly of all jollies: flights to Nice and back in a private Falcon jet; three nights at the five-star Mas d'Artigny in rooms with private pools; gourmet dining; a luxury yacht trip across the bay to Monte Carlo harbour and Swimming Pool grandstand seats for the race.

But on race day a storm rolled in, and the sea was too rough for our yacht to make the trip. An unfazed Mr Playfoot arranged a room in the hotel and we ended up watching the rain-shortened race on TV.

In typical fashion, Raymond had the unused tickets framed as a memento of the occasion. Mine still sits on the wall of my study.

Heaven knows what it all cost. In today's climate of cost justification and corporate correctness events like that simply would not happen.

Another sporting event will be etched on my memory for ever.



Formula One, football and star-studded events... **David Whinyates** recalls the days when motor industry PR budgets knew no bounds...

It was 2005 and a select bunch of us were invited to Turkey by Ford and, if memory serves me correctly, we did have a short drive in updated versions of the Fiesta.

But that was just a nod to the accountants. The scribes present had one thing in common - all were rabid Liverpool fans and the real reason for the trip was to watch the mighty reds take on Milan in the Champions League final.

We had prime seats right on the half way line of the Ataturk Stadium in Istanbul and access to the VIP area with its free-beer bars - Heineken, like Ford, were Champions League sponsors.

Those bars seemed like a very tempting option at half time when Liverpool were 3-0 down, but we decided to stick it out and witnessed one of the most amazing come-backs in Champions League history with the reds winning on penalties.

“ The real Miracle of Istanbul was that a jaded set of hacks got back to the airport for the flight home ... ”

☐ Left: Stevie Gerard lifts the Champions League trophy for the mighty reds. Top of page: the 1984 Monaco Grand Prix and Eric Clapton in concert.

The match became known as the Miracle of Istanbul - but the real miracle was that a jaded set of hacks got back to the airport for the flight home the next morning after hitting those free bars with a victorious vengeance.

If sporting events were a feature of PR hospitality back then, so were nights with the stars.

We once flew on another Ford event to Portugal and were accompanied on the charter-flight by soul star Wilma Reading who had been booked to sing at the evening soiree.

Models, pop stars and show-biz celebs used to put in regular appearances at events. Jimmy Tarbuck was just one of many.

And sponsorship tie-ups provided rare opportunities to enjoy the VIP experience at concerts featuring some of the biggest names in pop. One such event provided my darling wife Pauline with an experience she'll never forget.

I was sworn to secrecy at the time, but now, persuaded by a few G&Ts, she's given me

exclusive permission to share the tale of what she still says was the most embarrassing night of her life. Mind you, I could think of a few others!

As event sponsors, Volkswagen had invited a few lucky motoring journos to London to see Eric Clapton perform at Wembley Arena. It was a fantastic concert - but it was eclipsed by the after-event VIP party for which another fondly remembered PR legend, Paul Buckett, had been able to obtain tickets.

We queued with stars of stage and screen outside the party venue with eager anticipation - behind us were the acerbic Anne Robinson and the now-disgraced Rolf Harris (well I did say we mixed with some infamous people).

Inside, the room was packed with superstars and celebs; there was a huge Vodka fountain and the alcohol flowed liberally. BB King performed a set - arguably the highlight of the night for some of us old timers.

We returned to our hotel and retired to bed, full of good spirits - literally - and I remember nothing more until a thunderous hammering on the door woke me up.

Struggling - or maybe staggering - into the hotel dressing gown I opened the door to be greeted by the sight of

my lovely wife, standing as naked as the day she was born, in the corridor.

She'd exited the room thinking she was opening the bathroom door. She had, she said, been knocking on the door for a good five minutes but I was comatose on the bed.

Pauline made me swear not to mention the incident to anyone, so when we joined other members of the group for a very late breakfast my lips were tightly sealed. Frankly, I could hardly talk anyway.

We were joined by a colleague of the Scottish persuasion and his wife. "A funny thing happened last night," he told us. "I locked myself out of the room and was stark naked in the corridor.

"Couldn't wake her up so ended up having to go to reception to get them to give me another key. Fortunately I found a newspaper in the lobby and managed to cover my embarrassment!"

Those were the days. They're never likely to be repeated.

When Mike met Chuck

Beethoven rolled over when Chuck Berry took to the stage at a motor show dinner - and so did Mike Torpey. Here Mike tells the tale of a great night of Rock and Roll Music...

BACK in the days of the British International Motor Show, car manufacturers often hosted dinners for attending media the evening before Press Day.

The last year the show was staged at Birmingham's NEC, in 2004, Mitsubishi staged their annual bash in what was seen as a swansong for the soon-to-retire PR chief David Miles.

And what at first seemed a rather civilised, low key event complete with string quartet playing classical music during the early part of the meal, soon developed into a full-blown rock show.

From my table just to the left of the musicians I couldn't help but spot a slightly raised stage area with some amps and speakers set up and a drum kit towards the rear.

Could this herald something a little more upbeat perhaps?

It was just as dessert was being served that a scary-looking guy dressed head to toe in black and resembling something between Nick Cave and The Undertaker from WWE wrestling took to the plinth.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "This man has written songs recorded by Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones . . ."

It could only mean one person - at which point I leaped from my seat and took up a position next to the left-hand speaker stack just as Chuck Berry, complete with dazzling red sequined shirt, duck-walked onto the stage wielding his Gibson ES-350TN guitar.

I remember watching spellbound as Chuck rattled through many of his countless hits during a 40-minute show that seemed over in a flash - to the point I can't even recall which ones he did and didn't play. Then he vanished into a back room, determined, it seemed, not to return.

I wasn't having that though, nor was former



Northern Group member Nick Cooper, so we found out where the entourage was holed up and relentlessly harangued 'the man in black' until he persuaded Chuck to come out and speak to us. By that time we had been joined by a couple of other journos.

I think Chuck said he had recently celebrated his 78th birthday and was only playing one other

show in the UK. Then it was a quick pic and he disappeared behind a curtain.

☐ We will rock you: Pictured, from left, are Mike Torpey, Roger Anthony (then of the Welsh Group), Chuck Berry, former Group member Nick Cooper and Daily Star motoring man George Fowler.

ONE group member wasn't quite so lucky when Chuck Berry exited stage left at the Metropole Hotel at Birmingham's NEC.

Les Oliver recalls: "It was a very rare appearance by the late, great Chuck Berry. He was certainly getting on a bit and was only on stage for a few numbers but I was determined to get his autograph.

"Quite a few others had the same thought, but I believed I was the first to reach the stage and ask if I could have a minute of the great man's time.

"It must've been only a few seconds since the show ended but I was told he had already left the building. I was disappointed but can only assume that his advanced years had not diminished his sprinting prowess!"



How Ray Playfoot, BMW's perennial prankster, fooled us all

BMW's Raymond Playfoot was not only a fine PR man, having been a journalist earlier in his life, but also an inveterate prankster.

He excelled himself on one particular launch in France.

During our test drive he had actors playing the role of French gendarmes stopping our cars and asking us to step into buckets of water because of a supposed outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Some of the victims were videoed

for later embarrassment and among them was Douglas Armstrong, one of the Fleet Street doyens of our profession.

Having been asked for his name by the pseudo cop, Dougie replied in upper-class, put-down style "Armstrong, first ***** (expletive deleted) man on the moon old boy."

On arrival at our luxurious chateau hotel we were welcomed in the courtyard by a wine waiter serving

us glasses of what he described as the local vintage and asked for our opinion of it.

Courtesy of Raymond, the wine had been heavily diluted with vinegar - but I think only Lord David Strathcarron had the nerve to spit it out and describe it with a word beginning with p.

There was also the nude girl parading by the swimming pool - but that's another story.

- Alan Domville



Outback - and beyond

THE romance of the long distance motor journey. It's something to be relished and which has elements of Ripping Yarns for drivers not afraid of the unknown.

Always keen to take off behind the wheel of not necessarily a sporting car, I can date my truly defined motor escapades to the time I bought my first factory-aroma fresh car in the shape of an ugly duckling Citroën.

The date 17th March 1974 is etched in my memory. It wasn't a 2CV – that, and more than one, came later within my stable - but its grown-up, 3CV Dyane 6 sibling capable of a dizzy sixty-something flat-out, courtesy of air-cooled twin cylinders and a racy 602 cubic centimetres - nearly double the size of the 2CV's original engine.

Three weeks after taking delivery of the car I felt brave enough to tackle France singlehandedly, a glorious two weeks spent experiencing some of the oddest boarding places while investigating new and curious cuisines.

MALCOLM BOBBITT recalls his trips of a lifetime - from a 3,000 mile drive to the Arctic Circle in a Citroen Dyane to his ultimate bushtucker trial in a go-anywhere DS.

Wine, too, came into the equation, and not just plonk dispensed from three-star, crown cap bottles. I was hooked on France, and still am.

Rather more exciting was a wager which meant travelling the 900 or so miles between Land's End and John o' Groats, again with 602cc under the bonnet.

The big but was that this feat was not to be undertaken in a casual manner with time for gentle sightseeing.

The run, then known as the End to End, had to be made inside 24 hours, without using motorways and stopping only for fuel and comfort breaks.

Leaving the tip of Cornwall at 6pm to avoid the Midlands in rush hour, crawling into John o' Groats at 5.40 pm the following day was a cause for celebration. And a very bad head the next morning.

Something more demanding was called for so, in 1979, I took the trusty three horses to the lofty latitudes of Norway's North Cape, the land of the midnight sun.

It was a round trip of more than 3,000 miles with challenging roads and little help in case of emergency. Metalled roads had not yet replaced loose surfaces over much of the journey, especially north of the Arctic Circle.

It was also before bridges made the numerous ferries redundant, these being mostly small vessels accommodating a handful of vehicles in the crossing of countless fiords.

The aim was to complete the adventure in three weeks and to arrive at the Nordkapp on the longest day of the year.

That the Dyane reached its destination and returned unscathed by equally demanding routes through Finland and Sweden with not even a puncture, was miraculous. Tackling such a trip today is, to say the least, a doddle compared to the trial of forty-one years ago.

But my adventure of a lifetime came earlier than either the End to End or the conquering of the vast and isolated swathes of Scandinavia.

A six-week long visit to Australia in August 1978 culminated in meeting a friend in Brisbane and being offered the opportunity to co-drive her Citroën DS to Cairns in the north of Queensland which, in those days, was a sleepy backwater with as many sharks and pelicans as there were human beings.

For several days we drove through barren country on dirt roads. Humans were outnumbered by kangaroos and we had to keep to the centre of the track for the best stability.

But even this was surpassed by the several hundred kilometres drive from Cairns, northwards through the rain forest to the ghostly remains of Cooktown, once famous for its gold rush.

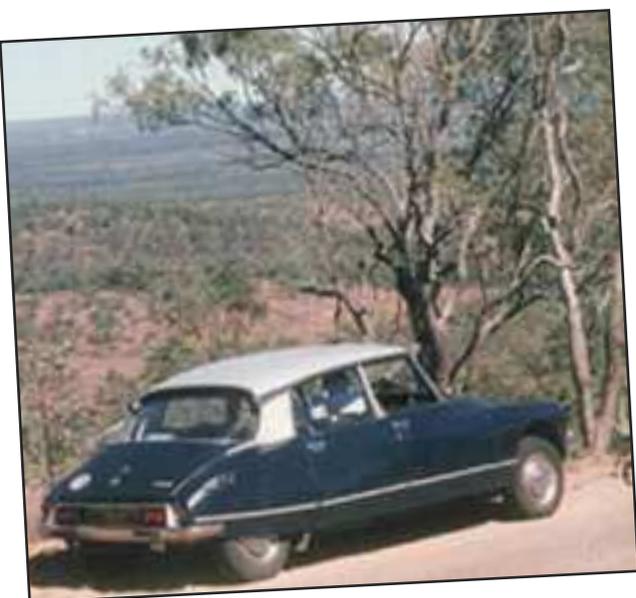
This was hostile country, inhabited by snakes, deadly spiders and the odd crocodile here and there.

The highway was a mud track with deep creeks which only Land Rovers, Jeeps and Toyota Land Cruisers could penetrate.

The DS, with its spaceship styling looked incongruously out of place but its height adjustable hydropneumatic suspension and front wheel drive gave it the tenacity equal to that of a mountain goat made it the perfect tool for the job.

My most striking recollection is of crossing a creek in full flood, the DS nearly submerged despite being on stilts with its suspension cranked to full height.

What's more there was the glowing satisfaction of going where not even the toughest four-by-fours dare tread, or swim.



Mud, glorious mud!

Our members have had more than their fair share of off-road adventures. Some of them turn out to be more memorable than others...

I AM a big fan of off-road driving and always jump at the chance to hone my skills.

I therefore received the invitation to an off-road day with a well-known manufacturer with some glee. Being Yorkshire-based meant a short trip to the venue.

Paired with my good friend and fellow journo Tim, the day dawned bright and sunny and we knew we were in for a good day. The fact that the weeks preceding the event had been especially wet meant there would be mud aplenty.

Although the assembled gathering were all experienced off-road drivers, our hosts' lengthy welcome presentation offered tips on how to stay

safe and get the most out of the event. Each pairing was teamed with one of the venue's professional instructors and though I cannot recall his name, let's call our guide, Bob.

Being ever so keen, our car was the first to depart, Bob behind the wheel, eager to show off his off-road driving skills and the car's considerable abilities.

As expected, the course was extremely wet and muddy, and we proceeded at a gentle pace along the first waterlogged track. About a minute or so in, we stopped. All part of the demonstration we assumed. Not so as we were soon to find out, as our capable, though diminutive 4x4 was well and truly beached.

Bob's perky disposition changed and futile attempts to extricate the car resulted in clouds of muddy water spraying everywhere. All was not lost as Bob had a radio, though no one answered his pitiful pleas.

Nothing left but to walk for help, but with water lapping at the doors there was no way either Tim or I were getting out. Bob braved the track of gloom and disappeared for what seemed like an eternity.

By this time Tim and I were in fits of hysterics and passed the time sending SOS messages on social media channels. We got no sympathy.

Eventually the venue's venerable old Defender hove into view. I can still see the look of disgust on the rescuer's face as he was lying in the murky water, bravely attempting to attach tow ropes to the vehicles.

Once done, we were ignominiously pulled backward from our watery resting place and after coffee and cake, we continued with the day's activities. Needless to say, Bob kept very quiet as Tim and I showed him how it's done.

A day to remember, filled with laughter, mud and friendship. You can't beat it.

Most names have been omitted to spare any blushes, but you'll find the off-road venue not a million miles from Thirsk! I've not been back.

- Martin Ward

- Andy Harris

Booted, suited... and well muddied!

IN THE days when I was selling cars, I was young and enthusiastic and, sometimes, just a bit too enthusiastic. I was selling Land Rovers, Jaguar and Austin Rover. I went on a LR off-road driving course, and learnt how to do some impossible things in the 4x4.

When I got back, I took a 90-inch Defender to a local wood and tried it in the mud and across some rough terrain and got it off to a fine art. Soon after, on a Sunday morning, a well-dressed couple walked into the showroom and said they were interested in a new Land Rover 109-inch County Safari.

They said they didn't have much time as they were meeting all their friends for lunch at a posh restaurant. I told them we had a 109 seven seater and that I would be happy to give them a quick demo in it.

Off we went and I headed for the woods so I could show off my new-found skills. I drove through the fields to a deep

ravine with a small stream at the bottom which was somewhere I had taken the 90-inch Defender.

Unfortunately, I hadn't realised that the demo car had a tow bar fitted, and was quite a bit longer than the 90-inch model.

The tow bar got wedged in the mud and lifted the rear wheels off the ground. As the front wheels tried to drag us out, they just slipped further and further into the mud. Oh dear, I thought - or words to that effect - we seem to be stuck.

We all clambered out of the Land Rover, feet straight into the stream, and crawled on hands and knees up the embankment.

I walked about half a mile to the road and to a phone box - no mobiles in those days - and phoned the garage for help. The well-dressed middle-aged couple weren't quite as snazzily dressed now ... they were wet through and covered in mud. I did try to apologise, but think it fell on deaf ears.

Our lift quickly arrived and we took them back to the showroom where we tried to clean them up a bit wiping some of the mud, grass and bits of the wood off them - and we offered to dry-clean their clothes at a later date. They got in their Jaguar and went off for their lunch. I can only imagine the looks on their friends' faces as they walked into the restaurant and explained the ordeal they had just gone through - bet they laughed about it throughout the meal...!!

The following Tuesday they brought in a bag of clothes for cleaning - and ordered a new County 7-seater! So I got a sale but my enthusiasm for going off-road with customers waned at that point, and I never did it again.

I still think about that fateful day even now and when I see those words 'Land Rover Experience' it makes me shudder... and smile at the same time!

It's Les - the high Roller



EVERYTHING seemed to be happening in a rush in the hectic days of test cars and launches every other week during the 80s.

I remember going to one eve of Motor Show dinner - I think it was at Earls Court but it may have been at the NEC.

Anyway, I had been on a launch on which I was very impressed by the smart light grey suit worn by Peter Myerscough (our late member in Blackpool), and I decided I must have one myself.

So you can imagine my embarrassment when I turned up at the ballroom and, late as usual, burst into the room to find every bloke in there in black tie - I cringed and somehow managed to put up with the inevitable jibes till the very end.

Recalling Peter, I remember we were all at some launch and the Emperor of Japan had died a few days earlier.

Sitting round the dinner table, Peter took his glasses off, put them back on upside down and had us all in stitches speaking with a mock

LES OLIVER looks back on the days when jackets were required - even for changing a baby's nappy on the back seat of a Rolls-Royce...



Japanese accent demanding of people "why you no a funera?"

Wouldn't go down well these days, but a great example of Peter's irreverent sense of humour.

Then there was the time when I drove a Rolls-Royce into the Sunderland Echo car park and shoe-horned it into a space next to the editor's car right in front of his window.

He wasn't in his office at the time but later he just about had a fit when he looked outside.

He shouted "Bloody hell, the chairman's here" and flew into the newsroom screaming at everybody to look busy and tidy the place up.



He wasn't too happy with me when somebody told him the truth.

The registration of the Roller was RRM 1 - probably still used on the press fleet - and a few days later I took it to Whitby.

We were parked right on the cliff top near the abbey and I remember my son, who is now 40, was a baby at the time and we had to change his nappy on the back seat.

I'm sure that other people in the car park thought that those scruffs in the Roller had probably nicked it or, at best, that it was the chauffeur and his missus on their day off!



MEDIEVAL banquets were among some of the popular side attractions at car launches back in the day and those at Bunratty Castle in Ireland (pictured, left) were a great source of fun.

The staff, suitably attired in colourful costumes of the middle ages, all played their parts brilliantly - and especially the compere for the evening who, during the meal, would pick on someone to be the knave. The unlucky 'volunteer' would be taken away and locked in a cell while the

rest of us enjoyed the fare. The late and greatly missed Peter Myerscough, our man in Blackpool, was the victim on the first occasion I attended a Bunratty banquet and he was led away to his fate.

Towards the end of the meal the compere asked the audience whether he should release the knave.

From a group of American tourists sitting close by me came the cry ...

"If he's English hang the bxxxxer...!"

- Alan Domville

From restoration projects to tapping up local celebs for tales, here's how two Group members have been doing their homework in self-isolation...

Steve gets on his bike

WITH new car launches on hold and test vehicles drying up during the Coronavirus lock-down motoring hacks have found themselves unable to take to the roads.

However, NGMW member Steve Howarth – who is also a big classic car fan – has found a way to still hit the highway with his latest restoration project.

For joining the classic fleet at Howarth Towers is a 50 year old Raleigh Flyer racing bike that motoring editor Steve has dug out and is returning to a roadworthy condition.

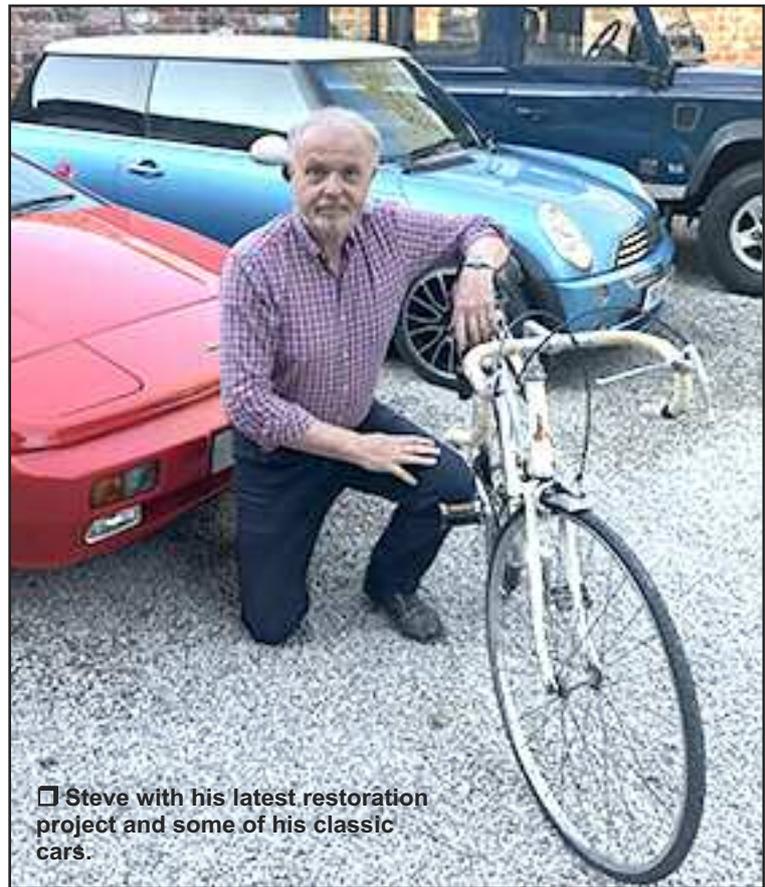
He said: "While clearly we can't

take classic cars out at the moment due to our movements being quite rightly restricted as we fight this awful virus you are allowed to get some exercise so the bike is brilliant."

"I got it about 20 years ago almost by accident as it was in the boot of a 'barn find' 1973 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow I bought that had not run for many years.

"In fact, there were two bikes but I tipped the other one and was about to do the same with the Flyer, but then realised that it was a top flight machine in its day with 18 gears and a lightweight frame."

The bike had been forgotten about until the pandemic took hold and Steve set out to make it roadworthy again with new tyres, brakes and



Steve with his latest restoration project and some of his classic cars.

chain plus a lot of elbow grease. But the first test run did not go well. Steve said: "I got about half a mile when one of the pedals disintegrated due to old age so I had to push the bike back, much to my wife's amusement.

"She was not convinced that it was

the bike that had failed."

While there is still more work to do to get the machine back to its former glory, Steve hopes that it will also be an incentive to get fit, but, he added: "I suspect that once we can drive again it may end up on the wall of my man cave."

Finding nuggets in the lock down

I know I'm not the only one to have been locked down, but it sometimes feels like it.

If you're used to the hustle and bustle of a frantic newsroom, producing a newspaper from the loneliness of your dining room seems like a lonesome task.

But journalists are an adaptable bunch and while the country has largely ground to a halt, newspapers haven't. It takes more than a killer virus to stop us in our tracks.



While we have Wi-Fi and a laptop, reporters, sub-editors and news editors will find a way to get our news out.

To readers of papers like my title – The Yorkshire Post – it might seem like nothing has changed. But behind the scenes, everything is different.

I'm the night news editor as well as a motoring reporter and we have "Yorkshire's national newspaper" to consider six days a week, blending national stuff - 90 per cent coronavirus - with Yorkshire news which is mainly, but not totally, linked to the disease.

Editorial conferences have been by video and contact with reporters and subs is by Instant Messenger, email or phone. Scores of people in flats and houses, helping readers keep abreast of the biggest news story in generations.

And roadtests? Well, they continue. And while the test cars might have run temporarily dry, we have to adapt.

I've scoured my diary for vehicles I haven't written about yet. And I've found some nuggets. We all go on launches and driving days and often drive several models but inevitably we concentrate on the shiny new model.

But now those other vehicles have become valuable sources of roadtests. A Lamborghini launch - I wrote about the Urus, but also drove Huracan and Aventador - and one with Land Rover from which I wrote a road test on the new Evoque but neglected to report on driving the Discovery at the same event threw up some useful ideas.

There will be similar so-far-unwritten reports from Suzuki, Honda and Ford events which will keep me going for a little while.

We have other motoring copy to consider, too. I run a My First Car feature each Saturday, where the good and great of Yorkshire and beyond reminisce. Ironically, the great shutdown meant more celebs were twiddling their thumbs and therefore more responsive to interview requests via Twitter.

Professor Alice Roberts (of Time Team fame) and Yorkshire actor Barry Rutter both agreed to chat. A few days earlier comedian Mark Steel gave up 10 minutes of his time to tell me of his first set of wheels - a Ford Anglia estate bought for £80.

Carol Vorderman and Jeremy Vine are so far resisting, but it's only a matter of time.

- Steve Teale

Cars, bikes, racing or power tools - Simon's your man at Honda

SIMON Branney has been appointed head of public relations at Honda, responsible for cars, motor-cycles, racing strategy, power products and internal communications in Swindon.

Simon has been with Honda since 2014, initially joining as maternity cover. He was retained and has earned a number of PR awards since then.

Previously he had been responsible for the motoring arm of Nobull Communications and for almost 20 years he has worked on motoring projects involving Volvo, Nissan, Kia, Mini and Hyundai.

Down in Walton-on-Thames, **Dan Sayles** has been made Kia's head of press and PR.

Dan joined the company in 2014 as press relations manager and in 2018 he spent time in Korea working with Kia's global PR team.

Craig Jones is the new press fleet manager at SEAT, covering the role for a year while **Katie Duguid** is away on maternity leave. He's previously held various roles across the business.



Motor Industry News with Alan Domville

Holly Williams is also now on maternity leave and **Laura Margott** is now working full time and is our first point of contact.

New product affairs manager in the Renault UK press office at Maple Cross is **Lauren Prema** who previously held PR positions with Fiat Chrysler for two years and BMW for five.

At Bentley, **Wayne Bruce's** team has undergone some changes.

Mike Sayer has taken over as head of product communications, **Jenny Elliot** has moved into a new role as UK press officer and **Greg Drury** has

joined the team as digital and social media manager.

Mike has been working in the press office for the past eight years, latterly as communications manager. He has also held a number of technical roles within the company.

Jenny is now our first point of contact. She has been with Bentley since 2003 and she was previously coordinating media visits to the factory including ours in January.

Greg formerly held a managerial position with the manufacturing engineering team at Crewe.

Following the appointment of **Tracey Tompsett** as Jaguar UK PR manager, which I reported in our last issue, **Mark Griffin** has moved over from the global public relations team to become senior press officer.

Terry Steeden, who was formerly with Infiniti, is now managing product and corporate communications at Nissan.

Mike Gale left his post as Volvo UK's head of public relations in April following a restructure of the company's marketing and communications operations.

Mike had been with Volvo for the past two years, succeeding **Nikki Rooke**, and previously he was with Renault and then SEAT.

Our first point of contact with Volvo for all inquiries is now media relations manager **Ben Foulds**.

While most of the press offices with whom we deal remain closed during the coronavirus outbreak with staffs working from home, MG's press and events manager **Carly Escritt** and her PR team have now returned to operating in-house.



□ From left: Dan Sayles, Kia's new head of press and PR; Lauren Prema, Renault's new public affairs manager; Mark Griffin, Jaguar's new senior press officer.



Our new Friend Andrew takes his lamp underground

ANDREW Didlick, our most recently appointed Friend of the Northern Group following his retirement from PSA, was thrilled to receive the gift of our traditional Northern Group miner's lamp.

General secretary Alan Domville took the lamp down to Andrew's home in Knowle in the West Midlands and, appropriately, Andrew is pictured down underground – shining a light on the vintages in his vast wine cellar.

The honour of becoming a Friend of the Group is reserved for motoring PR professionals who have provided Group members with exceptional service over the years. Andrew joins Denis Chick, Tim Jackson, Peter Newton and Paul Ormond on the roll of honour.

Group looks to widen scope of Northern CotY awards

IN spite of coronavirus, the Northern Group is actively making plans for its' Northern Car of the Year awards driving day which, restrictions allowing, will hopefully be held at Coniston Hall Hotel near Skipton in August or early September.

Consideration is being given to the possibility of widening the scope of the annual awards to include three or more categories as well as an overall winner.

It had been hoped that the winner would again be announced at the SMMT's annual Northern driving day in the autumn but with the rescheduling of the Milbrook test day, which was due to be staged next month, to September, there are now doubts as to whether the Northern regional event will go ahead.

Meanwhile, Covid-19 has also meant that the Group's driving day with Kia, which was being planned for June, has had to be postponed but, at the time of going to press, there was still a possibility the event could be rescheduled for a date towards the end of July.

Martin hangs up his CAP

Martin Ward is retiring from his full-time post with CAP hpi but is continuing to write on motoring on a freelance basis. His new email address is martinj.ward1953@gmail.com

Motor Industry Management News with Alan Domville

Andrew Humberstone has been appointed managing director of Nissan Great Britain. He has been involved with the motor industry for 27 years having previously headed Nissan's independent markets division across Europe.

Before joining Nissan he worked for Fiat Chrysler with whom he held positions in the Middle East, India and China. He has replaced **Kalyana Sivagnanam** who has left the company.

Citroen UK's new managing director is **Eurig Druce** who had been sales director since 2016. He joined Groupe PSA in 2001 and spent 14 years working in field-

based roles covering sales and after-sales as well as serving as parts and service director for Peugeot, Citroen and DS. He has replaced **Karl Howkins**.

Fiat Chrysler have made several new appointments within their UK senior management structure.

Damien Dally is now the country manager for Jeep and Alfa Romeo while **Francesco Vanni** holds the same position with responsibility for Fiat and Abarth. Damien had previously been managing Jeep sales, planning and marketing in Turin and Francesco had been

deputy managing director of FCA in Sweden.

The new managing director at Honda is **Jean-Marc Streng** who has succeeded **Dave Hodgetts** who has retired after 30 years with the company. Jean-Marc has 20 years' experience in the industry, latterly directing Honda's electrification strategy across Europe.

Meanwhile **Rebecca Stead** has moved from her post as head of Honda's UK network and commercial development to become head of the automobile sector while **Phil Webb**, who had

headed up the UK car business for the past five years, has crossed over to Honda Europe as deputy general manager.

Jato Dynamics, who have provided us with global automotive data since 1984, have appointed a new managing director. He is **David Krajicek** who has spent 25 years in the industry, latterly as chief executive with GfK Research.

New MD at Kumho Tyres in the UK is **Keon Park** who had held a number of senior roles within the company since joining them in 1995.

The night Sir Stirling was our guest of honour

HE WAS dubbed the finest racing driver never to have won a world championship and many of our members, past and present had the pleasure of meeting and even driving with him.

But even after the crash which so nearly took his life and led to his retirement, Sir Stirling Moss remained a great ambassador for motor sport and the motor industry.

Many of our longer serving members remember that, before his knighthood, Stirling was the guest of honour at the Northern Group's annual dinner at the Grosvenor House hotel in Chester in April 1980.

On the night of the event he made the presentations including the Pirelli Northern Group Motoring Writer of the Year award to Keith Ward.



□ Stirling Moss presents Keith Ward with the Northern Motoring Writer of the Year trophy in 1980.

OBITUARY:

Sir Stirling Moss

General secretary Alan Domville remembers the event well. Says Alan: "It was a wonderful night at the Grosvenor. It was Stirling who suggested I shave the last remnants of my own hair from over my ears.

"When it's gone, it's gone" he said!

Retired member Geoff Rumney, 83 and happily discharged from hospital recently after successful treatment for Covid-19, also recalls the event - but for totally different reasons.

He had driven from his Preston home to the event

in Chester in a Renault test car which had been delivered to him without any road tax disc displayed - obligatory in those days.

Wary of the law and already apprehensive, he was further alarmed on arrival to find the Grosvenor Hotel and its surrounds crawling with cops.

In fact, the then Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw happened to be there for lunch that day. Given that distraction, Geoff's offending test car was ignored.

Our memories of a motor sport legend

NORTHERN Group members have fond memories of time spent with Sir Stirling - here are just some of them...

I WAS lucky enough to have been taken for a spin by the great man himself a few years ago - on a Mercedes-Benz event - oh the advantages, privileges and perks of

our job - maybe some of you also had the pleasure of going in 722 with him on that launch.

He was a true gent, a great British legend and so friendly. I feel so honoured to have sat in, and been driven by Sir Stirling in that famous car.

He did confirm one much retold

story while I was with him about the time he was stopped by the police for speeding. "Good morning sir,.. going a bit fast weren't we. Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?"

- Martin Ward

I RECALL a Mazda track event for the RX7 near Paris which was attended by Stirling. I drove with him - a great experience - then had breakfast with the great man the following morning. A fine sportsman and a true gentleman.

- Jonathan Smith

THIS picture (left) was taken in October 2017 - the last time Sir Stirling and Norman Dewis gave a filmed interview. Simon Taylor did the on-camera questions about brake development, I produced and asked the behind the camera questions about racing etc. A fantastic and much treasured day.

RIP Sir Stirling.

- Guy Loveridge

COMING from Farnham, the home of Mile Hawthorn & his Tourist Trophy Garage, my dad made me aware that Hawthorn only won the drivers' title one year, because Sir Stirling Moss vouched for him not having committed a reversing offence in a grand prix. I believe it cost Stirling Moss the drivers championship that year - plainly a true gent and a motor racing legend.

- Andrew Walker

I met Sir Stirling several times and I recall drives with him on Mazda and Mercedes events. As well as being a great racing driver he was such a nice man and a very good host at launches.

Incidentally his great racing rival Mike Hawthorn was born on Group territory at Mexborough in South Yorkshire before his family moved to the south.

- Bryan Longworth



□ Guy Loveridge (back row, left) pictured after filming an interview with Sir Stirling.

How Derek mastered the banger business

I AM not usually a fan of ‘reality’ TV shows as they seem aimed at those less intelligent members of society... but one big exception is Bangers & Cash.

Currently on our screens via Freeview’s Yesterday channel for a second series, it follows the action at a classic car auction company in North Yorkshire – Mathewsons.

Having stumbled across the show - which follows an amazing array of classic vehicles from ‘barn find’ to proud new owners - I became hooked and lapped up every episode.

We see everything from vintage Rolls-Royces to Bond Bugs go under the hammer at the auctioneers in the picturesque village of Thornton-le-Dale, some vehicles immaculately restored and others abandoned wrecks.

But what makes the show for me are the characters we meet as the cars, motorbikes and commercials find new homes - from the sellers, who in many cases have cherished their

Steve Howarth took a trip deep into Dales country to meet the man and the team behind a huge TV motoring hit

vehicle for decades, to excited buyers and the family dynasty which owns and runs Mathewsons.

Head of the family is Derek who, ably assisted by sons Paul and Dave supervises the sale of around 200 vehicles each month along with putting a mountain of motoring memorabilia under the hammer.

Another key member of the team is office manager Sarah, who features

prominently as she tries to make sure all runs like clockwork.

Together they contribute to an entertaining, interesting and highly watchable show – although it helps if, like me, you are a classic car fan.

I managed to get an interview with Derek during yet another busy day at the auctions, but he explained it was not always like that.

He said: “We were selling classics and memorabilia for many years but got fed up with people who would phone up and say they were coming over to view a car but then never turned up. So in 2012 we decided to switch things around and run an auction - and never looked back.”

Undoubtedly the TV show has boosted things even further with the auctions now standing room only. The programme is also currently Yesterday’s biggest ratings hit.

Derek added: “I am still amazed at some of the things which turn up and

the money they can go for – two cars which particularly stick in my mind were both barn find wrecks, a 1960s Mini Cooper S which sold for £18,000 and an Aston Martin that fetched £125,000.”

But the show is not all about exotic and rare machines and features more humble cars like Marinas, Cortinas and Austins.

“It’s the car your dad used to drive or the one you took your first driving lesson in – those are the really interesting lots to many people,” said Derek.

My behind the scenes tour of Mathewsons was certainly a day to remember and the good news is a third series is already in the can with talks underway for more in the future!

Meanwhile the team at Mathewsons are using the Coronavirus shut down to considerably expand their vehicle storage capacity.



☐ Derek Mathewson pictured with an old ERF truck and, bottom of page, with his Bangers & Cash team.



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