

# Full steam ahead



Things are gradually getting back to normal. Group members report on a string of recent events



The night I shared my bed with Bilbo Baggins...

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For almost half a century, the Northern Group's miner's lamp has become the symbol of excellence in the motoring public relations world. The brass lamps - jokingly dubbed The Arthurs after former miner's leader and northerner Arthur Scargill - are awarded to motoring PR professionals who have provided Group members with outstanding service and to the winners of the Northern Car of the Year, the latest of which was presented to Land Rover's Kim Palmer (below left) following the Defender's win last year.

And the traditional lamps aren't just decorative - northern-made lamps were used to transport the Olympic flame around the world to ensure it stayed alight all the way from Greece to Tokyo (main picture)!

# New look for 2021 CoTY awards

CHANGE is in the air for this year's Northern Car of the Year awards.

For the first time, the awards will be judged in several categories with winners being announced in each category and the overall Northern Car of the Year title - and the coveted miner's lamp trophy - going to the car which Group members decide is the best of the best.

It is anticipated that the categories will include pure battery electric vehicles, city cars, family cars, luxury cars and so-called driver's cars.

Group member Martin Ward is currently drawing up a list of new models launched in each category in the 12 months up to June 2021. A short list of the five most significant newcomers in each category will be drawn up and Group members will be asked to score each vehicle and to select an overall winner.

The results will be decided via an on-line poll of members. Due to continued concerns around Coronavirus, the Group decided at its recent meeting that it would be inadvisable to hold a Car of the Year driving event of the type which was first introduced to determine the winner in 2019.

This year's Northern Car of the Year winner will be announced at SMMT Test Day North in September.



## Group set to welcome new media writers

THE Northern Group is to open its doors to journalists and writers working in fields of new media.

When the Group was first established 48 years ago, membership was only open to motoring journalists working for newspapers and print publications.

Over the years, eligibility for membership has been widened to include writers working in broadcasting and on web-based publications and, following a change to the Group constitution agreed at the recent annual meeting, that has been expanded to include writers operating in modern media applications.

Says chairman Andy Harris: "We do not want to dilute what the Group has always stood for, but it is time for us to embrace new forms of media."

## ngmw News

FOLLOWING so-called freedom day, it's starting to look as though things may be getting back to something like normal for our members who have been starved of driving opportunities and, therefore, editorial copy, for far too long.

Over the last couple of months Group members have been able to add a slowly increasing number of new model launches and drive days to their calendars and we report on a number of them in this issue.

But in spite of the easing of Covid restrictions it's increasingly clear that there will be significant changes in the way we can do our jobs and that there's now a new normal for the UK's motoring scribes.

- David Whinyates  
Editor

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- Contributors: Malcolm Bobbitt, Bill Duckworth, Andy Harris, Steve Howarth, Frederic Manby, Steve Teale, Mike Torpey and Martin Ward.
- Contributions are always welcome - send your stories and pictures to Alan Domville at [e.domville@btinternet.com](mailto:e.domville@btinternet.com)

# It's just great to catch up with you all!

MUCH has happened over the last year or so, the necessary curtailing of our personal freedom being one of the hardest. As the country slowly emerges from lockdown, I am sure many of us are wary of letting down our guard.

The motor industry was hit hard, with production reduced, showrooms shut, and thoughts of a new car put on hold. It does seem that the demand was always there, and now many manufacturers are now struggling to keep up with demand.

Used cars prices have risen as the impatient instead turn to the second-hand market and indeed I was quite surprised at how much I was able to sell one of our family cars for.

Regular requests from friends and acquaintances have also now taken on a different tone as we move towards electrification.

No more are acceleration and handling the key points of interest, it is now all about BIK rates and battery range.

**"Until the charging infrastructure improves many will be reluctant to turn their backs on the internal combustion engine"**

Most of the test cars that now come up my driveway are either fully electric or boast some form of hybrid technology and with my home charger I am now ready, willing, and able.

The charging infrastructure away from our



## FROM THE CHAIR with Andy Harris



conurbations still gives many cause for concern and my home county of North Yorkshire is particularly short of public charge points.

Until it improves, many will be reluctant to turn their backs completely on the internal combustion engine.

On a more positive note, I have been delighted to head off to launch events once again, even though this does inevitably mean plenty of long treks south. (Please finish the M6 roadworks). The end usually justifies the means and the recent SMMT Test Day at Millbrook was a joyous occasion.

It was a chance to catch up with much missed colleagues and industry friends and the icing on the cake was an interesting selection of cars to drive.

I began my day wandering in a Willys Jeep, marvelled at the latest Morgan, and was positively electrified by Ford and Volkswagen's EV offerings.

The day is never long enough, but the northern event will be upon us before we know it.

Whilst in the south, there were launches with both



Honda and Hyundai to attend and since returning home I have been burning the midnight oil writing it all up. Happy days.

On behalf of the Northern Group of Motoring Writers may I offer you my best wishes for the summer and I look forward to more good times to come.

As motor industry PR begins to get back to normal, motoring scribes have been able to get out and about testing the latest cars and doing what they do best - over the next three pages our members report on recent events ...

# What a great Yorkshire show

**MARTIN WARD** did more than just admire the cars at a new motor sport festival ...

WOULD it go ahead or wouldn't it? The first-ever Yorkshire Motor Sport Festival and Hill Climb was on a knife-edge right to the last minute.

It was a stressful few days before the event with the organisers awaiting late confirmation that it could go ahead. But great work by Kirklees council and the organising team ensured it could open safely.

Held over three days in late June and spread over 125 acres of land above Holmfirth, the festival attracted a large number of visitors, with a wide range of vehicles to look at - and hear - including: stock cars, ex-racing cars, trucks old and new, classic cars, military vehicles, the David Brown (DB) owners' club with a selection of their immaculate tractors and, on the same DB theme, 71 members of the Aston Martin owners' club who showed off their prize possessions, including two DB5s.

On the Friday the hills were alive with the glorious sounds of old and very expensive Bentleys going up the one-mile closed-road hill climb. Not sure I would have risked it in a million pound plus piece of history, but all did, and thankfully there were no incidents.

There were lots of exhibitors who took the 'risk' of attending the inaugural event, not an easy decision to make in these uncertain times. They included McLaren, who had a huge hospitality unit, Bentley with old and new vehicles, RRG Huddersfield and Toyota, Alpine and Dr

All the talk these days is of electric cars - well how about this 1905 Stanley Steamer seen at The Yorkshire Festival. It is in perfect working order and was amazing to see chug around. Maybe we should forget about electric...let's go back to steam. If it worked 116 years ago it can work now!



Andy Palmer in the Palmer Engineering Village. JCT600 displayed a selection of their cars including Rolls-Royce, Ferrari, Lotus, Maserati, Aston Martin and Bentley while SCC Private Club members brought the exotica with Lamborghini and Mercedes-Benz in abundance drawing in the crowds to drool over so many expensive and beautiful cars in the same place at the same time.

The kids were not left out and with dodgems, rides and six-wheelers to drive, the younger visitors loved it. There were long queues at all the catering trucks, bars and ice cream vans, but I guess the owners were happy.

A large camp site was set up for visitors and competitors with plenty of toilets and hot and cold shower units, it was a fantastic atmosphere in the evening with BBQs on the go and lots of happy people in their tents, caravans or motorhomes.

Mark Stone and myself did the interviewing and commentating, ably 'assisted' by Sarah Crabtree. It was a bit of a last minute thing, but it seemed to work.

From what was looking like a disaster a few days before, the festival turned out so much better than anyone could have hoped. It offered modern vehicles, classics, racing cars and modified vehicles.

Planning has already started for next year's bigger and better event, with lots of 'tweaks' being sorted.

I enjoyed the three days so much, and all those there - visitors, exhibitors, competitors, marshals,



officials, safety crews, caterers - many of whom had come from far afield, were just such nice people and helped create a great atmosphere. All in all it was a superb advert for Yorkshire.

If anyone would like press tickets, or exhibitors information or have any general enquiries about YMSF2022, then contact me at: [MartinWard.automotive@gmail.com](mailto:MartinWard.automotive@gmail.com) and I'll be happy to help, or at the very least, try to help.

# Dan's over the moon

A SPECTACULAR orange full moon rose above the assembled test cars at Coniston Hall near Skipton - and it perfectly reflected the mood of Kia PR chief Dan Sayles.

For Dan was over the moon after a day's hard driving by Northern Group members saw the 16 cars which Kia took to the event tested to the full, clocking up an impressive total mileage.

At the evening reception Dan revealed that Group members had completed no fewer than 68 test drives covering 1,121 miles - the equivalent of driving from Cordoba in Spain to "well into the Arctic circle", according to Dan.

And to emphasise the point, Dan reckoned that the distance covered by members in the six hours available for driving also equated to 86 laps of the Nurburgring which would take a Kia Stinger GTS some 14 hours 20 minutes to complete!

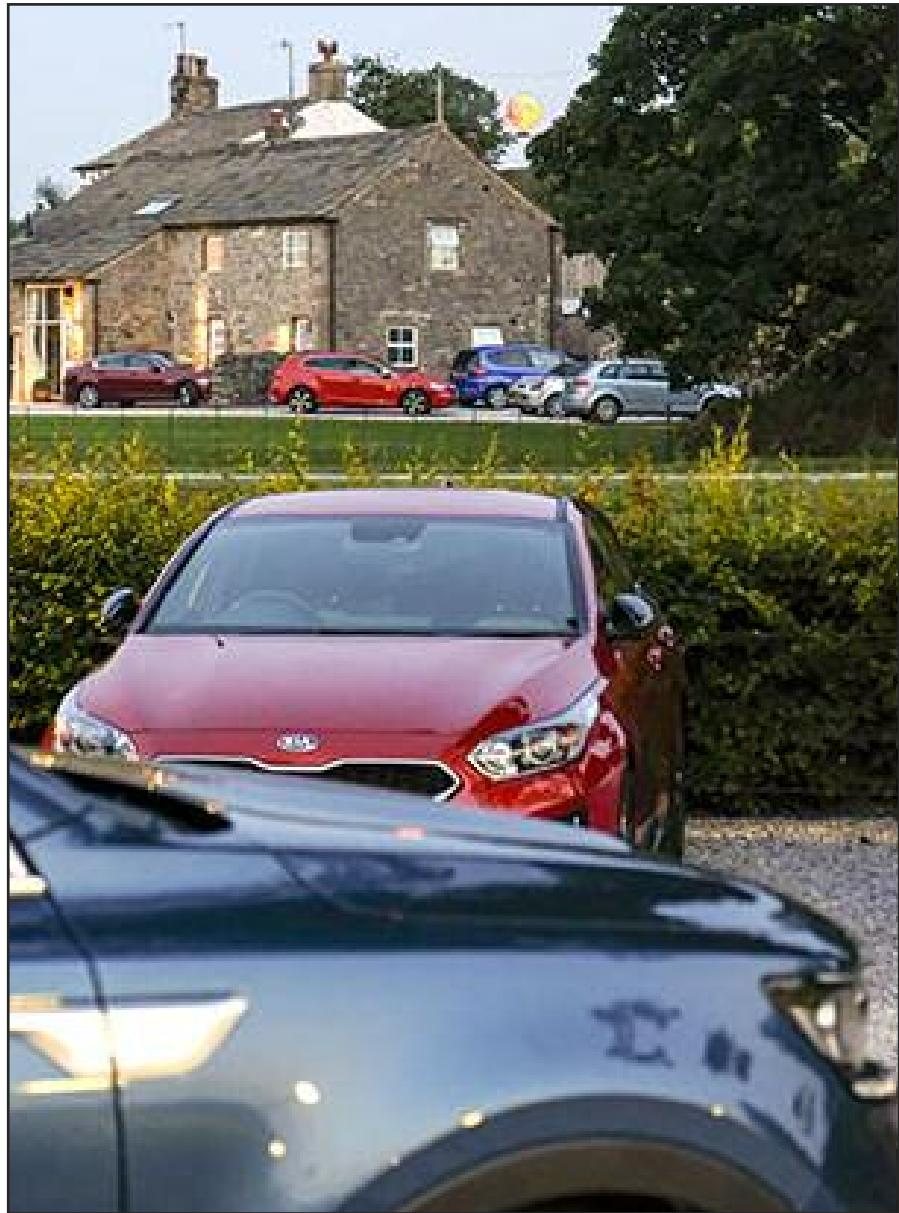
Harshest working driver of the day was Damien Turner, who clocked up seven test drives with partner Karen Lee.

The annual event marked the departure of press office intern Will Rees, who is returning to Cardiff uni after his year's placement, and debuts from newcomers Niamh

Minogue, who takes Will's place, and Milissa Ordone, the department's new events co-ordinator.

It was a happy return for former intern Chloe Farmer, who has rejoined Kia as full time press officer and even for former PR director Steve Kitson - albeit as a wall-mounted giant paper cut-out!

The event was only the second organised by Kia's press office since the Covid virus struck and, in true Schwarzenegger fashion, Dan promised: "We'll be back - next year."



Clockwise from above: a spectacular full moon rises over parked Kias at Coniston Hall hotel; Group chairman Andy Harris presents gifts to departing press office intern Will Rees who organised the event; the Kia PR crew with a one-dimensional, paper cut-out of Steve Kitson; Dan Sayles sums up the day's driving achievements.



# Testing and pinging at the **SMMT**

**Andy Harris reports**

ONCE again, the good folk at the SMMT held their annual Test Day event at Millbrook. A welcome return, as last year's gathering was cancelled, and much effort was made to keep all the attendees safe.

I do believe there was some inevitable pinging from the rather over enthusiastic NHS app - something we are going to have to get used to. Most of the leading manufacturers were in attendance, keen to showcase their latest vehicles, many of which we had yet to see, let alone drive due to the enforced cancellation of so many launch events.

As usual, a modest contingent made the long journey south to attend, the sensible ones amongst us choosing to travel the day before and stay nearby. It is now my routine and having found a cosy billet for the night some years ago, I always look forward to my night away in the company of colleagues and friends.

Classic cars always appeal and so my day began with a rather lovely drive in a Willys Jeep. Apparently, it was allowed on the Alpine Hill Route, but I was not that brave. Twice round the city route was more than enough to appreciate its many charms, speed not being one of them.

Electric cars featured heavily, and I was able to sample both the Volkswagen ID.4 and the Ford Mustang Mach-E. Variations on a theme and so interesting to see a different approach taken by manufacturers competing for the same customers. Both will feature on my autumn test car list and I will reserve final judgement until I get better acquainted.

Another competing pair that I was lucky enough to drive were the Toyota Supra and Alpine A110. I knew the latter was good, as it came close to winning our Car of the Year award in 2019. Let's just say that it remains a truly special low volume car that I would dearly love to own.

On my wanderings I also spotted a Morgan Plus 6, not hiding its light under a bushel, being presented in a rather vivid green.

It was perhaps the most exciting drive of the day, being both extremely powerful and completely lacking any driver aids. Concentration required at all times.

It has a more generous cockpit than the Plus 4 I had on test last year, but I am not sure it is as engaging. Maybe that was purely down to the automatic gearbox. I hope to reach a definitive conclusion as the good folk at Malvern have promised me an extended drive.

For me, the biggest attraction of the SMMT Test Day is the chance to catch up with industry friends and fellow journalists, especially as contact was so limited last year.

The day is always too short as there were many that I never got round to speaking with. A second day would be appreciated... I was also on the hunt for new members.

So, a heartfelt thanks from me and my fellow NGMW attendees for another excellent event. I am already looking forward to the northern test day at Wetherby, which is due to be held on September 21st.



□ Northern Group members take a break from driving at Millbrook. From left: Ben Harrington, Martin Ward, Steve Nelson, Andy Harris and Damian Turner



□ Some fleet car - the Porsche presence at Company Car in Action.

## The fleet's in at Millbrook too...

FLEET News events team organised Company Car in Action in late June at Millbrook Proving Ground with around 20 manufacturers showing their latest cars to the fleet industry.

Most of the cars were available to drive on either the bowl, or the hill route, with most booked up from early in the morning and in constant use all day, but with a thorough clean in between each test drive.

The organisers were very keen on who got an invite, and who could attend, and the event was strictly for fleet people only. If you couldn't prove you were a

bonafide member of the fleet industry, then no ticket.

I struggled to get an invite, but doing a monthly column in FN probably helped. In the end I was glad I did as it was thoroughly enjoyable, great to meet up and have face to face chats (2m apart!) with friends from fleet, after a long time of not seeing anyone.

It did give the fleet buyers a chance to see and drive all the latest models, and talk to the manufacturers and catch up with all the latest technology. A good day out.

- Martin Ward

# Classic drives with Honda



**Past and present:**  
Honda UK's restored  
S800 takes pride of  
place amongst  
today's models.

HOT on the heels of the SMMT Test Day was a Honda range day event. Hospitality was offered the night before at a lovely hotel near Wokingham and this was much appreciated as our NGMW contingent was somewhat weary after a long day at Millbrook.

Thankfully the M25 was kind to us and we all made it in time to enjoy an alfresco dinner and a drink or two. Inevitably we all stayed up far too late talking, even though the bar closed at a respectable hour.

The hotel formed an excellent backdrop for the

event and had a long driveway approach which was to prove useful not just for photography purposes, but also as a place to drive the most sought-after car of the day.

This was a rather splendid S800, fresh from a five-year ground-up restoration.

Quite understandably the Honda folk were rather protective of their new baby, but we were allowed to drive it in the confines of the hotel grounds.

The quality of the workmanship is quite exemplary, and the car will form a very valuable addition to Honda's burgeoning classic car collection.

And as if that were not enough, a 1984 CR-X had also been brought along. This we were able to take out on the road and put through its paces.

This car has had just one family owner from new, having covered just 57,000 miles. Not only that, it came supplied with a full dealer stamped service history folder. Another delight to drive.

Of course, the day was really about refreshing our memories with regards to Honda's current range, so Civic, CR-V and the exciting new Honda e were of course in attendance.

Days such as these are immensely valuable to the busy motoring journalist, especially as most manufacturers now boast ever broadening ranges and it can be hard to keep up.

Thanks to Laura, Emma and the hospitable Honda team for making our NGMW members so very welcome.

- Andy Harris

## I'm all at sea with Suzuki



**NOW here's something you don't get to do every day...** when those lovely people at Suzuki invited me to recent celebrations for their 100th anniversary there were more than just cars to try out.

For over those 100 years Suzuki have sold many more vehicles with two wheels than four and are also experts in marine propulsion. So if you want to go fast on land or at sea then Suzuki have just the thing for you.

In a day that ranged from off-road fun in their diminutive but highly capable Jimny 4x4 to blasting around Cardiff Bay in a patrol boat it was a real showcase of what the company can do. Also there to be enjoyed were a selection of motorbikes and

quad bikes including machines from their historic collection ridden by track legends like Barry Sheene.

Now I am far from a born again biker so sadly I had to pass on the two wheel stuff and I am glad to say organisers had more sense that to let yours truly loose with a £250,000 super speedboat.

Also there to be enjoyed was Suzuki's current range of SUVs from the compact but capable Ignis up to their flagship motor the S-Cross Hybrid. Us motoring hacks got to go on a scenic road route in a selection of Suzuki's current line-up which also included the Vitara Hybrid, Swift Allgrip and Swift Sport Hybrid.

And to make the point that small really is beautiful there was a cute 1980s Suzuki SC100 on show from their heritage fleet... which looked like you could pick it up and take it home.

As if that wasn't enough for the assembled petrol heads there were thrilling, if somewhat damp, rides in power boats which had Suzuki's latest DF300 engines... 300bhp in a small-ish boat is something to experience!

- Steve Howarth

# So far and so Goodwood

The Sharpe family made a bit of a splash when they joined emerging premium car brand Genesis UK for a weekend at the Festival of Speed...

AUTOMOTIVE Management news and features editor and Northern Group member Tom Sharpe and his two children, Charlie and Sienna, were able to make the most of Lord March's private pool after travelling the 225 miles from South Yorkshire to West Sussex for a high-profile Genesis event.

The sight of an eight-year-old boy in luminous swimming shorts distracted many an attendant influencer who had descended on Goodwood House's pool-side Orangery on the Sunday, however.

"There was quite a lot of posing and posturing going on around Genesis' cars, but it was apparent that few people approached the pool when my boy, Charlie, was in there," said Tom.

"Once he'd done a few 'bombs' and swum a few lengths they were all able to get their shots, though, which was just as well as it was a stunning location."

It was Genesis' first ever appearance at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

The brand used the prestigious motorsport festival – returning after a COVID-enforced absence in 2020 – to introduce itself to potential buyers and give a public debut to its G70 Shooting Brake.

The new model is the latest of six new car launches planned by the brand in its first year of European sales.

Hyundai's premium sister brand had been



□ Sharpe by name and sharp by nature: Tom poses in best bib and tucker in front of Goodwood House and, below, his son makes a splash in the pool.

launched in June with its flagship G80 saloon and GV80 saloon and with a direct sales model that does without traditional franchised retailers in favour of direct online sales.

After joining Genesis at Goodwood, the Sharpe family fled the festival at speed to get back to South Yorkshire in time for the England versus

Italy European Cup final – arriving home just 20 minutes before kick-off.

Tom said: "The fact that we had to get back for the football on the Sunday night did make for a fairly anxious time – especially on a slow-moving M25.

"But we love Goodwood and wouldn't have missed the Festival of Speed for the world. What a fantastic event. It was great to see it back on the calendar."



□ Track ready: the Genesis G70 Shooting Brake in action at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.



# Let's charge in to help make electric dreams come true



□ Britain's first purpose-built EV charging station in Essex has shops, a cafe and even a lounge for waiting drivers.

WE are so fortunate to be living in times of change. A few years ago none of us would have really believed that we would be plugging our cars in the way we charge up our phones.

I took the plunge a few months ago by having a Pod Point charger fitted at home so I would be ready and able to charge up EV test cars.



**STEVE TEALE believes that the motoring media should be piling pressure on ministers and local councils to support the charging industry**



I had already had EVs on test and had to find public chargers – never an easy task. It's difficult enough in urban West Yorkshire, let alone more rural areas. And I had spent countless hours sitting in supermarket car parks waiting for my vehicle to be replenished. I even earned a £70 fine

from Tesco for overstaying while the charger in its car park did its business.

Tesco quickly withdrew the penalty after I ran a story but said its chargers were there for topping up while people shopped, not for full zero to 100 per cent charging.

But we must – as a group of motoring journalists – pile pressure on the Government and local authorities to ensure there will be enough charge points for you to recharge on the go.

Vauxhall announced recently that it would be an all-electric brand by 2028 and Dr Andy Palmer, the ex-Aston Martin boss, says he believes 2021 is the tipping point year when EVs become the rule rather than the exception.

But it will only work if the Government supports the charging industry. At the moment, it is asleep at the wheel.

Ministers have challenged the motor industry to abandon petrol and diesel. It's time we challenged Ministers to make sure we can charge our cars with ease.

## It's time to give electric cars a proper grilling

MAYBE I'm old fashioned, but as more and more EVs come on to the market, am I the only one who thinks that many of them have something lacking in the design department?

I'm talking about radiator grilles – an identifying element of design and styling for many



brands, from BMW's kidney grille to Kia's tiger nose. Over the years radiator grilles have become key features which stylists would interfere with at their peril.

But for many car makers that philosophy seems to have gone out of the design studio window when it comes to EVs.

Clearly there are sound technical reasons for abandoning the traditional grille – not least the lack of a big radiator – but I can't help feeling there's something missing when I look at the dumpy front end of the Hyundai

Kona Electric (right) compared with the traditionally-grilled Mazda MX-30 on the left.

Tesla first laid down the grille-less design marker and many makers have since followed their lead.

But, notably, many prestige makers have stuck to their grille guns, not least BMW which has endowed its iX and i4 models with even bigger versions of the traditional kidney grille.

The company's design chief, Domagoj Dukec, sums it up this way: "The kidney is not just an air-cooling system, it's the

strongest differentiator between us and our competitors."

Seems pretty obvious. So, if we're to avoid a generation of look-alike battery-powered models, maybe it's time more designers gave their new EV models the grilling that all that electric techno-wizardry deserves.

- David Whinyates



# Dave's on his bike for a Scottish adventure

IN the last few years the North Coast 500 has become quite a thing. People do it on bikes, in cars, in motorhomes and with caravans, exploring the fabulous part of the world that is the north-west of Scotland. Undiscovered by many is a hidden gem with spectacular scenery at every turn.

My friend Steve and I got our first proper taste of motorcycle touring a few years ago with a trip to France to explore the D-Day beaches in Normandy. We loved it and quickly decided our next trip would be on home soil around the top of our fabulous country, but our plans were delayed a couple of times by the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic.

In need of something to look forward to, at Christmas last year we decided to think positive and book our accommodation in the hope that we would be able to go in June.

So, as the virus subsided, the excitement grew for the four of us who would be on two wheels – Steve and I being joined by Jim and Wayne. My son Alistair isn't a biker, but, like his dad, is always up for a good road trip, so he opted to follow us around in his Skoda VRs which is his pride and joy.

Our trip was originally planned for the end of May last year – the time of year when you can avoid the dreaded midges which have no second thoughts about eating you

Our Northern Lincolnshire member, Dave Hooper, recounts how four friends on bikes were chased by a Skoda VRs around Scotland's North Coast 500, taking in some of the best roads and scenery this country has to offer...



**Dave Hooper in the saddle at John O'Groats**

the finish at Inverness

First we had to get to Scotland to join the route. Our first day was a 300-mile ride from Northern Lincolnshire up to Glasgow, skirting around the west of Newcastle, through the Scottish Borders via Peebles.

Our second day saw us heading out of Glasgow early in the morning, along the side of Loch Lomond, before heading up through Glencoe, the scene of the famous massacre of the MacDonalds, through Fort William passing Ben Nevis and on to Mallaig to catch the ferry to Skye.

At least that was the plan, but the Scottish weather had other ideas – three wet days meant low cloud, the majestic mountains shrouded in mist . . . and wet riding, something we always try to avoid. But we just had to get on with it, so on went the wet gear! Mid morning on Day Two our phones all pinged with a message from Calmac Ferries to say that bikes were banned from the ferries due to rough seas, so we had to do

an extra 80 miles - the long way round - to Skye and our second hotel in Portree.

Our steeds for our epic journey included a BMW GS, fondly referred to as a Camel as they are often seen crossing deserts, two generations of Kawasaki Versys, mine being a 2016 model with my friend on the newest version, and a fresh out of the box BMW S1000R and of course, the Skoda VRs piloted by my son in hot pursuit, who had a great time trying to keep up with four bikes which could zip past slow moving motorhomes much more easily.

A tour of Skye followed the next morning, which gave us every kind of weather you can think of, including sleet, warm sunshine, and 50mph crosswinds. So we just had to take shelter in the Talisker Whisky Distillery for a few minutes, before heading back over to the mainland for one of the highlights, and most daunting parts of our trip.

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# A heck of a Barney for Fred and Jo

ONE is minding one's own business, or, more exactly, Jo and I were minding our own business, when a BBC Look North vox-pop pairing approached me.

It was May 26, the day a certain Mr D Cummings was giving evidence to parliament about the government's handling of coronavirus. A year previously he had driven to Barnard Castle, apparently to check if his eyesight was good enough for motoring. Depending on your political leanings, this was understandable or poppycock or just plain bizarre.

The north country market town became world famous and Look North was back, that day in May, to resuscitate the story.

The TV chap (he never gave me his card so his name eludes me) asked if I lived there. My reply: "no, but I can do....." at which point his colleague started filming. The subject was that bizarre drive to Barnard Castle.



By Frederic Manby

Jo then exited Greggs with a brace of their tasty vegan steak pasties and donuts to land herself into the discussion.

We expounded on the excuses and expiations and so forth without the need for retakes and went on our way. A few seconds of the interview made it to the screen that tea-time.

We saw it on our TV at the campsite. We had chosen Barnard Castle - known locally as Barney - as a first outing with RETA or Rita, our Renault Trafic Adria campervan with a tilting roof and a selection of awnings.

This Slovenian hand-crafted beauty had a few teething problems, acceptable at her age, but has

since taken us to Berwick-on-Tweed, Lindisfarne, Bamburgh, Seahouses and other east coast delights. At times the rain held off.

A farm stay near Ormskirk allowed us to get a train into Liverpool and visit its wonderful museum. We returned to find a troubadour rocking into the night.

Why Barnard Castle? I've been driving there for years, up through a coruscation of Yorkshire Dales and rivers.

Beyond, to the north, lies Upper Teesdale and we had our first view of the waterfalls known as Low Force and High Force.

During another walk through the woods at Barnard Castle I found a Specsavers lens cleaner. Honest.

## Hard riding but such a fantastic Highland fling!



Made it: Dave Hooper and pals at John O'Groats

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The Bealach na Ba Pass will be familiar to many who have driven on various Mazda launches based at the lovely Torridon Hotel or Ackergill Tower.

It's the second highest road climb in the UK, rising more than 2,000 feet through spectacular scenery, with three hairpin bends just before the summit - quite a challenge with fully laden bikes, wet roads and steep cambers.

Again the weather spoilt the views, but couldn't dampen the sense of achievement having made it safely to the top where I insisted on a photo shoot!

The weather improved for the rest of the week, with dry roads and cool temperatures making for perfect biking weather. The scenery also improved as the mist lifted off the mountain tops.

It's a different world up there, with white sandy beaches and aquamarine blue sea doing a convincing impression of the Caribbean, and fabulous mountain views that literally take your breath away as round almost every corner.

As we turned onto the top the country, the roads straightened out and the scenery became more bland with long flat expanses of open countryside, but we made good progress over to John O'Groats for some more pictures, before turning south and heading for home.

Our penultimate night was in Aviemore, in the Cairngorms, where the skiers amongst us delighted in the sight of snow-capped mountains in June, but the riding that day was also some of the best of the whole trip, although not part of the official NC500 route, with us now being well below its southern boundary.

Fast sweeping open roads with clear views through the bends, combined with light traffic made for some exhilarating touring.

Our last night was in Newcastle. We'd planned to make it our party night – but after seven days' riding, and a big curry and a couple of beers, all our faces told the same story... we were shattered and all we wanted to do was go to bed. Three hundred miles in a car is one thing, on a bike it's very different, and several days of big mileages back-to-back add up.

But after arriving safely home the next day, everyone agreed it had been an incredible trip and a fantastic experience, leaving us all with stories to tell.

The NC500 is a fabulous thing to do on two wheels or four. I can't recommend it highly enough, so if you're looking for a staycation inspiration, why not give it a go?

# How I've done it by the book for thirty years

TIME slips by with weeks merging into months and years being lost within decades.

Trawling through my library without any particular volume in mind, an occupation that's ideal when everyone else is watching football and the world is immersed in off-sides and penalties, my hand by chance fell upon my first book to have been published.

Nostalgia getting the better of me, a glance at the frontispiece was a time warp in itself, the publication date taking me back 30 years precisely to 1991.

I had always wanted to write a book and somewhere in the archive of my life languishes a collection of pages sewn together to reveal words and drawings that now hardly make any sense.

I was not even of school age when I engineered this primitive publishing attempt. It took me another four decades to publish this proper book I was clutching, and in the three decades since there have been some forty more titles to collect dust on Waterstones', Amazon's and other booksellers' shelves.

Not only real tomes with covers and bindings but also e-books together with countless articles in equally numerous periodicals. Of the latter, the first to carry a feature of mine, the November 1986 issue of Classic and Sportscar, is kept pristine in a wrapper to preserve and honour the 25th anniversary of the Renault 4.

That first book was not a best seller. Given the subject of British-built Citroëns, it would never have been



□ Malcolm Bobbitt with a selection of his books including the first to be published on the British-built Citroen

## Group member and prolific author MALCOLM BOBBITT recalls how he got his big break in publishing

flying out of the publisher's premises.

Instead its in-print life was cut short when the publisher called me to ask whether I'd like to bulk buy a consignment in advance of the receiver sending them to be remaindered, or worse for my hard work to be pulped.

Thankfully my Citroen's hydropneumatic suspension willingly took the weight of several

hundred books. I didn't make the big profit I had imagined, but at least my bank balance had something to show for my effort. I could easily have given up there and then.

My break came soon afterwards when I drove my baby Fiat to Gloucester to attend a Fiat event. With three-up and the tiny motor in the tail working overtime I got there, eventually.

Among the traders selling

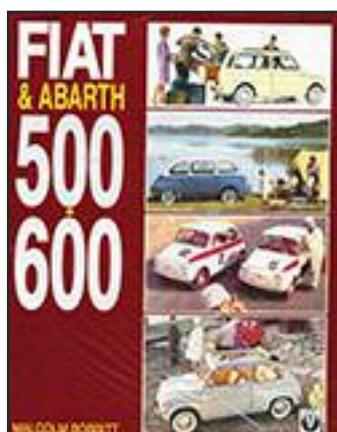
everything one would ever want to keep a baby Fiat running healthily was a publisher selling his wares, some of his titles being on Fiats - but nothing on the Fiat 500 or its successors.

My disappointment was obvious. We got talking and I told of my publishing plight. The publisher had seen my first book and invited me there and then to produce a history of the Fiat 500 and 600 for him - and he wanted it as soon as was possible. That book was published by Rod Grainger at Veloce in 1993. It is still in print, now in its fourth edition and has been translated into German and Japanese.

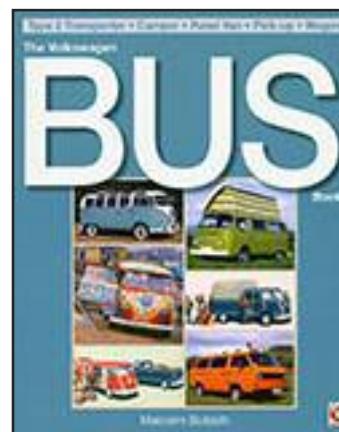
Since then Rod has published more of my books, on subjects including Rover, London Taxicabs, Rolls-Royce, Citroën, Volkswagen, British Lorries, Three-Wheelers and more, most remaining in print as well as being published as e-books.

One of the best-selling is the history of the VW Bus in all its genres, from camper to pick-up, splittie to bay windows and beyond.

There are books courtesy of other publishers too, the portfolio including Bentley, Hillman, Minimal Motoring, Bubblecars, Motor-Caravans, Police Cars and a biography of Rolls-Royce's - now Bentley's - Crewe factory which was specially commissioned to mark the company's 60th anniversary.



□ The book which gave Malcolm his big break (left) and his best-seller to date (right).



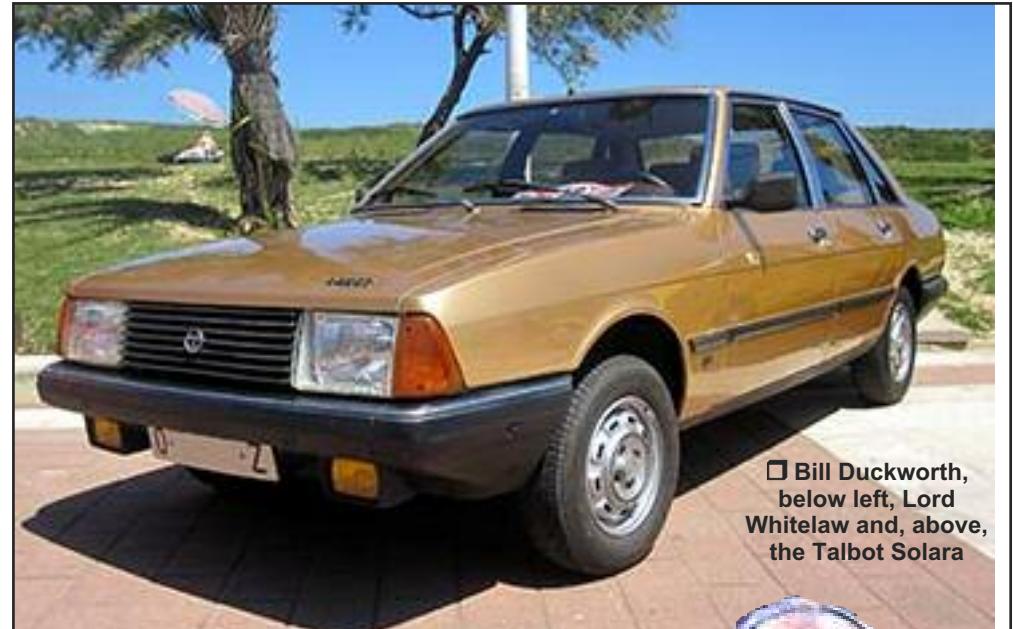
# No passport? No problem - I'll just ask the deputy PM...

I HAVE just renewed my passport at the age of 87, more in hope than anticipation, but it has stirred memories of the early days of the NGMW when foreign launches were the rule rather than the exception. One particular occasion was the introduction of the Talbot Solara - a car now lost in the passage of time.

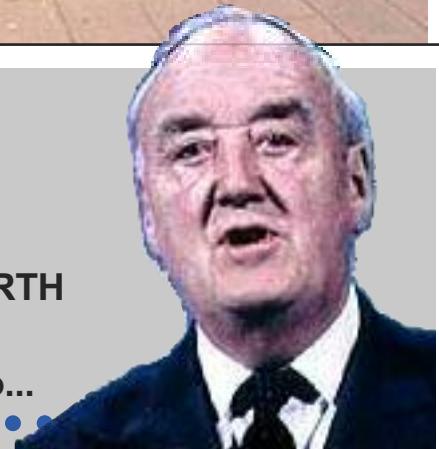
I was travelling on the last flight of the day from Newcastle with Steve Hughes of the Evening Chronicle when he casually removed his passport from his pocket and I suddenly realised mine was back home in Cumbria!

We were due to catch an early flight to Zurich the next morning and pondering my plight when I arrived at the airport hotel for an overnight stay I decided to telephone the foreign office in London. The duty officer answered my call and I explained my problem. He was quite dismissive of my difficulty until, with great emphasis, he said if anyone "in high places" could vouch for me, something could possibly be done.

He was taken aback when I suggested he could get in touch with Willie Whitelaw, the then Deputy Prime Minister and later to become Lord



**It pays to have friends in high places - as life member**  
**BILL DUCKWORTH found out many years ago...**



Whitelaw. I knew the member of parliament for Penrith and the Border was in the capital at the time and I gave the duty officer Willie's number which I had in my diary.

He asked where I was staying and several minutes later my room phone rang. He said: "OK, it's on."

He told me I would be met at the check-in gate in the morning. When I asked how I would recognise the person he said "he will know you."

Sure enough, next day I was approached at the airport by a well turned out official looking gentleman in black jacket, pin striped trousers and

a bowler hat, carrying a brief case.

He proceeded to produce an impressive, rolled up parchment with a large embossed stamp, with the opening words "Permit the bearer..."

This will get you anywhere, he said, but added that it must be returned and he would be at the terminal to retrieve it on my return two days later.

True to his word, it did get me entry to several countries, but not without local difficulties. It was obvious border guards had never seen identification like this before and it caused delays until it was verified.

I would have loved to have kept it, but on my return I reluctantly handed it back into his waiting hands with my thanks.

I have never left without my passport again until the day I checked in for a flight to Paris and when it was checked I was smilingly asked "Joy Elizabeth?"

Shocked, I said that's my wife. He handed it back and said "I won't stop you."

So I boarded the plane and at Charles de Gaulle was surprisingly processed quickly through passport control with only a slight official glance. Remarkably, and thankfully, it was the same again twice on the return trip home.

Security has certainly tightened up a lot since those days.

## Back to the Rootes

EVEN older than the Talbot Solara, this pristine Hillman Imp was spotted by our member for Liverpool, Mike Torpey, while on a couple of days break in the Cotswolds. Says Mike: "I think it's a 1972 model and the colour may be Honey Gold Metallic."

But what really caught Mike's eye were the original window stickers.

"Just loved the 'PUT A TIGER IN YOUR TANK' Esso Extra sticker on one of the side windows and one for Radio Caroline on the rear screen," Mike adds.



# Change is in the air as Matthew moves to Stellantis

THERE have been a number of changes within the PR departments of the recently created Stellantis group which now takes in Fiat and Chrysler brands as well as Groupe PSA marques.

Most notable amongst them is the appointment of **Matthew Bendall** to head-up the press office at Vauxhall having left Renault's PR department.



□ Wendy Towler

## Motor Industry News with Alan Domville

Matthew had worked for Renault for 11 years in total, initially from 2005 to 2010 when he became press fleet and events manager, and then from 2014 onwards as PR manager, becoming head of the department three years ago.

Matthew also enjoyed a spell as senior press officer with Kia.

PR manager **Lauren Prema** is currently our main point of contact at Renault.

**Kate Saxton** has left her role as public relations director for the Fiat Group and Chrysler brands within Stellantis and has been appointed global head of external communications at GKN Automotive.

Kate had joined Fiat in 2015 having previously worked with Honda Europe's PR team.

The PR departments of VW Group companies have been ringing the changes with new appointments, returning members of staff and internal transfers at SEAT, Audi and Skoda.

The new media relations manager for SEAT and CUPRA is **Wendy Towler**. Wendy is sharing responsibility for event planning and



□ Matt Bendall

management with **Holly Williams** having previously held PR roles with Jaguar, Vauxhall and General Motors while most recently she has been working on a freelance basis.

At Audi, **Johnny Burn** has been appointed product affairs manager. Johnny has spent the past eight years with Auto Express, latterly as one of the magazine's senior editors.

**Camilla Scanes** is now Audi's events, sponsorship and internal communications manager and recent newcomers to the press team are **Laura Margott** as media relations manager and **Vivienne Radfar** as administrator.

**Jo Catchpole** has now returned from maternity leave to resume her role as media relations manager, working on a job share basis alongside Kate Dixon. Jo's working days will be Wednesday to Friday, while Kate covers Monday to Wednesday.

**Natalie Southerden** has moved from her desk at Audi to join the Skoda press and PR team as media relations manager. Natalie will work on the Czech company's packed launch schedule over the next year while **Michelle O'Sullivan** departs on maternity leave.



□ Natalie Southerden

At Volvo, PR lead **Ben Foulds** has been seconded to global headquarters until the end of July. **Ian Tonkin**, who has held senior roles with Nissan and Hyundai, is covering for Ben until then.

**Continued on Page 15**

# Bernard steps down

GROUP stalwart Bernard Gent has stepped down from his role as treasurer after 48 years in the post - making him the longest continuously-serving Northern Group official.

Teesside-based Bernard, the Group's only honorary life member, has served in numerous positions over the years including a two-year stint as chairman, and as editor of both the Group handbook and newsletter.

A one-time wicket-keeper, Bernard was also the inspiration for and captain of the Northern Group cricket team which went into battle against motor industry PR teams at the fondly-remembered Mintex Test Day weekends.

He's succeeded as treasurer by Derrick Grocock.



## Motor Industry News Extra with Alan Domville

**Continued from Page 14**

Bentley's new head of marketing and communications for Europe is **Amel Boubaaya**, who replaces **Caren Jochner** who has become the company's head of global brand experience.

Amel has spent the past 15 years working in automotive communications, most recently as PR for Europe, the Middle and East and Africa for McLaren. She has also worked in communications with Infiniti Europe and Renault Sport Technologies.

Over at Kia, **Chloe Farmer** has returned to the in the role of press officer handling the press fleet and media and launch material along with digital content.

Chloe worked in the press office as an intern in 2017-18 and, after graduating from Bath Spa University, gained further experience of the

industry in a marketing role.

The PR department have also welcomed **Milissa Ordona** as their senior events co-ordinator responsible for planning and carrying out media-facing events and activities. Milissa has worked with Kia for a number of years, most recently as events and sponsorship executive with the marketing team.

**Niamh Minogue** is the press office's assistant intern for 2021-22. Niamh is studying for a degree in sociology at the University of York and succeeds **Will Rees** who is returning to Cardiff University to continue his studies in journalism, media and culture.

Meanwhile, **Moyo Fujamade** departed from the press office in May switching to the company's fleet sales department. Moyo joined the press team in 2014 when she moved over from the product planning department.

**Mark Griffiths** has joined the Hyundai UK PR team as corporate and brand PR manager. Mark was previously with Honda Motor Europe, where he worked as communications insight manager for the European region. After completing his MA in automotive journalism in 2010 and working across several UK motoring titles, Mark ran the press office for Continental Tyres where he managed day-to-day PR across

the UK and Ireland. He will be responsible for all Hyundai's brand PR communications, with responsibility for developing the company's corporate profile.

**Laura King** left the Hyundai press office in March and has since been appointed head of PR within the communications department of Honda UK.

Laura joined Hyundai's press office in 2007 as a placement and later as a graduate intern before being take on full-time and subsequently she became senior manager for brand PR. She earned a number of awards for PRs during her time with the Korean company.

**John O'Brien** has left his post as Honda's press fleet co-ordinator and joined Honda Europe as content manager. **Nasrin Munro**, also formerly with Hyundai, is currently covering his role.

**Millie Rodrigues Cova** has joined the Toyota and Lexus press office as their student placement for 2021-22. Millie, who has succeeded **Charlie Smith**, has completed a second year studying sociology at Bath University. Charlie has returned to his marketing degree course at Newcastle University.

**Veronica Borelli-Painter**, who left Vauxhall earlier this year, has joined PFPR and is working on the Ineos Automotive account helping to launch the new Grenadier marque.

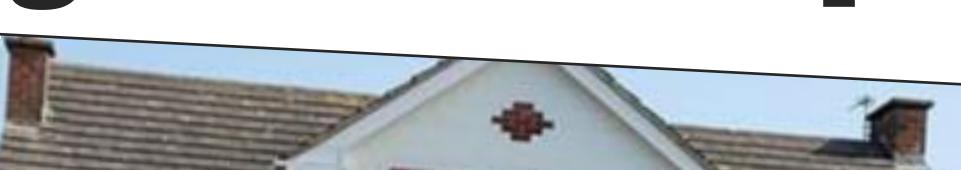
### Jonathan's on the move

THE Northern Group's most southerly-based member, **Jonathan Smith**, has moved house. His new address is Sparrows, 40, High Street, Hinxton, Saffron Walden, South Cambridgeshire, CB10 1QY and his new landline number is 01799 532003. Jon's e-mail and mobile phone numbers are unchanged.



□ Amel Boubaaya

# The night Bilbo slept in my bed!



ITS hard to turn down the offer when a film company knocks on the door to ask if one of Britain's most celebrated actors can 'borrow' your home

That's what happened when the locations manager for a new BBC drama production called The Responder turned up at Mike Torpey's house in Blundellsands, just up the coast from Liverpool.

They were looking for a property be used as the home of a character played by actor Martin Freeman - a new role for the man who has previously starred as Tim in The Office, Dr Watson in Sherlock and, perhaps most famously, as Bilbo Baggins in The Hobbit.

In the five-part drama, called The Responder, Freeman plays a Merseyside Police first response officer called Chris Carson, who is under pressure, overstretched and spends every night trying to paper over ever-widening cracks. The situation in his personal life is threatening to push him over the edge in a series aimed at holding a mirror up to modern day policing.



**MIKE TORPEY tells how his home became the set for a new drama featuring TV and movie star Martin Freeman...**



One of the opening scenes sees Martin Freeman leap out of Mike's bed, open the curtains and look out at his eight-year-old daughter playing in the back garden.

Over the course of four blocks of filming the Torpeys spent 28 days between March and June living in Liverpool city centre apartments and also at the upmarket Hope Street Hotel, which was used by Land Rover for the original Range Rover Evoque UK launch.

During that time four rooms in the house - two bedrooms, the kitchen and lounge - were redecorated and furnished and one of the bedrooms transformed into an eight-year-old girl's bedroom.

And while cameras were rolling there were up to 40 people on site at any one time, from film crew and lighting operators to directors, producers and security staff.

The full length of the road was jammed with lorries, vans, mobile changing rooms and portable toilets, as well as being closed to through traffic for each exterior shoot.

Says Mike: "For some of those outdoor scenes Martin was just sitting on the garden wall wearing

The film crew swarms over Mike's front garden (top) and Martin Freeman chats to the locals. (above).

a grey dressing gown as pedestrians walked past, their eyes glued to cameras on the opposite side of the road. Hardly anyone noticed him or twigged who it was.”

Liverpool has become a go-to area for film companies in recent years. In fact during Mike's time in the Castle Street apartments one of The Responder scenes was filmed in the street outside, just 24 hours after a shoot for the re-make of The Ipcress File. The same month also saw scenes from Batman, Doctor Who and Peaky Blinders being filmed around the city.

◆ *The Responder* is due to be screened on BBC 1 this autumn/winter, though no exact transmission date has yet been set.



Martin Freeman takes a break from filming at Mike's home.



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