



Top of the pile

Defender takes our
Car of the Year title



BRYAN LONGWORTH
1933- 2020

Group members pay
tribute to a true
professional - Pages 3&4



Defender takes the Arthur

THE 21st century version of Land Rover's legendary on and off-roader has been crowned as the 2020 Northern Car of the Year after Group members voted it into top spot by a considerable margin.

Building on 70 years of expertise and improvement, the rugged go-anywhere sports utility vehicle now offers hybrid technology along with petrol and diesel versions and various configurations.

Value for money is the main criteria for consideration for the Group's prestigious award and, while Defender prices start from £43,000 and rise to double that amount, members were impressed by the fact that it is predicted to hold its value extremely well in the years ahead.

Restrictions imposed to defeat coronavirus throughout most of the year meant that members did not have the opportunity to drive as many cars as usual.

Nor could we hold the now established day-long driving exercise to further assess cars shortlisted from the comprehensive list that Martin Ward provides for us.

However, it was decided to go ahead with our annual award albeit with a slightly different modus operandi and with the choice limited to the cars we had been able to test before the initial lockdown and its lifting.

Defender had been appraised by a sufficient number of members to earn the award with 16 votes in its favour.

In joint second place with 10 votes each were the rear-wheel-drive Honda e which is claimed to have a range of more than 130 miles from charging and the Ford Puma SUV compact crossover.

Oddly enough, more than a dozen other nominations, far more than usual, were selected for our final shortlist.

Before the latest partial lockdown came into force we were able to have the traditional miner's lamp trophy inscribed and our chairman Andy Harris was able to travel to a JLR Christmas driving event to present it to Kim Palmer, Land Rover's PR manager.

Kim is pictured with the award - affectionately known as the Group's annual 'Arthur' after former miners' leader Arthur Scargill - alongside the Defender which has been given a starring role in the latest James Bond movie "No Time to Die" - the premiere for which has been delayed also because of Covid.

It is the second time Kim has accepted a miner's lamp on behalf of JLR having done so in 2013 when the Range Rover was declared the winner.

And a delighted Kim told Andy that he hoped to get the lamp working once again.



ngmw NEWS

It's been a sad start to the new year for the Northern Group with the passing in early January of one of the icons of South Yorkshire journalism, Bryan Longworth.

A long serving Group member and our meetings secretary for many years, Bryan will be sorely missed and we devote two pages of tributes to the man variously described as a gentleman, a true professional and a bundle of affability.

Elsewhere in this first edition of Northern Group News of 2021 former member and now retired Kia PR director Steve Kitson reflects on what the Group meant to him in his early days in journalism.

- David Whinyates
Editor

david.whinyates@ngmw.co.uk

NGMW News is produced by the Northern Group of Motoring Writers, Britain's longest established regional motoring writers' group. The Group represents journalists working for print and digital media with regional, national and worldwide audiences.

Opinions expressed in NGMW News are those of the individual contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Northern Group of Motoring Writers.

Main contributor: Alan Domville.

Contributors: Andy Harris, Dan Hayles, Steve Howarth, Guy Loveridge, Steve Teale, Keith Ward and Martin Ward.

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

Bryan Longworth - a gent and true one-off

A Group member and official for most of our existence, Bryan Longworth died on January 6th, aged 87, just a day after being admitted to hospital.

Bryan joined the Northern Group in 1974 and was appointed our meetings secretary in 1985, a post he held until 2017.

As a motoring correspondent he supplied copy to many titles including the South Yorkshire Times Group, several within Newsquest and also local papers in Gainsborough, Epworth and Worksop.

On many occasions he would rush home to Chesterfield from a launch in time to attend a parish council meeting and have his piece written ready for a publication the following morning.

Over the years Bryan received many awards including one given by the Newspaper Society.

He even won a Pirelli award for his articles on motor-cycling.

Also a member of the Guild, Bryan worked well into his 80s until health issues prompted him to retire most reluctantly in 2018.

In a career spanning more than six decades, he began his working life as a reporter on the South Yorkshire Times, progressing to the editorship of the paper's Sheffield edition and, as well as covering news stories, was also an acclaimed sports writer, covering the county's football clubs, including reporting on the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 when 96 Liverpool fans were killed in a deadly crush at Sheffield Wednesday's ground.

A lifetime of hard work - but essentially Bryan made sure his work was full of fun.

He spent the latter part of his career working as a reporter at the Doncaster Free Press and one of his former colleagues there, Darren Burke, described Bryan as: "Always immaculately dressed and an old school gentlemen."

And Darren added: "He provided some of the funniest moments at the DFP with his, shall we say, distinctive interviewing style, his unique turn of phrase and his cheeky sense of humour. A true one-off."

On the motoring front, many of us have suffered embarrassing moments conjured up by press offices over the years and Bryan had his share but was always unfazed - even to the extent of having ferrets crawling up his legs at a Group social event back in the 1980s.

Unfortunately, members were unable to attend Bryan's funeral because of Covid restrictions but the service was streamed on the internet and our memories of Bryan were sent to life member Les Oliver who kindly arranged for some of them to be read during the service.



Members pay tribute to Bryan

A truly wonderful and genuinely unique man and a friend whose sense of humour and fun was legendary in a gone world where laughter lasted long into the night. So many great and, yes, daft memories.

- Frederic Manby

Bryan was one of our Group's great characters who was always seeking out stories but never let any which concerned himself spoil his fun. A busy news-seeking freelance when he wasn't travelling the world to drive cars, he left his mark on journalism in so many ways.

- Bernard Gent

Bryan was one of the first Group members to welcome me to the tribe. Thereafter, he was always wonderfully supportive, great fun and a gentleman.

- Malcolm Bobbitt

Being chairman was a cinch with Bryan arranging the two-monthly meetings; what ruses he employed to snare his victims will remain a mystery for ever now. Every chairman needs a man for Fridays!

- Geoff Rumney

Bryan was one of the first people to welcome me in my first job at the South Yorkshire Times as a trainee reporter in the early 90s. He was a lovely man and a great character.

- Julie Marshall

I have many happy memories of Bryan in his entertaining company during the early days of our Group.

- Bill Duckworth

More tributes on Page 4

Bryan: the fox in pole position

KEITH WARD remembers
the bundle of energy that
was Bryan Longworth



I WAS once asked to write a piece based on the ten most-told and funniest tales of the many concerning the escapades of the Northern Group of Motoring Writers over the years and around the world.

You may not be surprised to hear that Bryan Longworth, a stalwart of the Group in its heyday, featured prominently.

Nudge, nudge, say no more than coach lamps eventually cadged from a caleche driver in Egypt; that fake Rolex eagerly purchased from a street trader, only to spout beer from every orifice in a dipping test by the worldly Scots with us; a vain search for saucy Channel 5 on a hotel telly in Turin...

No matter if he took his turn as the butt of a story or two, nothing shook Bryan's good nature. He was a bundle of affability and nervous energy.



His long-time pal and driving partner, the late Don Booker of Barnsley, described his fellow South Yorkshireman as "paddin' abart like a fox". He'd be the first to arrive at a UK event and the first to dash away, ever on the move; the first to board a bus or plane.

To drive with Bryan was always entertaining. Plenty of chat. But there were unusual traits to look out for.

While you were driving you might become aware of an alarming knock from the passenger side. He'd be hanging his arm through the opened window and anxiously slapping the door... (Not just with me - several colleagues testify to this.)

He couldn't stay still - ever seeking out the latest gossip both among his mates and professionally, like the damned good journalist he was. A bit of a nosey parker: almost above any of us, he had the nose for a good story, a local newspaper reporter respected in Fleet Street for the tips he came up with.

Bryan loved France and loved his wine. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of supermarkets close to international airports, where towards the end of a car launch he would pull up, dash in and grab what in the day was the permitted seven bottles, no matter the weight, to haul across a terminal, maybe last gasp, to catch a flight.

From recent years in his retirement, I shall miss our chats about his treasured Skoda Yeti, holidays in France, football and his favourites Sheffield United - he had long held passes for the press boxes to report both United and Sheffield Wednesday. Inquiries about his health tended to be dismissed.

Sorting through files at home, I came across a posed official photograph from 1983 of a UK motoring press group about to board Concorde at Heathrow to attend a memorable VW Golf launch in Germany. On the uppermost step, in pole position for the dash to claim a premium seat, is Bryan....

A gentleman newshound with a heart of gold

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Bryan was a valued friend for more than 40 years and, despite having had health challenges in recent years he never lost interest in motoring and Group matters. He loved to hark back to the "Good Old Days" and I will miss his calls and emails a lot. A top notch professional and a real character...there was never a dull moment when he was around.

- Derrick Grocock

Bryan was always good company. I well remember a Kia launch in Boulogne when we wandered off into the town around midnight after dinner....enough said!

- Steve Nelson

Lovely memories of Bryan on overseas launches - and of course he was always first on and off the plane, first through customs and first to the cars. A lovely man and terrific company.

- Mike Torpey

I liked Bryan and will never forget our "adventures" together on launches when we shared a car or three.

- David Hooper

Lovely guy...could always guarantee getting back to the airport on time!

- Roy Woodcock

He had a very dry sense of humour and was a proper gentleman.

- Martin Ward

He was a great character, a real newshound who could spot a story a mile away and he had a heart of gold.

- Jonathan Smith

My abiding memory is of a wonderful day he, I and my wife Irene spent together driving into the desert in California, he providing a running commentary on all that we saw. I am sure he and Don are now sharing a car on a heavenly launch.

- Alan Domville

Bryan was a true professional as both a news reporter and a motoring writer. He was a good friend to many of us and will be sorely missed.

- David Whinyates

The show can't go on

The Geneva show has been cancelled again and the longer term outlook isn't good, says Group chairman **ANDY HARRIS**



I CANNOT imagine many will look back on 2020 with any fondness. The way we live has changed beyond recognition and it is doubtful life will ever be quite the same again.

The world of business has been hit hard and as a writers' group, so were our plans. The year began so well with our first meeting held at Bentley Motors in Crewe where we were lucky enough to enjoy a wonderful factory tour, drive some cars and conduct our group business.

The Geneva Motor Show was the first big casualty on the automotive calendar.

Many of us were all set to travel, with flights and hotels booked. The show stands were set up ready to receive the influx of visitors and the resulting losses for the manufacturers will have been hard to swallow.

There will be no show this year and the longer-term outlook is poor. I for one will miss the excitement of show day, with the raft of new models to inspect and perhaps equally important, the chance to catch up with industry friends.

The SMMT's Test Days also fell by the wayside, despite their best attempts to arrange a suitable date and venue and of course comply with the myriad of restrictions.

The long period of lockdown made us realise how much we all missed socialising and everyday business interaction. Launches were cancelled, press car deliveries suspended and for many, work dried up with all the financial implications that brought.

There is now an acceptance that car launches of the future will take a different format. Drive days

Chairman Andy Harris is to remain in post for an extra year to make up for missing out on so much during his second year in office because of the Covid crisis.

General secretary Alan Domville sounded out Andy on the possibility of his staying on and he affirmed that he would be delighted to continue.

Here, in his regular From the Chair column, Andy reflects on the trials, tribulations - and even some positives - of the past year.



are likely to become increasingly more important, with some manufacturers seeing the benefit of more regional events, cutting down the need for overnight accommodation and long-distance travel. We have wonderful driving roads in the north of England, so we are always delighted to be able to test cars on home turf.

“ I will miss the excitement of show day and the chance to catch up with industry friends...”

Even taking delivery of a press car is now no simple matter. Delivery drivers arrive wearing masks and gloves, much care being taken to hand over a clean and sanitized car for us to review.

The efforts are very much appreciated as, without a steady stream of cars arriving at our doors, we would have little to write about. I must confess to still getting the antibacterial wipes out though – you cannot be too careful.

We were fortunate to be able to hold our AGM at Rudding Park, the event being well supported by members. Kindly hosted by Kia, it was an opportunity for us to bid a fond farewell to Steve Kitson, a former NGMW member and well-respected friend to the group.

Steve will be much missed but he leaves behind an excellent team who will no doubt carry on the good work.

We also curtailed plans to hold our Car of the Year driving day and a pre-Christmas get together.

In looking back on 2020 I must also not forget that we said goodbye to our dear friend Steve Orme. Many of us were able to attend his funeral and pay our respects. It is therefore incredibly sad to report that another in our ranks, Bryan Longworth, has recently passed. You can read more about Bryan and his life elsewhere in the newsletter.

Hopefully, we shall meet again soon and in the meantime on behalf of the NGMW, I would like to wish all industry friends and colleagues a happy and healthy new year.



DESPITE being really busy over the past few weeks, I managed to find time during yet another lockdown to finally sort out my model car collection, and get an old Austin Rover showroom sign working.... it took quite a few people to get it working, but, as the old saying goes, “many hands make light work”

Over the many years of going on some fantastic car launches and events, it was quite normal for manufacturers to give the guests a small gift in appreciation of attending the driving event.

These small gifts had a wide range in value and desirability: some were brilliant while others, well, you hadn't a clue what they were or how you could use them.

Toy story

MARTIN WARD tells a dinky tale of a model life in lockdown...



Some were not allowed through security in hand luggage, I remember one event when I was gifted a fondue set, complete with long, sharp forks.

But among the best items to receive were the model cars, you'd often find one had been left in your room after a long day's flying and driving, . And as far as I was concerned there was no better launch memorabilia.

I have saved every model I was ever given, and I recently put them into order, on shelves in my garage.

All the VWs are now sitting side by side, as are the Audis, Citroens, Peugeots, Skodas, BMWs, Bentleys, Fords, James Bond cars and all my old Dinky models. I even have a section of cars I have either owned or would love to own.

As I put them into the right place, the memories came flooding back. Somehow I could remember every one of them, bringing back memories of where we had been, the launch location, the weather, and the things that occasionally went wrong.

I could recall the people who had been there in some exotic, and not so exotic places, most of whom are still with us, and some who sadly aren't. It was all very nostalgic, but some very happy times are now remembered in my garage.

So, many thanks to all the manufacturers for being so generous in giving these very special models, and for their wonderful help and cooperation on the events and all the complex logistics of getting us there, and back again. Thanks also to all the guests who I drove with, sat having an evening meal with, a beer and breakfast.

Tickets will soon be on sale for a personal tour of my garage..!



Let's hear it for the delivery drivers

drivers

STEVE TEALE pays tribute to the guys and gals who keep our test cars coming...



WE often take for granted that our booked press cars will arrive on time.

The delivery driver will, in many cases, have driven 200 miles or more to bring a car north for us, and he or she will often go back by public transport.

At least, that's how it used to be. Now many drivers are banned by their firms from using buses and trains for health reasons.

Instead, they come up in convoys to ensure someone can drive them all back home again at the end of a long day.

There have been one or two hiccups in the plan when lockdowns made companies re-assess their arrangements.

Is a test car a necessity? Are companies really allowed to send a car to journalists for tests? At times, no-one knew the answer and guidance from Government was



lacking or, at best, confused.

Thankfully, in mosts cases at least, common sense prevailed. Yes, testing a car is classed as essential use.

We might not be medics, teachers or social care staff, but it has been deemed that journalism in all its forms is essential.

Of course, delivery drivers now have a rigmarole to go through, wiping down the cabins with

sanitiser and sometimes handing over the key in a plastic bag.

I usually offer the delivery driver a lift to the train station but that is not necessary in most cases because they have transport sorted.

It is welcome news that cars are - for now at least - being delivered.

It is a relief for all of us who have scoured our notebooks looking for cars we may have driven in years BC (before Covid-19) to fill a road

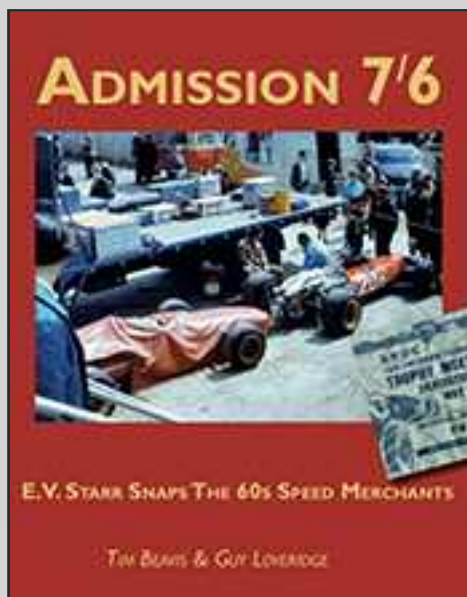
test space in our newspapers and magazines. Thankfully, I've filled all my spaces in The Yorkshire Post and other titles.

Thank goodness for the test days at Wetherby! I didn't realise how valuable some of those 30-minute spins would become.

And thanks to the delivery drivers such as Peter, pictured with me, above, who brought me an Audi A3.

Another road test slot filled!

Lockdown: it's time to sit down with a good book



IRONICALLY the Covid-19 lockdowns have given me the opportunity to focus my attention on "back burner" projects which I had been putting off to look at "when I get the time"!

Well, the thing that has been available in abundance since March 2020 HAS been time. I was able to get back to work on a six years in the making book project in collaboration with a good motor racing friend and fellow Guild member from Dorset - Tim Beavis.

Tim had acquired a vast archive of colour slides from the 1960s through to the 1980s, substantially concerning Formula One racing. He and I had spent a few "study days" trying to accurately date and contextualise the images, but with lockdown and that wonderful thing called "Zoom" we were able to draw the slides together and produce a book, which we launched in November last year.

It has been an amazingly challenging adventure getting it sorted.

Accessing archives and people has all been through email but to have been able to get Derek Bell, Geoff Brabham, Jackie Oliver, Christianne Ireland, Damon Hill and Jack Lewis on board was massively gratifying and gives a very different view of the motor sporting world of that time.

That I was finally able to use interviews I had done with John Surtees over three occasions stretching back to 2014 has revived wonderful memories of a truly remarkable gentleman and times spent together.

The book is, happily, selling well and I have committed to producing another four volumes using the same archive, so we are into 1970-1974 at the moment.

It has taught me that, in adversity, you can cope with your laptop, your library and your natural intuition!

- Guy Loveridge

Great blasts in the past

From desert sands to Falklands minefields, STEVE HOWARTH reflects on more than four decades of car launch globetrotting - and has a word of thanks for those who continue to make our jobs enjoyable and even possible in these difficult times...



THERE is an old saying that you don't know what you've got until it's gone and that has certainly proved true for us motoring hacks.

With more than four decades as a journalist under my belt I have been privileged to have met motoring legends like Sir Lewis Hamilton, Sir Jackie Stewart and the late great Sir Stirling Moss in the line of duty.

I have travelled the globe to many exotic places such as Singapore for the first ever night-time grand prix, Abu Dhabi for the opening of the Ferrari World theme park and driven across many spectacular landscapes - from a barren Utah desert to the snowfields of northern Japan.

More hairy moments include being shot at by the IRA in Belfast,



Steve joins a convoy traversing the Utah desert in Jeep concept vehicles in 2015 while, below, he's pictured with racing legend Sir Jackie Stewart during a Ford driving day at Oulton Park in 1988.

dodging Argentinian minefields in the Falklands and freefalling for almost a minute in a battered lift cage going down the world's deepest gold mine in South Africa.

But none of these have had the impact that Coronavirus has brought with pretty much everything coming to a stop.

This is where that 'you don't know what you have got' phrase comes in - with time to think back I reflect on some terrific adventures and have cause to be grateful.

My purpose in writing is to thank those in the motoring press offices who have valiantly tried to keep things going - in a responsible and socially distanced way of course - with a few events staged in 2020 and test cars supplied where possible.



I hope we will all survive to 'meet again' soon and I will certainly better appreciate the privilege of being able to write about the industry I love.

This blasted virus has, along with

almost every other industry, hit the car trade hard - mind you with many losing lives and livelihoods their loss is far greater than ours and it is those people that should be foremost in our minds.

A trip in the old Moke's snow joke

DURING the recent spate of bad weather, when we "up north" had a bit of snow, which really went as quick as it came, I thought I would try my old Mini Moke out in it.

The car has been molly-coddled since the day I got it - never seen any rain and always kept in a nice warm garage. But it was time for a trip out into the real world.

I didn't take it far, and I checked the roads before I left to make sure they hadn't been gritted - they hadn't, nor had any roads for miles around.

The Moke didn't start first time, but I just give the petrol pump a tap with a screwdriver, and the motor fired up. Old petrol pumps

are a bit temperamental - they just need a bit of encouragement to get them ticking away.

And off I went, into the snow. The Moke behaved itself perfectly, no slipping or sliding, it drove as though the roads were just normal tarmac - quite surprising really for a 52 year old car.

But I remember back in the days when a Mini would virtually go where no other car would dare to go in bad weather. The short trip did prove that my Moke is as good today as it was when it was much younger. Great fun - whatever the weather.

- Martin Ward



How Steve left his mark

DAN SAYLES, Kia's head of press and PR, pays tribute to his former boss, Steve Kitson, who retired at the end of last year...

STEVE became the classic poacher turned gamekeeper.

After many years being under-paid in the newspaper world as the motoring editor at the Bradford Telegraph and Argus he turned to the dark arts of press and public relations with what was then the rescue company National Breakdown in Leeds.

He still has the pen that the late Diana, Princess of Wales, used to sign the visitors' book on her official visit to open their new headquarters in 1989 that hopefully will one day be the subject of amazement on Antiques Roadshow.

Eventually the whiff of engine oil and the persuasive powers of former fellow-hack and Northern Grouper Tim Jackson prompted him to



join Renault and he made the move to undertake serious missionary work bringing the glorious cultural heritage of Yorkshire to the poor benighted people of the south.

Loving a challenge, he subsequently joined Hyundai car (UK) in High Wycombe to head up a newly created PR department – consisting of all of two people including Steve – to begin the work of building a reputation for the Korean company previously famous for its two-seater SLC – yes it did actually stand for “Sporty-Looking Coupe”.

He was responsible for explaining to headquarters in Seoul that the name Atos might lead to headlines in the vein of “New Hyundai – what Atos-ser” and what “a tosser” was in English dialect. They agreed to go with Atoz. Steve also launched the Hyundai Coupe and helped the

company find a partner for their first foray into the World Rally Championship.

That must have worked to at least some extent because the then chairman of Hyundai Motor demanded that Steve become only the second foreigner to be hired by Hyundai to work at head office and to establish an overseas PR team.

Clearly this was another major recognition – the team consisted of four people while the domestic PR Team comprised 44!

For three years Steve roamed freely through the corridors and established a global PR network, inaugurated regular global PR meetings and conferences, created an editorial advisory board Eventually visa issues and a desire for milk chocolate that tasted something like it was supposed to do, led to Steve returning to the UK to work with Hyundai's World Rally Team – until that activity was suspended late in 2003.

Steve then joined Kia and helped to take it from anonymity and annual sales volumes of just 25,000 to a 2019 record of 97,323 with a vehicle consistently in the top 10 best sellers and a solid position as one of the fastest growing brands in the UK new car market.

Entering retirement he leaves a small but enthusiastic, professional and dedicated PR team who together have won Press Office of the Year four times in a row in recent years.

Steve's immediate retirement plans have been hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However he will soon be able to travel the world with his wife Sue using the one million (!) air miles he managed to accumulate through his years travelling the globe.

Steve says thanks to the Northern Group - Page 10



Group thanks PSA stalwarts Kevin and Craig

THE Northern Group has presented thank you gifts to long-serving members of the PSA press office, Kevin Jones, DS head of communications, and press fleet manager Craig Morrow, following their retirements.

Chairman Andy Harris was able to travel to the company's UK headquarters in Coventry to present to each of them a miner's lamp, suitably inscribed, as a special thank you – along with a bottle of champagne for Kevin and a selection of craft ales brewed in Yorkshire for Craig.

On his Facebook page Kevin said the lamp would always be a fond reminder of his special last day in the office and was something he always envied when such presentations were made to other deserving friends within the industry.

He said he was most touched, honoured and delighted have our friendship recognised in this way. Craig echoed Kevin's words saying that the gifts were warmly received and he expressed special thanks to Fred Manby for the Naylor's Yorkshire ale.

Kevin, left in picture, joined Peugeot in 2000 after 22 years with the Rover Group while Craig joined first joined the company as an apprentice in 1980, joining the press office team in 2007.

Thanks for such great memories

TO MY dear friends and colleagues in the Northern Group....

I'm not quite sure where to start this – but up-front let me say your kindness, generosity and humbling tribute both at our event in Harrogate and in the last newsletter meant such a great deal to me and only served to reinforce the Group's reputation for being a bunch of really nice people.

That doesn't properly say the half of it but as a Northerner myself, let's not get overly emotional here!

As a 25-year-old scribbler who felt like he'd just won the pools (the lottery didn't exist then!) by becoming the Telegraph & Argus' motoring correspondent I attended my first local test drive event in Halifax with some trepidation.

The event was packed with people who knew each other, knew the industry representatives, leapt in and out of a variety of cars without hesitation and, I was happy to say, all looked older than me!

Everyone seemed to know how this kind of event worked, they all appeared to be completely at ease in the luxurious surroundings of the venue and, dauntingly, were all "paired-up" for the test-drives.

Standing hesitatingly in a corner of the lounge I was approached with a smile and a welcoming handshake by a bloke who introduced himself as Mike Attenborough and a tall, willowy and much more austere chap called Geoff Rumney. "Hiya," said Mike. "You must be Steve Kitson – we heard you had got the motoring job in Bradford. Would you like to share a car with Geoff and I?"

For the next couple of hours we pedalled around together, chatted and they explained the dark arts of being a motoring journalist. By the afternoon we were confirmed chums!

That was my first introduction to the Northern Group and an early indication of just how welcoming and supportive a group of generally-

The Northern Group honoured former member Steve Kitson in advance of his retirement by making him the latest Friend of the Group - a title reserved for retired PRs who have gone the extra mile for our members. Here, Steve says thanks and recalls his days as a Groupie...

perceived cynical hacks could be. It only got better.

Very soon afterwards I was persuaded to join the group, attended regular meetings and was then cajoled (arm-twisted) by Dave Whinyates into helping organise the Mintex Test Day – a wonderful two-day event at the friction-materials company's proving ground at Sherburn-in-Elmet.

Back then it even rivalled the SMMT's test Day with manufacturers and media from all over the country attending.

“ My time with the Northern Group will always be a part of my life that I will treasure and value beyond measure ”

David persuaded me to organise the pre-event industry panel – one of the "news-making" elements of the Test Day.

I then achieved the heights of secretary to much-loved and sadly-missed Don Booker as chair. Two great years were spent working alongside one of the doyens of the journalism world, mentor to Parkinson and chum of "Dickie" Bird. What fun!



Friend of the Group Steve Kitson with his miner's lamp.

In the 40 years – WHAT! 40 YEARS!!!! – since that first meeting with the NGMW I have gathered a collection of memories that have enriched my working life, given me some of the deepest friendships anyone could wish to have and led to some escapades that are best consigned to legend rather than be the subject of re-telling!

So to be made a "Friend" of the Northern Group and to receive my very own Davy Lamp is one of the crowning moments of a career that has taken me all over the globe, has

"youngsters" in its ranks than it has had for decades.

I am delighted by that and by the clear vision being displayed by its current leadership core recognising the challenges of a very different commercial landscape compared to 1980!

It was not with sadness that I left Harrogate after my wonderful team at Kia hosted our most recent event – it was with a great deal of pride and satisfaction that I have been able to be associated for so long with such a wonderful group of people.

We are very fortunate in our shared industry to meet some amazing individuals, to see some wondrous sights, to travel on some astounding journeys but my time with the Northern group – either inside it or associated with it - will always be a part of my life that I will treasure and value beyond measure.

Thank you NGMW members past and present for the time of my life. I wish you all continued success in a post-COVID world that will continue to be a challenge and as long as you all stick to good old Northern values then the next 40 years are guaranteed to be as good as the last!

Good luck – and here's to the ferret!

Simon says goodbye to the griffin

AFTER an innings lasting more than 12 years, **Simon Hucknall**, Vauxhall's head of communications, has left the company to pursue other opportunities within the automotive media industry.

A PR veteran, who started his career as a journalist with Autocar magazine 23 years ago, Simon joined Vauxhall from Bentley Motors at the start of 2008, when he played a key role in launching the first generation Insignia.

In the 13 years since, Simon's love of pushing the envelope - for products and journalists - resulted in press launches which always bucked trends and helped move perception of the brand.

Whether it was driving century-old Vauxhalls across the Alps, competing in VXR's at Shelsley Walsh, driving electric cars through the Channel Tunnel or setting new Land Speed Records in an Astra, Simon's drive for colourful stories knew no bounds.

"My thanks to all in the Vauxhall family for their support and encouragement during my time in communications," he said. "There have been many highs in the last 13 years, and I feel honoured to have played a small role in the incredible journey the company has made - and is still making."

Simon's boss, communications director **Jeremy Townsend**, paid this tribute: "On behalf of Vauxhall Motors, we want to thank Simon sincerely for all his efforts and we



□ Simon Hucknall

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wish him every success in his future endeavours, which will keep him firmly rooted in motor industry PR."

Simon's replacement as head of PR will be announced in due course and we expect to have news of his new position in our next issue.

Vauxhall have also said farewell to **Veronica Borrelli-Painter**. She was made redundant after 23 years working in the press office and providing us with a first class service. Veronica is hoping to remain in the industry.

Stuart Sanders is Toyota's new

director of communications and product. He joined the company 20 years ago on a student placement during the final two years of his BA (hons) degree in business management at Nottingham Trent University.

He has succeeded **Andrew Cullis** who has moved to a new position with Toyota Europe.

After his graduation Stuart was given a full-time role in product marketing and has since served the company in various roles.

Stilyana Podmolova has returned to the Toyota press office as events officer working with Erica Haddon on model launches.

Stilyana spent a year with Toyota on a student placement in 2014-15 and graduated with a BA honours degree in public relations at Bournemouth uni. Since then she has planned film and photo shoots for car companies including projects for Toyota and Lexus in the UK and across Europe.

At Renault, **Lauren Prema** is now in post as press relations manager. She has taken over from **Alistair Sommerville** who has been promoted to a product marketing role. Lauren joined Renault as

product affairs manager last January and has been involved with motor industry PR for the past seven years.

Yasmin Rhodes has joined the Renault Groupe team as press officer on a two years' graduate programme.

Yasmin has obtained a degree in business psychology at Loughborough University and in her final year there she enjoyed a placement working within Bosch UK's communications department.

Jaguar UK have appointed **Charmaine Lewis** as their senior press officer. She was previously associated with the press office in her role with the JLR special vehicle operations division.

Peugeot's new senior press officer is **Emma Gaffney** who has held various posts within Group PSA Communications since 2015, most recently as media relations executive.

At the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, long-time Group supporter **Karen Parry** has been appointed acting head of communications where she is covering the post for **Emma Butcher** who is on maternity leave.



□ From left: Charlotte Moss, new product affairs manager at Skoda, Stilyana Podmolova, Toyota's new events officer and Emma Gaffney, who is now senior press officer at Peugeot.

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Genesis - a new dawn for Simon B

AFTER six years at Honda, the Japanese brand's head of PR, **Simon Branney**, has just moved to pastures new.

Simon is taking on an exciting new challenge - spearheading the launch of Hyundai's luxury car brand, Genesis, on the UK market.

The Korean company is on the verge of launching its executive models in Europe and Simon has been appointed as head of PR and communications for the UK.

He is joined in an all-new press and PR team by **Lauren Martin**, who left Kia recently after three years working for the brand as press fleet manager.

In his final Tweet before leaving Honda, Simon paid tribute to his team saying: "Have been privileged and fortunate to work with the most amazing, capable, outrageous and fun team over the last six years.

"Travel, fast cars, booze and exotic locations are great ... but it's the people that make it."

The arrival of Genesis coincides with a number of changes in the PR departments of the company's sister brands, Kia and Hyundai.

At Kia, **Tom Richards**, pictured below, has been appointed press relations manager. He has joined the company after more than a decade working as an account director for the PFPR agency.



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A graduate of Exeter University, Tom's work has meant involvement with several top automotive brands including Kia.

A newly created role of press officer for Kia dealer PR has been filled by **Jonathan Musk** and he is supporting the PR team's activities including new model introductions and industry events. Jonathan was previously with Fleet World.

Will Rees is the new university intern in the Kia press office, succeeding **Melissa Lodge** who is now back at Newcastle uni studying English literature and creative writing. Will is working for a degree in journalism, media and culture at Cardiff.

Lauren Martin's departure means that all press fleet enquiries are being handled by senior press officer **Moyosola Fajamade** until a successor for Lauren is appointed.

Hyundai, who have moved their press office from High Wycombe to Leatherhead, have said farewell to **Yasmin Fletcher** and **Nasrin Munro**. Our inquiries should be directed to **Natasha Waddington**, **Laura King** or **Robin Hayes**.

Skoda's new product affairs manager is **Charlotte Moss** who had been covering for **Michelle O'Sullivan**, media relations manager, who is now on maternity leave.



□ Making a fresh start: Simon Branney and Lauren Martin.

Grant McPherson is the new media relations manager at Skoda. He was previously a member of the Volkswagen UK press and PR team and has been with the VW Group for the past six years.

MG have appointed CRC Creative headed by **Craig Cheetham** as their new PR agency.

Craig is well-known to us as a former director of communications with Chevrolet in the United Kingdom and he held the same post with General Motors Holden in Australia. The MG press fleet contact is **Lisa Barnard** who had previously been with Hyundai and Nissan.

Head of press and PR **Juliet Carrington** is back in the SEAT and CUPRA press office having returned from maternity leave. **Jodie**



Davis, who held the fort in Juliet's absence, has now returned to Performance Communications which remains a part of the manufacturer's 'family'. Also back in the office are **Katie Duguid** and **Holly Williams**.

PFPR Communications has been acquired by two of their team members, **Peter Cox** who is now the managing director, and **Mike Stainton**, now his deputy. **Peter Rawlinson**, co-founder of the company with **Peter Frater** in 2001, bought his partner's share two years ago. Cox has been on board since 2006 and Mike since 2007.

OBITUARIES:

LONG-serving motoring journalist Mike Ford has died at the age of 81. Mike, a familiar face to us on launches, worked for the Southern Daily Echo in Southampton for 40 years. He was treasurer of the Guild for 25 years.

Mike is survived by his second wife, Jill, whom he married in 1975, daughter Michelle and a stepson and stepdaughter.

Les Rothery, for many years motoring correspondent with the Portsmouth Evening News, has

Mike Ford & Les Rothery

died at the age of 89. Les was well known to longer serving members of our Group and he began his career in journalism with a news agency in Stoke when life member Maurice Glover was working with the city's Sentinel newspaper.

Ticked off buying second hand

Yes, many motoring hacks do buy their own wheels - but the whole process of snapping up a used bargain can be pretty fraught - as **ANDY HARRIS** discovered...

.....

THE TIME had come to change our ageing Volkswagen Polo. After nine years of sterling service, and surviving son number two learning to drive in it, we wanted something bigger and with all-wheel drive.

I have always relished the challenge of hunting down that gem of a car and used to like nothing better than scouring the small ads or scrutinising a copy of the Autotrader.

Now it's simply a case of a laptop and the myriad of websites offering cars for sale. It should make life much easier, but I am not so sure. It is all too easy to get distracted and wander decidedly off piste especially when looking at eBay.

I have a small confession to

make here. Over the years I have bought three cars from eBay, all sight unseen. The R107 SL was probably the best of a bad bunch, but that's not saying much. Yes, I know I should have looked before bidding, but exotic locales such as Lincoln and London seemed such a long way away....

So, keeping the search to a more sensible 40-mile radius I soon came across a likely candidate at a familiar franchised dealer. Right car, right colour - the family were quite specific - but somewhat overpriced.

Then began an email exchange which continued even when I had clearly indicated that I was no longer interested.

Car number two was soon flagged up on the Autotrader website and with a decent part exchange price promised and a test drive arranged, I was soon Harrogate bound.

The car was everything I had hoped for,

one lady owner, low mileage, mint condition and a test drive confirmed that all was as it should be.

Then came the bit I dislike the most, the haggling. The part exchange price for our immaculate VW was immediately decreased and convinced I could do better elsewhere, I removed our car from the proceedings. One less complication.

I asked for a discount on the new car and although one was given, it was modest to say the least. No matter, as I had decided I was going to buy this car.

Finance options were discussed even though I had already indicated that I would be paying cash.

And then came the startling bit. I was familiar with GAP insurance and have always politely declined but the following list I think is worth sharing: Alloy wheel repair insurance (£231); Cosmetic repair insurance (£399); Life shine protection (£509); Prestige warranty (£649); Tyre insurance (£201); GAP insurance (£401). The grand total of £2,390 rather took my breath away.



It's farewell to the old Polo and hello to a three year old Vitara (bottom of page) - but it was far from an easy matter.

The salesman looked at me ever hopefully and looked rather crestfallen when I declined them all. I know there is commission to be had.

I collected the car - a three year old Suzuki Vitara - a week or so later and we are quite delighted with it.

I sold the Polo to a motor trade contact who paid me £500 more than the measly part exchange allowance.

Is it any wonder that so many people find changing their car such a traumatic experience? It is not for the faint-hearted, as declining all the options and negotiating a good deal require strength and determination.

As we tend to keep our cars for a long time, I had hoped to be spared a repeat for some considerable time.

However, number two son currently resides in Melbourne and guess what, he's trying to buy a second-hand car.

He wants a small, reliable and cheap automatic with air conditioning and as he is finding out, that's what everyone else is after. It's going to be a long search.



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