



# Simply GReat

Hot Yaris is  
our Car of  
the Year



**“A journalist of the old school - a stickler for facts, correct spelling and proper English...”**

**Group members pay tribute to the late  
Geoff Rumney**

# Fun CoTY first for Toyota



THE Northern Group's Car of the Year award for 2021 went to Toyota's stunning GR Yaris and their senior PR manager, James Clark, was ecstatic when he received the traditional inscribed miner's lamp at the SMMT northern driving day from chairman Andy Harris.

General secretary Alan Domville also handed over a bottle of Taittinger for the celebration back at the office in Epsom.

It was the first time in the competition's 16 years' history that a performance car had been voted our CoTY.

"An award voted for by motoring journalists is always special so everyone at Toyota GB is thrilled," said a delighted James.

"Following GR Supra and ahead of GR86 our rally-derived Yaris has really put the Gazoo Racing name on the map in the UK and I know our colleagues at Gazoo Racing in Japan and at our European race HQ in Cologne will be just as delighted with this award.

"A huge thank you to the NGMW – our miner's lamp will take pride of place in the trophy cabinet."

The 257bhp GR Yaris has been produced in limited numbers and is such a collector's item it is predicted to increase its value considerably in the years ahead.

In another first for our annual award, members were invited to choose the best vehicle in each of six categories with the GR Yaris also being named the best fun car.

Other category winners were the Mustang Mach-E (EV), Skoda Octavia (Family), Rolls-Royce Ghost (Luxury), Hyundai i20 (Small) and Cupra Formentor (SUV).

At our most recent Group meeting chairman Andy Harris thanked Martin Ward who came up with the comprehensive list of contenders once again and Andrew Wright and James Fosdyke who created the shortlists for each category.

As in 2020, several members did not vote because they had driven too few cars because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hopefully the world will have returned to something like normal when we are ready to vote for this year's top car with the return of a special driving day involving the cars on the shortlists.

On the eve of last year's presentation and the northern driving day, the Group held another successful barbecue in association with the SMMT at the Wood Hall hotel which was also attended by members of the Scottish and Northern Ireland groups. We intend to hold the event once again next September whether or not there will be a northern driving day.

## ngmw NEWS

The festive celebrations were dampened for Northern Group members with news of the death on Boxing Day of Geoff Rumney.

Geoff was one of our longest serving members - latterly as a life member following his retirement - and will be remembered by many for his often outspoken and firmly held beliefs on professional standards within journalism.

We devote two pages of tributes to Geoff in this edition while elsewhere we focus on the latest former member of the motoring PR fraternity to be honoured as a Friend of the Group and look at some great launch venues and driving routes on our patch.

- David Whinyates  
Editor

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

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

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Contributions are always welcome - send your stories and pictures to Alan Domville at [e.domville@btinternet.com](mailto:e.domville@btinternet.com)



# Geoff - a battler to the end

OUTSPOKEN on protecting fellow journalists' jobs, a campaigner on a host of issues concerned with motoring, a stickler for accuracy, courageous in his battles with several serious health issues and a man who was determined to enjoy life to the full...that was Geoff Rumney who died on Boxing Day at the age of 85 after a long illness.

Geoff was actively engaged in Group affairs and activities after joining us in July 1974, serving as our chairman from 1986 to 1988 and as editor of our newsletter from 1979 to 1988.

**ALAN DOMVILLE**  
looks back over the life and times of the man he describes as "a true professional".

Geoff was motoring editor for the Lancashire Evening Telegraph and Blackburn Evening Star until he was made redundant in 1992 after 28 years with the company.

He then became a successful freelancer and accepted our invitation to become one of our first life members in 1997 along with his usual driving partner, the late Peter Myerscough.

A true professional, Geoff played a leading role in a decision taken at our 1978 annual meeting to restrict membership of the Group to writers who were members of one of the two journalists' unions, and to exclude broadcasters.

The policy was reversed in 1981 but Geoff went on the warpath against what he called "freeloaders" as soon as he had recovered from his first of two episodes with cancer in 1984.

We revised our policy again, confining membership to full time newspaper writers, and this led to the departure of three members.

Geoff then extended his campaign to outlaw what he called a "flagrant attack on Group members' jobs" by people in other professions offering road tests to papers at £5 a time.



Geoff also raged against manufacturers who supplied their own "road tests" to newspapers.

He was also prominent in the decision taken that Group members should not travel by air when only one pilot was on board – a policy that remains in our constitution.

And in his own columns he called for caravans to be banned from our roads; he described them as a menace to all road users.

Fiercely competitive, Geoff was named the north's top daily newspaper columnist in the Pirelli-sponsored Group motoring writer of the year competition in 1977.

A year later, his entry was highly commended and in 1979 and 1983 he won the top award as writer of the year.

He sportingly bowed out of competing the following year and became one of the judges. His work was commended yet again in 1988.

After winning the north west press section of the then annual Total Economy Drive in 1975, which earned him six bottles of Champagne, Geoff qualified for a works drive with Vauxhall in the four day International Total

Economy Drive over almost 1,000 miles.

Driving a Viva in both events, he was accompanied by the RAC's northern press officer Charles Gilbert who was his observer.

In the first round Geoff achieved 47 mpg – a fine effort in those days – but this was cut by 6 mpg because he was adjudged to have arrived six minutes late at the destination.

In fact, the organisers had miscalculated and Geoff and Charles had sat by the roadside for five minutes so that they would arrive exactly on time.

Geoff and Charles continued their partnership in the BP Economy event of 1979.

Geoff was game for so much – he was the conductor of our choir that performed at several Group events, led singalongs of members on lots of launches, was cast as the wicked magician in a pantomime Aladdin during a trip with BMW in the south of France and was an umpire at our annual cricket match against the industry.

In 2001 and again in 2005 we held our annual dinner at the Castle Green Hotel in Kendal where one of

Geoff was a real classic character and healthwise he certainly fought the good fight. The word quit was not one he ever used. Great memories of Geoff and Margaret in the good old days.

- Derek Grocock

He was very much a one-off who never took to fools easily. Apart from his brilliant journalistic ability he was a character who will never be forgotten. A supreme choirmaster who will never be replaced.

- Bernard Gent

I always found Geoff helpful, funny – and so kind.

- Steve Teale

Geoff was one of a kind. Passionate, controversial, serious on topics close to his heart but always game for a laugh. He will be missed and his contributions to the Group and motoring journalism in the north should never be underestimated or forgotten.

- David Whinyates

He was one of the legends.

- Frederic Manby

Geoff was both a hugely talented journalist and a superb writer. More than that he was a great character who had total integrity and believed in speaking his mind. We will never forget his renditions of *Abide With Me* on frequent far-away launches.

- Jonathan Smith

Geoff's sons, Tim, was the manager. Geoff himself was the son of a vicar. To Margaret, his soulmate for 68 years, and his family of four children, nine grandchildren and four great grandchildren, we extend our deepest sympathy.

# An old school journalist with a touch of the toff

WE had kept in touch into his final days. It was especially difficult to take in Geoff's death because he enjoyed a reputation as a great survivor of several serious illnesses over the years - two bouts of cancer separated by a stroke which temporarily part-paralysed him. More recently he caught Covid 19, for which he had been treated in hospital and discharged.

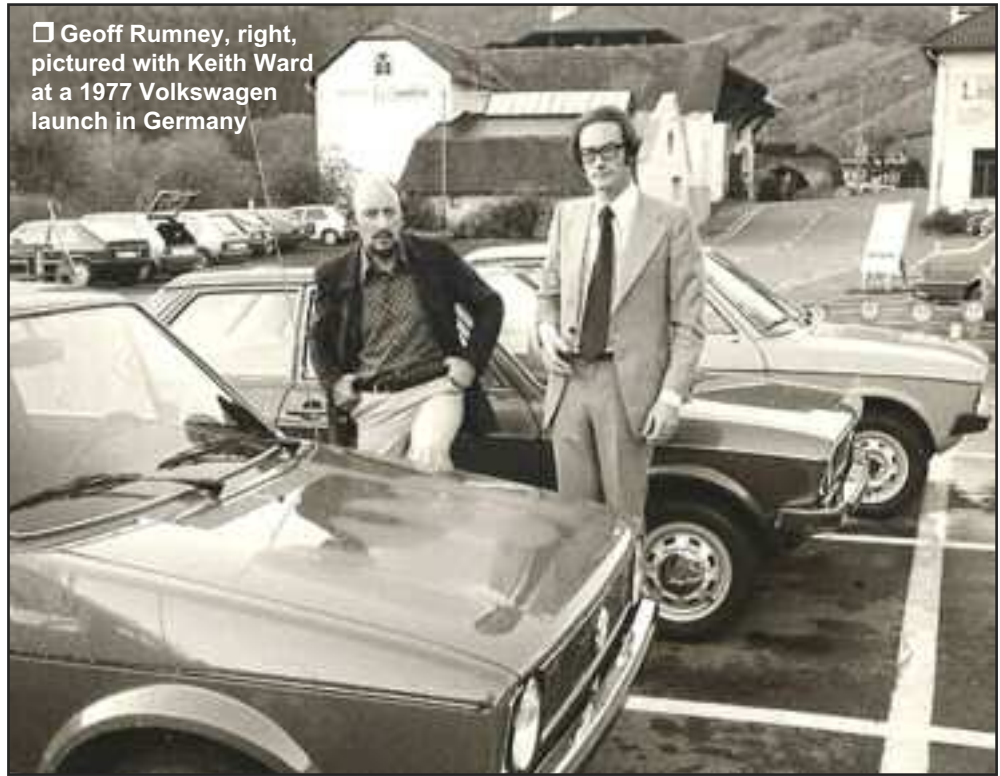
Geoffrey Francis Brookes Rumney, born the son of a vicar in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and sent to boarding and public schools in Scarborough and Surrey, was virtually accent-free, with extremely clear diction - a copy-taker's dream. There was a touch of the toff about him.

A fully trained journalist of the old school, he was a stickler for facts, correct spelling and proper English; a quizzing inquisitor with an eye and ear

“His graphic no-holds-barred features as a cancer victim were acclaimed by fellow sufferers...”



□ Geoff, right, gets to grips with a beached Land Rover along with, from left, Keith Ward, the late Peter Myerscough and former member Mike Grummet.



□ Geoff Rumney, right, pictured with Keith Ward at a 1977 Volkswagen launch in Germany

## KEITH WARD recalls the serious and fun sides of the late Geoff Rumney

for errors, at work or in casual conversation, which could offend some. All backed by an impish sense of humour.

He was a devoted listener to BBC Radio 4 and particularly, in its time, to the weekly "Letter From America" by his journalistic hero, Salford-born Alistair Cooke (I carefully checked the name spelling, sensing Geoff at my elbow) which he diligently recorded and catalogued into what grew to be a vast collection of tapes. Geoff's appreciation of "real" journalists was evidenced by his long friendship with Cooke and they often exchanged letters.

On our various car launches home and abroad, there was nothing Geoff loved more than a hearty after-dinner sing-song. He was our unofficial choirmaster.

Popular motor industry haunt Ackergill Tower, near Inverness, had a magnificent sound system. I remember Geoff turning it up full blast late at night to have us all belt out the Hallelujah Chorus. A favourite of this clergyman's son was the hymn Abide With Me.

During an evening stroll by a number of us along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, we heard the notes of a live piano from an upmarket lounge.

Geoff led us in there. The respectable clientele were being treated to gentle dinner jazz by a Nat King Cole type at the keyboard.

In no time Geoff had engaged him in emphatic conversation: "DO (pause)YOU (pause) KNOW this one...?" and soon he was invited to sit alongside the performer. It developed into a communal chorus, enjoyed (we liked to think) by all.

When he contracted testicular cancer in his late 40's, Geoff was admitted to the renowned Christie's Hospital in Manchester.

As visitors, my wife Jacqui and I approached the small side ward with some trepidation. While his fellow patients showed varying forms of distress, Geoff was sitting on top of his bed fully dressed, surrounded by that day's Sunday newspapers; strong of voice, firm in opinions. "Have you SEEN this story.....?"

Not enamoured of hospital food, he insisted we abscond to a curry house across the road.

Subsequently the full and graphic, no-holds-barred features he wrote as a cancer victim and survivor for his newspaper, the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, were to be acclaimed by fellow sufferers of the big C, which in those days was still talked about in whispers.

It was Geoff who was the main organiser, as recorded by our Newsletter, of the Group's 21st year anniversary ball in April, 1994 at the celebrated Majestic Hotel in Harrogate, which had been the setting for the first formal meeting of the Group in 1973.

Geoff, music hat on, engaged one of Britain's top dance bands of the day, the full Ray McVay Orchestra ... and singers.



# A trickle of hope for 2022



I WOULD firstly like to wish all our members and friends a very Happy New Year. I hope that 2022 brings peace, happiness, an end to Covid 19

restrictions - and, most importantly, plenty of exciting new cars to drive!

At last year's AGM, kindly hosted by Kia once again, I was delighted to be offered the opportunity to stay on as chairman for a third year.

I have very much enjoyed the role and have concentrated on raising the profile of the group and recruiting new members. I believe I have had some success.

“European car launches seem to be a thing of the past but there was no shortage of UK events which kept us all busy”

The group's autumn season was a busy one, as always marked by the SMMT North event at Wetherby Racecourse.

Once again, we hosted a barbeque the night before for members and

## From the Chair with Andy Harris



☐ Cars that have impressed our chairman in recent months include the Ineos Grenadier - pictured at Duncombe Park, Helmsley, top - no fewer than seven Porsches at a County Durham driving event and the new Lotus Emira, pictured at its launch, bottom right.



industry PRs at Wood Hall. Enjoyed by all in attendance, this looks set to be an annual event.

European car launches seem to be a thing of the past and though always exciting, I do not miss the travelling. Plane travel has never excited. There was, however, no shortage of UK-based events, which kept us all busy.

Two events on consecutive days stick out. The first was a chance to be immersed in the new Ineos brand, the Grenadier tour stopping off at Helmsley in Yorkshire.

My report on the day was well read, even though there were no driving impressions, as passenger rides were all that was on offer. Only the rather

bullish price disappointed.

The next day saw me head to County Durham for a driving day with Porsche. It's fair to say that I love all cars, but the Zuffenhausen brand still manages to excite me a little bit more than most.

The fast-charging day saw me behind the wheel of no less than seven cars - tiring but exhilarating. Inevitably it got me thinking about the opportunity to buy a friend's immaculate 2009 911 Carrera S earlier in the year which I turned down. Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too many to mention...

Other notable highlights included a look at the new Lotus Emira and a

trip to the Classic Car Show at the NEC. I've always plenty of time for the oldies.

I do hope that this year will see a return to more usual levels of car production, as many buyers are still waiting six months-plus for newly ordered cars. This has inevitably led to a sharp rise in second-hand values, with used cars dealers struggling to find affordable stock.

My own ageing fleet soldiers on, limping from one MoT test to the next. Too much time standing idle whilst shiny new press cars create an obvious distraction. This year, I will try and drive them more. Time to check on those trickle chargers.





PAUL Buckett, who retired from his post as head of Press and PR with the Volkswagen Group two years ago, has become our seventh Friend of the Group.

The honour carries with it the award of a coveted Northern Group miner's lamp - affectionately known as the Arthurs after one-time miner's leader Arthur Scargill - but it had not been possible to make the presentation to Paul because of the travel and distancing restrictions imposed during Covid pandemic lockdowns.

But the presentation has now taken place, oddly enough at a Guild of Motoring Writers event on the Isle of Wight.

When Guy Loveridge, who is vice-chairman of the Guild, heard about the problem of presenting Paul with his 'Arthur' he immediately volunteered to hand over the suitably inscribed gift at the Guild's annual "own classic car" driving weekend which Paul was planning to attend.

In a letter to Group chairman Andy Harris, Paul expressed his delight at receiving the lamp.

He wrote: "Though the legendary lamp has passed close to me during my motor industry years it has always been destined for a company display cabinet.

"To receive one that I can keep at home is therefore a real pleasure and I

# Paul sees the light - at long last

will endeavour to discover how much light it generates.

"Don't worry, it will never be subjected to an LED conversion.

"Josy and I have many happy memories of events with Group members - and we have noted that Blackpool Illuminations (to which he invited members back in the day) have now been extended.

"A Saturday night in Blackpool is a wonder to behold."

Guy holds so many professional and personal positions that he has become known as a man with many hats.

Accordingly, while making the presentation he donned a flat cap to add a little more northern flavour to the moment!

Paul's own classic car is a Citroën DS brake, the design of which created a sensation back in the 1950s.

The six other Group Friends are Tim Jackson, Peter Newton, Paul Ormond, Denis Chick, Andrew Didlick and Steve Kitson.



☐ Gentlemen of the lamp: Guy Loveridge presents Paul Buckett with his 'Arthur' and (top) Paul poses with the Northern Group miner's lamp alongside his cherished Citroen DS brake.



# How Illya led Les out of a blind alley

A PHONE call out of the blue has led to a life-changing partnership for life member Les Oliver.

Les, motoring editor of the Sunderland Echo until his retirement in 2012, had been suffering from gradually deteriorating sight since being diagnosed with glaucoma in 1999.

“Little did I realise that one day I’d be experiencing life in a blind alley,” he says.

He was certified as partially sighted in 2014 and by 2017 he was considered by his consultant to be severely sight-impaired.

Explains Les: “My consultant ophthalmologist recommended that I apply for a guide dog, but I hung back for years thinking I could walk around without bumping into people and objects.”

But eventually Les bit the bullet and applied to get a guide dog in January 2020 ... just a couple of months before the UK was hit by Covid 19.

And with lockdowns and restrictions on training due to social distancing, everything was put on hold.

Les was placed on the waiting list but managed a brief assesment walk with a golden retriever before the first lockdown. “I was told further assesment was needed,” he says.

Then, after a ten month wait, Les got the news he’d been waiting for. “Out of the blue came that phone call: ‘We’d like to try you with a dog.’ I was expecting it to take much longer,” he says.

“A few days later there was three-year-old black Labrador Retriever cross Illya outside my front door.”

Training started immediately with a team from Guide Dogs visiting his home most weekdays for five weeks until Les qualified.

“It’s many months since that milestone and I feel that Illya knows it all and I still have my L-plates on,” Les jokes.

Now Illya has become an indispensable part of Les’s life - even helping him maintain his lifelong love of music which had seen him play in bands for more than 30 years.

**“I am so fortunate to have Illya in my life...”**

Les, now 74, explains: “When I retired I decided to learn to play the guitar and had been making weekly 20 mile round trips via bus and Metro to the Sage in Gateshead for guitar classes.

“But as my eyesight deteriorated it was becoming more and more difficult, especially in winter months - setting out in darkness at 6pm for a 90-minute class and getting home well after 10pm.

“All this changed with Illya’s arrival. She took me there and back on buses and on the Metro.

“My life now is very much changed. Illya’s arrival has not only transformed my day-to-day mobility, but, more than that, she



Les Oliver at his guitar practice with guide dog Illya

gives me the confidence to make my own way to the Sage, enabling me to continue my life-long love of making music.

“She gets me up early, rather than sleeping through the day. And

complete strangers now stop and talk to me.”

Les adds: “I am so fortunate to have Illya in my life. How could anyone resist that unconditional love she shows me dozens of times a day.”

## Sleigh bells ring as Brian becomes Santa’s helper



IT HAS been a tradition for as long as I can remember for a Santa sleigh to go around our local villages.

But the old sleigh has seen better days and we needed a replacement to enable Santa to make his visits.

A quick phone call and Brian Wheeler at Isuzu UK PR came to the rescue by loaning a D-MAX so Santa didn’t let anyone down.

A Christmas tree in the back, plenty of lights around it, and a custom made sleigh turned this luxurious go anywhere off-roader

into the perfect vehicle for Santa.

Just a pity he didn’t get to sit in the nice warm cabin, in some superb leather seats. No it was a bench in the back for Santa.

Over four nights, with plenty of his helpers on hand, collecting much needed money for our local schools, he managed to raise around £1,200.

A good and very enjoyable few nights were had by all. Ho ho ho.....

- Martin Ward

# These are testing times in the regions



□ Events like this Genesis launch in North Yorkshire in December are valued by Group members.

THERE'S a distinct sense of déjà vu surrounding recent developments in some motor industry press and PR departments.

It's 50 years this year since a bunch of bolshy Northern motoring hacks began plotting a minor revolution.

From Newark to Newcastle, Leeds to Liverpool they were becoming increasingly frustrated with what they regarded as a largely Southern-centric attitude amongst some motor industry PR departments.

While motoring writers based in the south were swanning off to try out the latest models in sunnier climes, those in the north felt they were being left out in the cold by some manufacturers.

There was an abundant supply of the latest models – some of them locked away in underground garages - for motoring writers to borrow and test down south, but few were allowed to make the trip up north.

The frustrations led, in 1973, to the formation of the Northern Group and now, as the Group approaches its fiftieth anniversary, those

## DAVID WHINYATES comments on worrying developments in the motoring PR business

frustrations are becoming manifest again. Just as they did back in the seventies when the Northern Group membership consisted purely of print journalists.

By and large they had little competition on their home turf back then and the Group argued - sometimes robustly – that their newspapers' circulations and readerships, which amounted to many millions, were of equal, if not more, importance, than those of the national press, magazines and southern regional media - particularly where local dealers were concerned.

Much has changed over the last 50 years. Digital media has blossomed in little more than a decade; newspaper circulations have shrivelled; advertising revenues have slumped as more and more on-line outlets compete for the

business. When the Group was first formed there were no such things as bloggers, influencers or videographers; a facebook was a photo album; twitter was something birds did; a tik-tok was a clock.

The Northern Group has recognised the rapidly changing media scene and opened its membership to Northern writers operating in cyberspace as well as print and broadcasting.

But nationwide competition for test cars and driving facilities means that competition is fierce.

Which is why we're eternally grateful to the likes of Kia, Genesis, Porsche and Grenadier, all of whom have staged driving events on our patch in recent months, not to forget the SMMT who's northern test day is a valuable and, hopefully, continuing driving asset.

Our members are acutely aware of - and sympathetic to - the problems for press offices thrown up by Covid and budgetary restrictions, but more and more of them are raising concerns about being unable to access the facilities they need in order to do their jobs.

We know that delivering and collecting test cars does not come cheap and that every place at a launch – whether at home or abroad – eats up a tremendous amount of the PR budget.

Even so, regional writers feel that they are once again being frozen out.

Our members and those in other regional groups are being affected by what they feel are unfair and unreasonable policies for the provision of test cars and facilities from some manufacturers – policies which hark back to the 'bad old days'.

One Northern Group member has become so disgruntled and frustrated with one company's failure to provide him with facilities that he says: "I've given up on them."

Back in the day, some Group members adopted an unofficial "no cars to drive – no news coverage" policy.

It would be a crying shame if any of our members felt the need to adopt such drastic measures again.

**THE Northern Group is looking at the possibility of setting up its own stand at next year's Yorkshire MotorSport Festival and ideas floated so far include the provision of a racing simulator to attract enthusiasts. Group members will be present to be quizzed about cars and answer the age old question of "What's the best car you've driven?"**

**The festival, right, was a huge success last year and will again be staged**

**on 125 acres of land above Holmfirth on 24, 25, 26 June.**

**The fun filled, action packed three days will include a closed-road hill climb, classic and vintage vehicle displays, manufacturers showing their**



**latest models, an engineering village, Yorkshire shopping and evening live music. Sarah Crabtree from Bangers & Cash will be in attendance again.**

**Our own NGMW member Martin Ward is helping to organise this bigger and better event at which more than 40,000 guests are expected.**

**For more details or availability of exhibition spaces please contact: martinward.automotive@gmail.com**



# New law could be the limit

IT WAS a bit of a shock to me to find out that from July 6th this year, all new cars, and I'm not sure if this applies to light commercial vehicles too, will be fitted with speed limiters, to 'help improve road safety'.

This new regulation will be imposed by the EU in the General Safety Regulation which was approved by the European Parliament in 2019 and which our government has adopted in spite of leaving the EU.

The Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) black boxes will use the car's GPS or SatNav systems to determine what the speed limit is, and ensure the vehicle does not go over the speed limit.

ISA's will be mandatory on all vehicles given



**Legislation which will require all new cars to be fitted with speed limiters could push up prices, says MARTIN WARD**



Type-Approval from July 6th, but will not affect cars on-sale or in production, so it will take quite some time to filter through to all cars. Nor will it be necessary to retrofit the system to older models.

Prices are bound to rise with new technology being added and entry-level cars on sale today, which have pretty basic specifications, will need much more technology to be added, pushing prices up dramatically.

As a driver, I'm not convinced speed limiters will make driving any safer. In certain circumstances you do need a bit of acceleration to get you out of trouble and away from other drivers who might be driving recklessly or dangerously.

With the way technology is being rolled out, it is possible that all cars will have the ability to report any speeding to the authorities so, in effect, your car's system reports you to the police.

But, when everyone sticks to the speed limits, which of course they must, and should, then the income from fines and 'awareness courses' will drop to virtually nothing, leaving a big hole in the government's finances.

But this new ISA technology will need many more microchips to make them work, so that in itself creates a whole new problem for manufacturers and suppliers.

# It's a camping carry-on!

AT THE end of 2020 on a complete whim, Mark and I bought a 1986 Land Rover 127 Pulse-bodied ambulance with the intention of converting it into a posh camper.

As we already have a 1956 Series One, a 1965 Series IIA camper and a 1993 Defender 90 some may say that was a Land Rover too far!

Nevertheless, we didn't regret our decision and set about turning it into a self-sufficient overland camper that would tackle any terrain and allow us to remain off-grid for weeks at a time.

The various lockdowns proved challenging with equipment delays, the price of materials going through the roof and expert help difficult to come by.

But, little by little it came together and we are rather proud of it, despite the final

**JULIE MARSHALL is planning to go off-grid in her latest Landie**



cost looking so scary I refused to add it up on the spreadsheet.

Solar panels and a massive lithium-ion battery provide power when away from electric hook up and the gas and water tanks are underslung to save space.

We have an onboard shower and loo, fridge, cooker, hob and room to sleep three (an extra double bed can also be added to the roof at some stage) a wind-out awning provides shade.

In 2021 we got out and about as many times as we could (including a week away with our man from Gargrave in his left-hand drive Renault camper) and are making lots of plans for 2022.

Perhaps next year if travel is a little less problematic we may go on longer trips to France and Spain and then explore further afield when we retire - if that ever happens.



☐ Above and below: the Land Rover ambulance before conversion and after - complete with solar panel, pop-up roof and awning. Below left: home from home and room for three in the cosy interior.





The Northern Group has taken a further step into the world of digital media with the admission to membership of Ben and Annabelle Quirk who become our first members with their own YouTube channel, Planetauto. And they've wasted no time getting involved with Group affairs, setting up a new Group YouTube channel to which members can submit their own videos. We find out a little bit more about them...



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WITH Manx family blood and Northern roots, Ben received an HND Diploma in Multimedia, Web Design and Video Editing from Teesside University.

Ben has always had a love of cars, and throughout his career as a web designer, he was always creating content

inspired by this love.

As times changed (and double dip recessions bit) Ben made a move to work on projects that excited and challenged him and that move was made to create quality content and produce video reviews.

Although the website was born in 2005 as a repository for car knowledge, Planetauto

was re-invented at the beginning of 2017 as a YouTube channel.

The focus was on content creation and the production of video media and broadcasting from automotive shows and festivals in order to provide live access.

Since the Planetauto Channel was launched, the team have celebrated some amazing

achievements, including attending some of the greatest automotive events in the U.K. and working with many car manufacturers, reviewing some of their bestselling models.

Their efforts have not been in vein and they have already celebrated seeing the channel hit the ten thousand subscribers level.

**BORN** and raised in Cardiff, Annabelle started her career in customer services and the promotions industry, making the most of her natural abilities and honing her hospitality skills.

Annabelle is now capitalising on her ability to use these skills to help co-manage Planetauto's calendar of events, reviews and content creation.

She holds a BA (Hons) in English, and a PRINCE2 Certificate, which gives her the communication skills and

knowledge to successfully manage the logistics of all that goes into running Planetauto.

Before stepping into a more active role for Planetauto, Annabelle spent the previous fifteen years working with a diverse range of clients as an executive education programme manager including LVMH, Emirates, GSL, BP, Co-op Bank, Uncommon Leaders, London Business School, Duke Corporate Education and Imperial Business School.

Given her skills, Annabelle has the ability to work within many different facets of quality content creation.

Says Annabelle: "It was an especially sunny day for Ben and I when we received the fantastic news that we had both been accepted as new members of the group.

"Knowing that we are now able to gather amongst our peers in the north and share our encounters was – for both of us – a fantastic highlight of 2021."



# Venues with vroom

More and more driving events are being staged on our patch and we'd love to welcome more...

**FREDERIC MANBY extols the virtues of some of the north's best launch locations.**

AS Robert Zimmerman wrote 60 years ago, times are a changing. The point being that the upheavals in culture which Bob Dylan sang about have been echoed by the joint attritions of Covid disease and the drip, drip, drop plummet in car sales and PR budgets for events.

In the past year, despite the set backs, many launches have been held in NGMW territory. The area covered by the Group is huge, roughly from Carlisle to Newcastle in the north, and east from Chester in the south.

It remains one of the country's major regions for car sales and population and commerce. Nothing much comes near it, certainly not in Wales or Scotland or the South West or all Ireland.

What it also offers is a unique map of roads, from the seemingly endless high country in Cumbria and Northumberland and the North York Moors to the dales and valleys which connect with them.

Some press offices recognise that these driving routes with low traffic density help us to find out about handling and, yes, driving enjoyment in a way not possible on an event in the Thames Valley where you can never get going from one speed limit to the next.

“ The north remains one of the country's major regions with a unique map of roads ”

At the rather exclusive end, Porsche GB uses Headlam Hall near Darlington for national events. It is handy for the A1 motorway and you are soon motoring, whether south west towards Richmond and Swaledale, or north through County Durham to the border with bonny Scotland and who knows what happens beyond. This secluded country house hotel and spa dates from the 17th century and, like many which follow in this review, it is family owned.

Mazda is a generous supporter of regional groups and a favourite HQ is Bowcliffe Hall, within a mile of the A1M near Wetherby.

It was once home to the boss of the Blackburn aircraft company and, for several years, has been owned and developed by Jonathan Turner, wealthy from oil retailing (eg Gulf) and fortunately placed to be a collector of the finest

historic British cars. He's driven his 1929 Bentley on the 10,000-mile Peking-Paris rally and campaigns with the first works Bentley to race at Le Mans - in 1925.

The private members club room is devoted to motoring and outside is a separate, modern meeting and eating wing - almost literally. Its inspiration was the profile of a plane wing. It's a long story.

You'll have to find a bed elsewhere and we are not far away from Thorpe Park hotel, longtime venue for NGMW events in the days before accountants wanted to see the bar bills. It still makes a good launch spot. The buffet lacks the silver service lunches up the road but is quick and there is a large secure car park.

A few miles north of Bowcliffe is Wood Hall, used for many launches and NGMW events. For the last two years it has hosted our BBQ night when we host PRs who run desks at the SMMT northern driving day at Wetherby racecourse.

As I write, Suzuki has just announced an event at Carden Park, near Chester.

While Cheshire's roads lack the gritty realism of Yorkshire they are pretty. Other handsome Cheshire locations are Nunsmere Hall and Rookery Hall.

Liverpool is not far away and the Titanic hotel is in an old, huge red brick dock warehouse. Vauxhall and SEAT have been there. It is an interesting spot but open roads take time to reach.

Kia is another generous supporter of regional press, and longtime sponsor of the NGMW annual meeting. This year's will be at Crathorne Hall, near Yarm in North Yorkshire, for more of those great northern roads.

In 2021 they chose the Coniston Hall Hotel near Skipton, which is smack on the road to the western Yorkshire Dales and Lakeland and handy for the Trough of Bowland, a hidden gem, as they say. The hall is another family concern, hunting folk from way back, and owners of the Boundary Mill retail outlets. It has an off-road Land Rover Experience course and superb facilities.

Unusually, there's also a Land Rover Experience centre not far away at Broughton Hall: take your pick. Broughton Hall is also a car launch centre -



□ Broughton Hall hosts a Land Rover Experience Centre and is a busy film location.

Lamborghini have been there - and has been the Tempest family seat since 1097. Beat that.

Sleepy? you can rent the hall or a cottage in the grounds. It is a busy film location, most recently for Gentleman Jack and All Creatures Great and Small.

And finally, two newcomers came to see us. Ineos launched its Grenadier at Duncombe Park, Helmsley, on its world tour. Chauffeured rides were better than nothing and the story of this modern tribute to the battle weary Land Rover Defender was worth covering - and we got a commemorative monogrammed tour T-shirt. A nice touch. Nice, too, to meet up with Veronica Borelli-Painter who was working on the event.

Last launch of the year, and a reminder of times past, was our introduction to Genesis. The location was near Richmond at Middleton Lodge, a family owned Georgian country estate with outstanding cooking. Honda, Volvo and Maserati have been there in previous years.

Simon Branney had done everything he could, taking the entire lodge from lunch to dinner and then B&B. He invited all the group and partners, too, but the weather in early December was foul and horrible and it was soon dark. Yes, it really can be reet grim up north. I had an early bath.



# Going green in the Dales



I ALWAYS sense trepidation in our current chairman Andy's voice when he tells me he has a 4x4 on loan and I begin arranging a day out green laning. It's not as though I've been known to lead him astray, much.

The other week it just so happened that I had the all-new Subaru Outback, whilst our illustrious leader had the equally new Suzuki S-Cross, so what better way to test their off-road prowess than by traversing the odd green lane around the North Yorkshire Dales.

Our rendezvous point was Lupton, a small linear village on the A65, just a few minutes away from junction 36 on the M6.

Within Lupton there's a short, yet



**It's not just our excellent roads that make the North a great place to launch a car - there's a great network of green lanes waiting to welcome off-road events. DAMIAN TURNER describes a recent off-piste test drive double act with chairman Andy Harris**



interesting, green lane that descends quite sharply towards a brook.

The last time I was down there I was in the Jeep Renegade 4xe (4-by-e), and the brook was a raging torrent, so I figured it wasn't worth the risk and turned round.

On our day however, the water level was around a foot and a half, easily manageable in both our cars.

Photos taken, and satisfied of our steeds' wading capabilities, we made our way past Kirby Lonsdale, then left at Ingleton and onto the B6255 towards Hawes and our second green lane.

By now it had turned into a glorious and unseasonably warm morning, with an almost clear blue sky and a very low sun that made taking photos a tad difficult - at least that's my excuse.

Upon reaching High Cam Road, his eminence and I headed down towards Bainbridge.

**☐ Top: Subaru Outback and Suzuki S-Cross take the high road over the Dales.**

**Left: making bow-waves through the brook near Lupton**

**Right: Pause for a photo-opportunity alongside Semerwater**

Offering spectacular views, High Cam Road has a surface of compact gravel with a few limestone steps to negotiate. With decent ground clearance I wasn't concerned about catching the Outback's undercarriage, but our esteemed figurehead had to be a little less nonchalant, and a bit more wary, when it came to wheel placement in the S-Cross.

Arriving unscathed at the bottom, we made our way towards Semerwater, the second largest lake in North Yorkshire, known for water sports, walks and peaceful scenery.

It doesn't matter what your carriage is, you simply can't drive past Semerwater without pulling over onto the shoreline and taking a photo or two - it's the law.

More photos taken, we headed towards our next ancient byway, High Lane. Much like our previous green lane, it's mainly made up of

compact gravel and suitable for most vehicles with all-wheel drive.

There is only one obstacle to be aware of, and that's a deep rain channel that cuts across the lane.

To be fair, in a proper 4x4 it would be deemed insignificant, but in the Outback, and in particular the S-Cross, it was an obstacle that required respect.

Positioning the Outback at a 45° angle, I slowly eased the front, off-side wheel into the channel.

Amongst other things, this method limits the damage you can cause to the front bumper of vehicles if you drive straight on.

The Outback cleared it with plenty of room to spare, and next it was our distinguished commander's turn, and taking the same line, the S-Cross proved that it's a capable machine with abilities above its station.

From here on High Lane continues to climb, offering more amazing views across the Dales. After a short plateau we made our way back down to tarmac and our lunch stop at The Buck Inn in Buckden.

Although the three green lanes aren't particularly gnarly, nor damaging, over our fish and mushy pea sandwiches, we both gave the S-Cross a respectful nod of respect.







SOME Northern Group members, like their colleagues in other regions of the British Isles, will remember trying out a Green Goddess. That's not the more familiar Bedford fire engine of the type coaxed into service during civil emergencies, but an arguably prettier example of Deity in the care of DS Automobiles and Citroën press fleets.

For the ageing specimen of a motoring legend with more miles under her bonnet than she could ever imagine, it is time for retirement after sixty years on the road.

Carefully prepared for her final escapade before a hopefully long superannuation, the DS, which, in fact is a 1961 British-built ID19, was sent to Paris where she joined company with other historic vehicles wearing the Double Chevron insignia.

The destination was none other than Citroën's famed Conservatoire which is a treasure trove of the most iconic and famous paradigms dating from the firm's establishment in 1919.

The Conservatoire houses prototypes and earliest production models of cars and commercial vehicles built in Citroën's factories throughout Europe and beyond including the Javel works



▣ **Pride and joy: Malcolm with his DS (above) and (top) the green goddess causes a stir in Paris.**

# Mon dieux Malcolm, c'est magnifique!

**Even the locals did a double take when MALCOLM BOBBITT turned up in Paris in his British-built Citroën DS. We trace the story of the car that became a star in its own right**



bordering the River Seine, Aulnay to the north of the French Capital, La Jannais at Rennes, the Forest plant in Bruxelles and even at Slough which, when it opened in 1926, was the French firm's first overseas factory.

As well as cars, vans, lorries and buses, Citroën's output included the Kegresse-type machines which heralded the company's overland expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s across the

Sahara Desert, forging routes north to south through darkest Africa and crossing Asia via the Himalayas to reach Peking.

In its early years, the ID19 wearing the index number 57 EKKX was Citroën Cars Limited's own car and was used for publicity purposes as well as being the transport for the Slough factory's chief engineer Ken Smith who did much to set up the DS production facility at Slough ahead of the car's 1955 introduction in France.

After exemplary service it was passed to the motor trade and after a couple of

custodianships was offered for sale at the 1991 Beaulieu Autojumble.

That's where Northern group member Malcolm Bobbitt spotted it and instantly recognised its importance. Within minutes he'd succumbed to its charms and a deal was struck with the vendor. Malcolm kept the car for some twenty years, eventually selling it to a German racing driver, only for it to be offered for sale after a couple of years when it was acquired by Citroën UK.

It was under Malcolm's guardianship that the Sherwood Green Citroën with its daffodil roof was widely used, often making trips between his home in West Cumbria and London as well as longer voyages to all parts of Scotland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and deeper forays into Europe. A significant journey was to Paris in 2005 as part of the celebrations to mark the DS's 50th anniversary.

It is a car that's been well-featured on screen and in print and been the subject of several television programmes including BBC's *The Car's the Star* and Discovery Channel's *Top Marques* as well as in the pages of numerous motoring publications.

The Slough-built DS and ID differed to their French siblings as they were designed to appeal to British customers who expected lashings of leather and wood in the style of Rovers, Jaguars and even Bentleys.

Daringly different with their hydropneumatic suspension and unique styling, the cars were favoured by the more adventurous motorists who understood just how satisfying these cars were to drive.

# Dan's the man for Ford

LONG-serving Ford PR man **Dan Jones** will be the company's next director of communications and public affairs.

Dan will take up his new role on April 1st when he will become responsible for all of Ford's earned media product and corporate communications activities in the UK and Ireland.

Currently the senior manager for passenger vehicle communications, at Ford of Europe, Dan started his career with the company in 2009.

His past experience includes product and corporate roles in the UK and product launch strategy across Europe and North America.

Says Dan: "I am thrilled to re-join the team where I started my journey at Ford, and feel privileged to unite with some of the most talented and experienced colleagues of any communications team. The opportunity to help narrate the next chapter of Ford's story in the UK doesn't come along very often and I cannot wait to get started."

Dan currently lives in Essex with his wife Alexina, and son Harry. He enjoys cooking, DIY, skiing when he can, and on weekends playing as a midfielder for Chelmsford Hockey Club.

In his new UK and Ireland role, Dan succeeds **John Gardiner** who is retiring from Ford at the end of March after more than 30 years.

John said: "I've had a great time at the Blue Oval, working in different PR and governmental roles in various global locations, and have been proud to have played a small role in helping to tell the Ford story.

## Motor Industry News with Alan Domville



Top brass: Dan Jones will cop Ford's top PR job when John Gardiner (left, above) retires while Olivia Ross-Wilson is Volvo's new head of communications.

"I'm delighted Dan is taking on the mantle in the UK and Ireland as he has a great reputation with the media and a wonderful team to support him."

There's another top appointment at Volvo where **Olivia Ross-Wilson** is the new head of communications having taken up her new post in December,

Her appointment continues her Scandinavian links for, prior to taking up her new position with the Swedish automotive brand, Olivia had led the communications team within the Ingka Group, the largest of the franchisees that operate IKEA stores - since 2016.

She has 20 years' experience in media and public relations working in London and New York with premium brands including Marks and Spencer and Delta Airlines and also the Clinton Foundation.

New public relations lead at Volvo is **Tom Lynch**, formerly of Volkswagen, Honda and the Goodwood estate.



Tom has taken over the reins from interim lead **Ian Tonkin** who has been appointed the external communications strategist with the company's Volvo Europe, Middle East and Africa team.

Media relations executive **Georgia Watt** has departed to a PR agency. Renault's new head of press and public relations is **Rachel Goodwin** who has extensive experience of motor industry media affairs having worked as a press officer with Hyundai and an accounts executive with a specialist automotive agency before moving to Mercedes-Benz, initially as a press officer and then senior PO.

At Mercedes **Olivia Frankel** has been appointed press specialist with responsibility for technology media. She joined the company in 2018 as an intern and has latterly been working with the marketing team.

After leading MG's PR strategy and events organisation for the past few months, **Linda Robinson** is now a colleague experience and events manager with Sky Television. Linda has also worked with Nissan and Renault.

**Mark Griffiths** has joined Hyundai as their corporate PR manager. Previously, Mark was communications insight manager

with Honda Europe. He worked for several motoring titles before moving into PR, initially taking charge of Continental Tyres' press office.

Audi have welcomed back **Jo Catchpole** to their press office team following her maternity leave. She now works on a job-share basis with **Kate Dixon**.

**Natalie Southerden**, who has covered for Jo during the past year, has moved to Skoda as their team's median relations manager.

**Tamara Better** is Nissan's new product communications section manager. She's been with the company since 2016 working in marketing and aftersales.

Isuzu have appointed **Brian Wheeler** as product and PR manager. Brian has been involved with the motor industry for more than 20 years, much of that time with Mitsubishi, most recently as product planner, press officer and PR and social media executive.

Also new at Isuzu is **Alexander Taylor** who has been appointed events and PR executive, assisting with press activity and media relations.



Former Mitsubishi man **Brian Wheeler** is now product and PR manager at Isuzu.

More Motor Industry News on Page 15



# Heart's in Seoul for Andrew

**More Motor Industry News with Alan Domville**



□ Andrew Roberts

THE Hyundai Group have appointed **Andrew Roberts** as vice president to lead their global PR operations for both the Hyundai and Kia marques from their base in Seoul.

Previously, Andrew had led communications at Bentley, Mercedes-Benz and Land Rover and latterly he was with Influence Associates as their chief operating officer. He has 25 years' experience within the motor industry.

At Jaguar Land Rover **Lindsey Dipple** has been promoted to a new role, taking on responsibility for the management of multiple fleets across their UK business. She continues to service press fleet logistics regarding delivery and collection but our

requests for test cars are now being managed by relevant brand officers: **Charmaine Lewis** for Jaguar and **Mark Griffin** for Land Rover.

Michelin have appointed **Conor Twomey** as their communications director for the UK and Ireland.

Conor has been involved with journalism and PR for more than 20 years and has previously worked with Jaguar, Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Mitsubishi.

There have been a number of appointments affecting the Stellantis Group's Alfa Romeo, DS and Fiat PR operations.

**Kris Cholmondeley**, head of PR for the DS Automobiles brand, has added the Alfa Romeo marque to his responsibilities while **Krystyna Perry**, PR manager with Alfa, has added DS to her remit.

In the Fiat press department **Kate Oyler** is the new head of PR for the marque along with Fiat Professional, Abarth and Jeep.

Kate was previously head of brand communications for Citroen, DS, Peugeot and Vauxhall, having joined the latter 10 years ago.

Working with Kate is PR manager **Chloe Yemm** who first joined the former FCA Group in 2019.

## News in Brief

STELLANTIS senior vice president Alison Jones has been appointed the 82nd president of the SMMT, a post she is serving for a year.

Formerly group managing director for Peugeot, Citroen and DS in the United Kingdom, Alison has also held senior roles within the Volkswagen Group.

GUILLAUME Sicard is the new managing director at Renault UK, succeeding Vincent Tourette. Previously, Guillaume was working in a senior role with the company in China and, before that, in India. He has also served as president of Nissan India.

BARBARA Purnell, widow of former Group member Eric, died last year and it fell to Eric's son Rick Bowers to sort out the couple's home in Wales.

He came across the two figurines that were specially created by Margaret Coning to mark the 10th and 21st anniversaries of our Group. He decided to write to us to warn us that they had been put up for auction on ebay in case any member wished to acquire them.

Eric, Radio Manchester's motoring man, died in 2011 and Barbara was his third wife.

TONY Dron, who was editor of Thoroughbred and Classic Cars from 1983 to 1992 and more recently freelanced with the Daily Telegraph, has died at the age of 75. Tony competed as a professional racing driver from 1968 to 2011.

ROGER Anthony, well known to members through his membership initially of the Welsh and Midland groups has died at the age of 69. Roger was motoring editor for the Oswestry and Border Counties Advertiser and Whitchurch Herald where he was also a sub editor and designer for more than 30 years.



□ Connor Twomey

# Forget Italy - it's the Ilkley Job



□ Andy Harris's thoroughly modern MINI Cooper JCW stood out from the crowd of classic Minis at Elvington

I AM a great fan of the Italian Job and was excited to find out about and participate in an exciting event that came to Yorkshire last year.

Inspired by the 1969 Michael Caine film of the same name, the Italian Job motoring holiday has been (for the last 30 years) a road trip for MINI and vintage car enthusiasts.

The event takes adventurers (or 'Jobbers' as they are known) off the beaten track in Italy to see the real country, away from the tourist trail. It also offers the chance to visit some of the locations used in the hit film.



□ End of the road: the Yorkshire Italian Job finished with a photo opportunity in front of the Piece Hall in Halifax.

## With Italy out of bounds thanks to Covid, where could Mini enthusiasts go for their yearly Italian Job run? Yorkshire of course - and ANDY HARRIS joined them for a day.

With travel restrictions precluding a tour of Italy, the event organisers decided to hold their first ever UK-based 'job' in the beautiful county of North Yorkshire.

I was happy to promote the local event and was invited to join the assembled throng for the whole tour, which began with a day at RAF Elvington, near York.

Sadly, I couldn't spare the time, but

did join the friendly Mini enthusiasts for the opening day's jollities. In order to blend in, the MINI press office kindly provided me with a sparkling new Cooper JCW.

A day spent using Elvington's long runway for timed trials, obstacle courses and much more was pleasurable, ending with all the participating cars forming a rather grand synchronised procession.

The event went on to take in many of the hidden gems that capture the very essence of Yorkshire - from the soaring natural beauty of the Dales to the rugged sandy beaches of the Yorkshire Coast; to the stunning and breath-taking landscapes of the North Yorkshire Moors to the cosmopolitan charm of Leeds and York's ancient cobbled streets.

The Italian Job's raison d'être is to raise money for children affected by poverty in the UK. To date the mother and son organisers, Giulia

and Freddie St George, have generated nearly £3 million for charity through the event. Each driver/adventurer was encouraged to raise money in advance of the trip through local fundraising activities and sponsorship of their car.

The Italian Job's current charity is Buttle UK, which provides support by paying for things that we would expect all children in the UK to have, but which their parents simply cannot afford.

Each grant is designed to meet needs where the safety, health or development of a child or young person are at risk. It could pay for a bed where a child does not have one, and has been sleeping on the floor, or a laptop to do schoolwork for a child who, having fled domestic abuse, cannot go into school because of Covid-19.

An endowment created by Buttle UK's founder, Frank Buttle, means that the charity can pay its own administration costs. Therefore, 100 per cent of all monies raised on the 'Yorkshire Job' went directly to the children it helps.

If you fancy taking part in this year's event, hopefully returning to the sunny climes of Italy, more details can be found at [www.italianjob.com](http://www.italianjob.com)



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