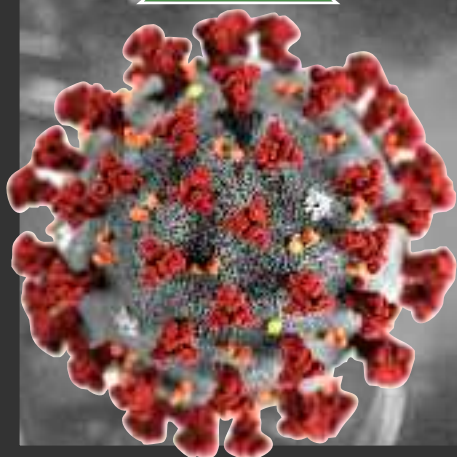


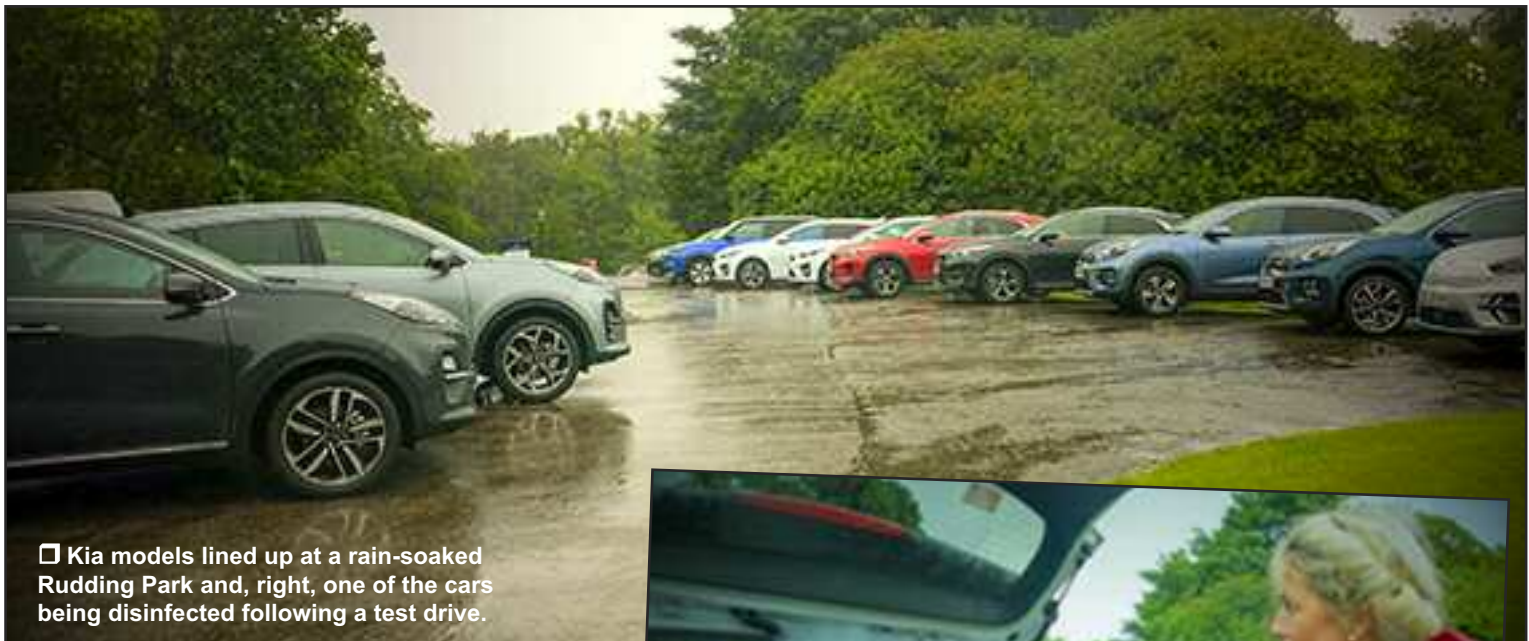


Our Covid diaries

With no launches and no cars to test, how did our members manage to fill their time during lockdown? Turn inside to find out...

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□ Kia models lined up at a rain-soaked Rudding Park and, right, one of the cars being disinfected following a test drive.

That Kia aura



IT took more than a pandemic to force the cancellation of the Group's traditional annual driving event and social get together with Kia.

Coronavirus restrictions did, however, rule out the normal early summer event and the date was moved back to late August.

Ten of the latest Kia models were available to



□ The Kia team at Rudding Park: Steve Kitson, Melissa Lodge, Sara Robinson and Daniel Sayles.

drive at Rudding Park hotel near Harrogate and, in spite of atrocious weather conditions, our members managed to fit in a total of 56 test drives covering in excess of 3,500 miles between them. And this was in spite of the fact that Covid 19 precautions had to be put in place with each car being sanitised between test drives.

The event - Kia's first since lockdown restrictions were eased - had been meticulously organised by the Kia press office's student intern, Melissa Lodge, who was praised at the evening dinner by her boss, PR Director Steve Kitson.

Said Steve: "Melissa has battled through to make this event happen despite all the challenges.

"I hope you will join me in saying well done as none of you can possibly imagine the hoops she has had to jump through and the obstacles she has had to overcome."

Melissa will complete her extended internship in the Kia press office soon and return to Newcastle University to complete her course.

"Compared to this event, her last year of studies will be a walk in the park," Steve added

ngmw NEWS

Locked down and self isolated - our members have had plenty of time on their hands in recent months. So with no test cars to drive or launches to attend, exactly what have they been doing to fill their time? In this edition of Northern Group News some of our members provide an insight into their leisure-time activities from bird watching via lonely cycle rides to camp stove cooking in the back garden.

With the easing of restrictions some members have been able to attend driving events in recent weeks. Social distancing and strict hygiene measures remain the order of the day, but there are now some hopeful signs of a return to normality.

- David Whinyates
Editor

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

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

Main contributor: Alan Domville.

Contributors: Malcolm Bobbitt, Andy Harris, Steve Howarth, Frederic Manby, Julie Marshall, Jonathan Smith and Martin Ward.

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

It's our Friend Steve

ARGUABLY the Northern Group's most ardent supporter, Steve Kitson, has been made a Friend of the Group.

Steve, who is due to retire from his role as director of public relations at Kia at the end of the year, was presented with a traditional miner's lamp - the Group's 'badge of honour' - by general secretary Alan Domville at the recent Kia driving day at Rudding Park near Harrogate.

Steve joins an elite group of five other former motor industry PRs who have been awarded Friend of the Group status in recognition of their services to the Group and its members.

And to mark his impending retirement and in recognition of his many years of support, chairman Andy Harris also presented Steve with a specially commissioned artwork by Ian Cook which shows him alongside a Kia Stinger.

Steve joined the Group in 1980 when he was motoring correspondent of the Bradford Telegraph and Argus.

His first job in motor industry PR was with Leeds-based National Breakdown - now Green Flag - but he soon moved into the mainstream of motoring PR with Renault.

It was at Hyundai where Steve's rise to the top began. After a stint with the Korean company's UK PR department, he was promoted to the firm's head office in Seoul where he spent three years. On his return to the UK he took over PR for Hyundai's motorsport activities before eventually joining Kia as head of PR.

Steve still holds the Northern Group in great affection. He says: "It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be both a member of and a supporter of the Northern Group.

"The Group welcomed me in and I was met with warmth, friendship and hospitality - and it's still the same. You're always welcoming and that's what makes the Northern Group special.

"To come here and spend time with people who simply appreciate us being on their patch is very important to us," he added.



Well hello Dolly... You're not looking at all good Dolly!

□ This dilapidated 1987 Citroen 2CV 6 Dolly was spotted by Northern Group News editor David Whinyates in a garden-cum-junk yard next to a house at Naburn Lock on the River Ouse near York - appropriately parked next to a rubbish bin with a hazardous waste sticker. With a potential restoration project in mind, David spoke to the lady owner who told him that it was in perfectly good running order, was still used for the occasional trip to the shops and was most definitely not for sale!



☐ Northern Group bubble - Andrew Wright, Julie Marshall, Damien Turner and Frederic Manby back in action on the recent Land Rover Defender launch.

We're getting back on the road again

AS the world slowly emerges from the coronavirus crisis, it is clear the motor industry faces a multitude of challenges.

Working from home is likely to become the new normal for many, bringing into question the need for two cars in a family. The upside will no doubt be a reduction in commuter traffic, though I imagine the school run will be as busy as ever.

During the height of the pandemic we were urged to avoid public transport, something that I have been trying to do for years.

“Expect a flurry of reviews from our members ... you will not be short of reading material”

This leads me nicely on to the electric bicycle I recently had on test. Not having cycled any distance for more years than I care to remember, I was surprised to find myself whizzing through the countryside on 10 to 20-mile rides.

The bike could be folded in just ten seconds and

FROM THE CHAIR with Andy Harris



fitted easily into the boot of the various cars adorning my driveway. I can see the benefits, not just to my general health and waistline. Drive to the edge of town, park for free and continue emissions free to my journey's end.

The appeal is such that I am going to make a purchase, though the myriad of options is somewhat bewildering. I also gather that most e-bikes are out of stock, so clearly I am not on my own in this way of thinking.

Does this mean that I am falling out of love with the car? Absolutely not, but it is inevitable that our freedom to use our cars is being reigned in.

In Gateshead the other day, traffic chaos reigned as the council dug up roads to make new cycle and bus lanes and in London, mayor Khan is increasing charges for anyone with the temerity to try and drive into the capital.

The shift to greener cars is continuing apace and a raft of electric cars are now starting to hit the showrooms. Many, like the new Honda e, are aimed directly at the city driver and if you have some home charging, cars like this work very well and in the Honda's case are fun too.

The charging infrastructure is slowly improving



and even my part of rural North Yorkshire is slowly starting to embrace the change.

On the work front, car launches are beginning to take place once more with safety and social distancing the order of the day.

It is a joy getting back behind both the wheel and the keyboard and looking at my calendar, up to now a sea of crossings out, it is going to be a busy couple of months.

Expect a flurry of reviews from our members as we all play catchup. You will not be short of reading material, that's for sure.

Eyes down for great tits

DAVID WHINYATES reflects on bingo, bird watching and gardening during lockdown

REBECCA long Bailey spent most of the tedious lockdown months self-isolating on our driveway.

Not the bespectacled leftie politico, I should hasten to explain, but our motorhome. It's called Rebecca – but usually Becky for short – because at 7.5 meters it's pretty long and it's made by caravan and motorhome makers extraordinaire, Bailey of Bristol.

We'd planned on taking Becky for a month long sojourn to France and Spain in late May. Instead she sat grumpily on the drive demanding regular feeds of electricity in case her batteries went flat.

We'd gone into self-imposed self-isolation long before Boris and his SAGE mob made us all do it.

We knew the writing was on the wall when we came back from a winter sun break in early March so, as responsible but vulnerable seniors, we locked ourselves in, hunkered down and accepted our daughter's kind offer to do all of our shopping.



☐ Mean machine: the Cobra battery mower



☐ Feeding time: a pair of tits chow down on suet and mealworms in the Whinyates' garden

That, of course, was a major crisis for Pauline who thinks there's nothing more satisfying than pushing a trolley round Tesco on a Saturday morning; I accepted this tragic interruption to our weekend routine with amazingly good grace.

Which is, according to Pauline, rather strange. She reckons that now I've reached my Victor Meldrew years there's been an inevitable increase in the things that make me angry.

But the opposite seems to have been true - in the long months of lockdown I reckon that I've actually mellowed rather than Meldrewed. My tolerance levels have improved and pet hates have become quite enjoyable pastimes.

Like bingo and bird watching, aka twitching.

On trips to the seaside as a kid I just couldn't understand why people would want to sit in a clammy amusement arcade or bingo hall with their eyes down, hovering their dibbers – or should it be dobbers? – over a slip of coloured paper in the hope of winning a few bob.

Now I find it a quite fascinating game thanks to some inventive neighbours who organised an evening of socially-distanced street bingo on the green area in front of our homes. Who knew, for example, that two fat ladies have been outlawed because they're not politically correct – now it's William and Kate for 88.

It was a chilly night but I found myself sweating profusely as the squares on my cards filled-up. My new-found love of the game has, of course, nothing to do with the fact that I carried home five prizes including several rather fine alcoholic beverages, plus a box of choes for Pauline.

My dislike of twitchers was born in Cyprus where bird watchers used to descend on our village which was a well known stopping off point for migratory birds. They would land, clog-up the narrow roads, trample crops and generally disturb

our quiet rural life in their search for a rare sighting before flying off to roost elsewhere. The twitchers, I mean, not the birds.

Now, I'm afraid to say, I've joined their ranks.

I now know that a robin isn't just for Christmas, I'm on tapping terms with a woodpecker and I can tell the difference between a blue tit and a great tit. Amazing how many hours of endless fun you can have watching the little creatures pigging out on suet and mealworms in the bird feeder.

Gardening has never been one of my favourite pastimes either, but with little else to occupy the mind, I've taken to hoeing, forking and grass cutting with a vengeance.

I've now come to the conclusion that stones are organic material – no matter how many you take out of the flower beds there are more breeding just below the top soil and waiting to surface.

I've bought a Cobra – not an AC or a Shelby, but a sexy little red, battery-electric number with a low-slung front end, fat wheels and a rear roller. It's a real mean machine, goes from standstill to stripes in seconds and makes mowing the lawn an absolute breeze with no wires to trip over.

Between the many mows, sitting in the garden gives you valuable thinking time – time to ponder the great mysteries of life such as how does Michael Portillo manage so many technicolour yawn changes of clothes when he only carries a dog-eared copy of Bradshaws, and never a suitcase on his Great Continental Railway Journeys?

So that's been my lockdown. Hopefully the worst is over and we – and Becky the long Bailey – are hoping to get away on our long-overdue camping trip in September. Spain and the Netherlands have spiked and are now out of the question so the Rhine Valley, lederhosen, schnitzel and bratwurst beckon – if we're very lucky!

Lockdown: it's music to a Yorkshireman's ears...

MARTIN WARD saved a fortune
but sixty quid for fence paint
came as a bit of a shock



THE past few months have been terrible times.

Terrible for all those who have lost their lives, terrible for the family and friends left behind, and terrible for businesses and industry - unless, of course, you produce sanitizer or face masks or 'keep two meters apart' signs - and terrible for the travel industry.

The motor trade was forced to put up the closed signs for weeks. Factories shut down, dealers locked their showroom and service department doors and sales went into meltdown.

In the months of March, April and May only 279,252 cars were registered in Britain, compared to 834,629 in 2018, a whopping 555,377 difference in registrations according to the SMMT's figures. Ouch....

But it's not all been bad. In fact, for a true Yorkshire man like me, it's actually been ok.

I haven't been able to go to the pub, saving money. We haven't had any family meals out, no curry nights out with the lads, big savings.

I haven't been able to go to the barbers... that's saved another £9. Kerr-ching.....

We haven't been to the coast and spent a fortune on ridiculously-priced iced creams or donkey rides and we've saved on the cost of fuel to get there. It's been warm enough so we've not had to put the heating on meaning there've been no additional gas and electric costs for being at home.

Holidays were cancelled, so there were massive savings on flights and hotel, airport parking, car hire etc. We couldn't celebrate any birthdays or special occasions, so buying presents, flowers etc were put on hold "until things improve".. now things are improving, we seem to have forgotten who actually had birthdays during lockdown, so that's even more saved.

The cars couldn't be MOT'd so we kept the money in the Building Society a bit longer. We couldn't go out for weeks and buy any new clothes, or bits and pieces for home.

I did however manage to find, after much searching, some paint for my new back garden fence - the £60 cost came as a bit of a shock. I had

to sit down and have a cuppa after spending that much in one go.

Like many others I had an 'abandoned' test car - a very nice SEAT Arona FR - for three months, so using that, instead of my own car, inevitably saved money too. It was frugal on petrol and great to drive, however I couldn't use it much, or go any distance in it, but it was good to have around and almost became part of the family. When you work it all out, the lockdown has saved me a small fortune and these few words are music to the ears of a Yorkshireman

During lockdown I had plans to do all sorts of things and had loads of good intentions: read books, learn Spanish, sort out my garage, do the garden at my mum's. All are still on the list of things to do... I'll save them for later in case we have a second spike.

I have really missed the launches, events, meeting friends in the industry from the manufacturers and fellow NGMW members. Just hope we can return to some sort of normality soon.. but I'm not holding my breath..

OBITUARY:

Don Ludlow

ONE of the Group's longest serving members, Don Ludlow died in hospital on Sunday, August 13th.

Don, who would have been 90 in December, was motoring correspondent for the Darlington Evening Despatch when the Northern Group was established in 1973. He had moved from Cheshire to the north east some years earlier having trained as a reporter on the Northwich Chronicle.

Don was the first of 20 northern journalists admitted to the Group

in its first year. For a number of years he edited the annual handbook and also, with David Whinyates, the bi-monthly

newsletter. On his retirement he became one of our first members to be accorded life membership..



Don was always the epitome of the good mannered gentleman journalist and was truly a fine role model for us all.

Members were unable to attend the committal service because of the restriction on numbers during the pandemic.

Our thoughts are with his widow Jean and his sons Richard and Martin.

☐ Don Ludlow, right, pictured with wife Jean and fellow life member Bill Duckworth at a Group event in 2019.

Testing times to enjoy the glories of Yorkshire

SO, what did you do in the first national lockdown to avoid the Covid 19 infection back in 2020 grandpa?

Well, at the start, in the Spring, the weather was warm and sunny and I tanned my legs, though still a cooler substitute for May in Ibiza.

I tended the garden with plants from market stalls and supermarkets which had outside sales racks. I planted rows of beans. Radish never matured and my carrots went wobbly. Sweet peas and old roses flourished.

I rode bikes up to the lung-expanding hill tracks, or along the newly surfaced canal towpath between the village and town, a not so challenging but tranquil four miler. I slowed for strollers. Some smiled, some said hello, some stayed tight-lipped, some tried to integrate into the nearest bush or field margin.

I used the bike instead of a car, riding through the deserted local high street, like someone encountering a community which had been abandoned. Which in a way, it had. A few shops were open and I bought what I needed. I still have too many tins of tomatoes but they'll come in.

The shut-down of the PR industry came suddenly.

The last events for me would have been the UK launch of the Mk 8 Golf and, err, oh I forget, oh yes, that one, the Land Rover Defender.

In June some companies resumed PR activities.



□ The Ford Puma is just Frederic's size and was a practical delight

By Frederic Manby

First off the blocks for me were Mitsubishi with the L200 which I drove to Barnard Castle and Renault, with the Captur.

Others followed and I note that the Colt Car concession for Mitsubishi will continue until stocks run out after the shock that Mitsubishi is quitting Europe..

The doomsday scenario of a collapse of stout parties was mostly allayed. Porsche remains the only brand which doesn't send cars north. There was a driving day with Lotus to brighten up a July day in Warwickshire.

The only other launch so far has been for the Honda e, a sweet thing and then the formidable Land Rover Defender.

At the time of writing I have just driven the latest Golf, which, like every new Golf before it, feels like the car I might buy.

And I've at last been able to drive the new

Defender at the epic Eastnor Castle. I'd seen my first in the railway station car park in St Ives in early July, a bold back to the future apparition.

This Cornish resort is where I saw my first Citroen DS, resting a few inches above the road surface. It is also where I saw my first Jowett Jupiter, coming up Tregenna Hill. I gaily said I would have one when I grew up. Well, I grew up and did almost buy a metallic plum Jupiter. It was mechanically past its best.

As lockdown faded and we were allowed to go back to work I enjoyed the Puma which Ford had left with me since March.

I resuscitated a test route connecting the River Aire with the Ribble and then up and over and down, down to Halton Gill to meet the Skirfare which runs through Littondale (the original Emmerdale Farm location) to meet the Wharfe near Kilnsey. Then either back home or do a bit of ghyll walking above Parceval Hall.

In mid summer the curlews marked my movements. Barn owls and plover and shrill oyster catchers and wrens were my only companions. Human contact: nil.

It is 50 or 60 miles of Yorkshire glory.

The most fun in ages has been the Abarth 595 Competizione, finding exhaust noises worth every penny and muscle aches I'd tried to forget.

The Puma remained a practical delight until taken back in July.

So far the best economy over the challenging route has been 50 mpg from the Golf 1.5 TSI. That's how far petrol economy has come since the demise of diesel.

The one-litre petrol Puma ran it close enough for a draw - but it is a smaller car: just my size if I don't grow up any more.



Frederic's favourite:

□ The latest Golf averaged 50mpg over a challenging Yorkshire route and, like every new Golf before it, feels like the car Frederic might buy

Bobbitt in the bubble

Minimalist motoring has marked out Malcolm Bobbitt's years behind the wheel - and it all started when he provided a chauffeur service for an elderly widow in her Isetta bubble car

WE all have our funny moments but in some instances those silly seasons can last a lifetime.

For Malcolm Bobbitt, his daftness is connected to minimal motoring and those eccentric three and four-wheelers including the like of bubblecars and cyclecars.

It began as a teenager when he'd drive his elderly widowed neighbour in her Brighton-built Isetta to do her weekly shopping.

"For such a tiny vehicle it was surprising how much could be stowed behind the bench seat, the only problem being that all the shopping bags had to be loaded through the wide-opening door that was the car's front panel," says Malcolm, recalling how the steering wheel swivelled out of the way to allow access into the bubble's interior. The Isetta took some getting used to, especially the right-hand gear change which had to be taken rather gently, as well as the lethargy of acceleration and the heavy steering. It was noisy too, the engine being behind the seat.



Malcolm with the Renault 4 which took him thousands of miles around Europe.



Park the bubble alongside the kerb and it wasn't unusual to return to the car only to find a vehicle close up to the door preventing it from being opened, says Malcolm.

His spell of chauffeuring came soon after he passed the driving test at the age of eighteen, and before he bought his first car, which wasn't the type he'd had in mind.

His friends teased him at his idea of a glass-fibre three-wheeler in the shape of a jelly mould Reliant Regal Mark III that was for sale in the showroom of the nearby Reliant agent.

Saved from potential derision when the car was sold, Malcolm's attention turned to the model's 1962 replacement, the then modern-looking Regal 3/25 with its reverse-rake rear window in the style of Ford's Anglia and first series Corsair as well as Citroën's incredibly ugly Ami 6.

Instead, his choice was a conventional but horribly unreliable 1963 Morris 1100 - which spent more time being repaired than on the road.

For a twenty year old, the staid Austin Farina A60 Cambridge that replaced the 1100 hardly summoned anything relating to street cred, despite its rear fins, leather-look Rexine upholstery and metal faux veneer dashboard.

The quest for minimal motoring continued to bubble under the surface until Malcolm finally gave up with conformity and bought a 1955 tin snail.

Its minuscule 425cc air-cooled twin-cylinder engine, four-speed gearbox with its incredibly long-legged top ratio and front-wheel drive propelled the ancient Citroën to a dizzy 40mph with a following wind.

Luxuries were few, but the 2CV did at least have exceptionally comfy hammock seats, a roll-back

canvas roof and wonderfully soft springing that gave the car its wafting sensation. The uncomplicated 2CV, with its Meccano-like construction, wasn't the only paradigm of minimalism that Malcolm sought.

A Renault 4 with its peculiar wheel layout - not to mention the Citroën-esque push-twist and pull gear change sprouting from the dashboard - served well with thousands of miles throughout Europe until the rust-worm expelled all life from the car.

After the 2CV and Renault 4, even a Morris Minor looked far too predictable.

It took the Italians to produce the smallest car imaginable when, in 1936, Fiat introduced the Cinquecento which instantly was given its Topolino - little mouse - nickname.

Continuing in production until 1955, the 1952 model that Malcolm acquired really was a two-seater - with space enough for two small children sitting on cushions in the rear compartment.

"It truly was tiny," Malcolm recalls. "Once squeezed in, Jean and I were joined at the shoulder and we felt like Noddy and Big Ears."

The 569cc water-cooled four beneath the bonnet gave the lightweight Topolino adequate performance, though being so tiny it could be nerve wracking when being overtaken by big lorries.

Today there's still a 2CV in Malcolm's garage but there's room enough for something smaller, older and definitely minimalistic.

A Bond Mark C or D Minicar would fit the bill, as would a Morgan three-wheeler or a Messerschmitt. For sheer simplicity a French 1930s pedal-powered Velocar, built for times when fuel was in short supply, could be the answer.

At last - I've zoomed into relax mode

IT WAS at an early point during the Covid lockdown that I suddenly realised that I had been 100 per cent “on the go” with my various professional and “leisure time” activities since I left school and with hardly a single moment when I had nothing to do – and still less time to do it.

I have to confess that for me this has been an upside of a situation that has been so devastating for humanity.

A social media dinosaur, I have also been introduced to the wonderful world of Zoom via family virtual “get-togethers” and meetings.

At the paper our worst fears have been allayed. The team have pulled together magnificently, working from home (the new norm?) and while social distancing has created some challenges for our distributors we have managed to get copies to all of the 40-plus towns we serve.

We haven't lost circulation since the spring and mercifully most of our advertisers have remained loyal – even those who have been shut

For the first time since he left school, ALAN DOMVILLE found himself with time on his hands - but work has returned with a vengeance now that his beloved Warrington Wolves are back in action...

down for some months.

We have even launched the most unlikely of columns.

The owner of the largest funeral directors in the region submitted a piece regarding his company's experiences at this time and it was so brilliantly written - and so well received by our readers - that we invited him to carry on submitting his experiences at this difficult time.

Nothing morbid – in fact it's very entertaining. A recent column contained the quote “Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would put on a mask and walk into a



Back in action: the restart of the rugby league season means that Alan has to write material for the matchday programme again - even though there are no crowds.

bank demanding money, It's not only now acceptable, it's compulsory!

Rugby League closed down in March saving me a lot of work on reporting matches and penning material for the matchday programmes.

This work has returned with a vengeance however - games are back again, twice a week albeit behind closed doors at neutral venues and the Warrington club have decided to issue programmes for each “home” game.

Church activities have taken up a

lot of Irene's and my time over the years but they came to a halt in March and are unlikely to return to normal for some time to come.

We had arranged for the Bishop of Liverpool to come to us in September to help us celebrate the 200th anniversary of our Sunday School but this is now unlikely to happen this year.



Series IIA Camper – it's still work in progress but a resolution is said to be on the cards. Next job is to repair the splits in the vinyl roof - not as easy as it sounds.

Some weekends I pretended I was on holiday and cooked breakfast at the bottom of the garden on a camping stove whenever the weather allowed.

- Julie Marshall

It's time for a campstove breakfast at the bottom of the garden!

i'VE NOT really had a great deal of extra time on my hands during lockdown.

Due to many of my colleagues being furloughed, my work at jpmmedia increased rather than diminished.

However, I used the time at weekends when I wasn't able to go out, to investigate the strange noises coming from the power steering pump on my Land Rover

Those were the days

Lockdown has given **JONATHAN SMITH** the chance to dip into the memory bank and reflect on launches past. Here he recalls some of his favourite events...

IN these times of scarce car launches and one-day events at best, it's perhaps a good time to look back over a shoulder and recall some of the good times.

My baptism into motoring journalism, some four decades or so ago, came in Wigan at the Evening Post and Chronicle where I was a feature writer.

I was prevailed upon by the editor to write a broadsheet page once a week on motoring – what a chore! Since I spent almost every waking minute either talking about cars or reading about them, the idea of getting free motor mags, expenses (yes, no shortage of those then) and the occasional test car was a dream come true.

Just a week into the job back in 1977, a letter from Ford's press office dropped into my in-tray... an invitation to go to Monte Carlo to drive the all new Fiesta. Two days in Monte Carlo travelling in the firm's private jet from Manchester to Nice, and would I like to take my wife/partner.

Easy decision.

At the tender age of 25, Lynn, my wife of four years, had never even flown before. Needless to say we both felt totally at home in a suite in the Hotel de Paris overlooking Casino Square! It was there that, for the first time, I met the Northern Group gang who nurtured, teased and helped me in equal measure.

☐ A young Jonathan Smith pictured in 1978 at Oulton Park and, top, at a Northern Group event in the early 90s.



From then on it was four or five launches a month until a few years later I left the evening paper to take a staff news job on the Daily Mail in Manchester and turned my hand to freelance motoring writing, rather than give it up altogether. The trips continued, albeit sandwiched between tough night-shifts news-subbing on the Mail. Morocco became a regular haunt with several visits to Marrakesh and one long distance drive across the Sahara with Chrysler.

Several flights to Florida, the most memorable being the Fiat Uno launch in Orlando which somehow required a six night stay with just a single morning's test driving. Apparently Fiat was quitting the US and wanted to get rid of some money. It would have been rude not to help out.

Not all the trips were easy and pleasurable. A factory visit to Citroen's Paris plant was hit by air strikes and I had to drive back in one hop to Lancashire. A home launch in the Cotswolds for the VW Scirocco involved an extra couple of nights because we were snowed in at the hotel.

By the late 80s I was a staffer on Fleet Street at the Express and pitching in with the motoring pages there. I took a short notice trip to Brazil with Fiat which involved 22 hours of travel including three flights and a long coach journey. Unfortunately, I learned as we flew over the Atlantic that the car – the Fiat Paleo – was never going to come to the UK...so I spent my four days writing city stories and scratching around for titbits of news.

Then over to South Carolina for the first Z3 which

was to star in James Bond's Goldfinger, followed by ice driving in Finland with rally champ Stig Blomqvist.

I can well recall – but not perhaps for the right reasons – the Honda Accord Type R introduction in Baden-Baden, staying at a chateau owned by the Grundig family.

It was another partners' trip and Lynn saved the blushes of a very senior Japanese executive as he strode naked into what he wrongly thought was a male-only sauna.

After a quiet word from my wife, he hurried off to slip on a pair of swim shorts before bravely returning.

Fast forward to the last few years, and the first drives are shorter but no less productive and enjoyable, although post 9/11 airport security and passenger volumes have detracted from the whole travel experience.

Perhaps my favourite regular destination over recent times has been Le Castellet right next to the Paul Ricard circuit in the South of France and once Bernie Ecclestone's home, with Audi... especially travelling by private jet from Stansted business terminal, just eight miles from my house. Today, we're more localised for obvious reasons. But one of the most satisfying events from a writing and an enjoyment aspect – if not for the driving – was last summer's VW Grand California introduction meandering through the Cotswolds via Blenheim Palace and camping overnight at the iconic Caffeine and Machine pub.

I must be getting old.

Sara and Moyo move up at Kia

Motor Industry News
with Alan Domville

PRESS office activities may have been put on hold and PR staff working from home, but, even so, there's been a flurry of activity around the industry.

At Kia, **Sara Robinson** has been promoted to a new role as manager of the in-house dealer PR service, which supports the activities of the marque's 186 dealerships and also involves fleet communications and other public-focused activities.

Sara, pictured right, has been with Kia's PR department for ten years having previously worked on product marketing.

Initially she was responsible for the press fleet and in her previous role as senior press officer she organised media events and co-ordinated the company's external agency support partnership which involved leading communication to lifestyle, social and non-specialist media. She has also developed the dealer PR support operation.

Happily we shall still see Sara on product introductions.

There's also a promotion for **Moyosola Fajumade** who takes over the post of senior press officer. She has been with the Kia press office for the past four years having previously worked in



☐ Charlie Smith



☐ Moyosola Fajumade



the planning department. Moyo has previously held responsibility for the press fleet, supported the PR team's financial administration and created streamlined systems for various press office functions.

More recently she has taken control of the team's driving days, motor show presences and national and global events and also the management of multiple agency partners.

Newest member of the Volvo press and PR team is **Joe Watters** who has taken over as our contact for press cars.

Toyota Lexus have engaged **Charlie Smith** as their student placement intern for 2020-21, succeeding **Ryan Luscombe** who has returned to Exeter University to continue his management and marketing degree studies.

Charlie was born in Leicester but supports Manchester City. He is currently studying for a marketing degree at Newcastle University.

Renault's new press fleet manager is **Gemma Croft** who has enjoyed the past five years in the motor industry having previously held senior customer service roles.

Charlie Roper, who had served as press fleet and VIP relations manager for the past three years has been promoted to the post of brand affairs manager.

Kitty Field is the new graduate press officer at Fiat Chrysler and is our new contact for press car bookings.

Kitty studied marketing and communications at the Fashion Retail Academy and has served PR internships with Sanrio, Debenhams and Nobull PR.

Toyota PR stalwart **Richard Seymour** has retired after 30 years with the company and the past 12 as press officer. During his time he also held responsibility for the press fleet and the company's collection of heritage cars.

Great - we're back in action!

LIKE all my Northern Group colleagues I have been looking forward to returning to something like normal post pandemic.

So when those lovely people at Lotus invited me to the UK's first post lockdown driving day offering a couple of hours behind the wheel of the latest Elise Cup 250 around the twisting lanes of Warwickshire I was more than happy to oblige.

Now I have to admit to a little bias as I have had a Lotus for almost 20 years... and don't believe those old unreliability tales, my bright red 1988 Esprit Turbo has taken me to events all over Europe and only let me down once – and that was mainly due to an expensive maintenance mistake made by me – the rest of the time the car has been a well behaved crowd puller.

However, on the test day Manchester was being lashed by a constant downpour and only a very brave driver wants to hit the motorways in a car so close to the ground whilst being deluged by spray from huge HGVs - unless you had a certain movie star spy version - so the Esprit stayed in the garage and more mundane transport was used for the trip to the event.

Once safely in Warwickshire and against a backdrop of cars from their heritage fleet, Lotus let me loose in the 0 to 60 in 3.9 seconds pocket road rocket and what a load of fun it was.

Cup cars are even more pared back than the standard Elise with nice touches like an exposed gear shift mechanism and track mode yet there are still some creature comforts such as air conditioning, a dab radio and electric windows.

But it is the track which is this car's natural environment and Lotus say the Cup was built to lap hard all day without complaint and could be raced competitively by adding little more than a roll cage.

Chargecooled for a consistent 245 bhp, the all-alloy, 1.8-litre supercharged four-cylinder engine rockets the Elise Cup 250 to a top speed of 150 mph and for the 2020 model, Lotus's acoustic engineers have improved the exhaust note for 'even greater driver engagement'. But all that performance and handling



After months in lockdown, our man in Manchester, **STEVE HOWARTH**, was more than happy to be back in business driving one of his most cherished brands...



needs some serious braking which is provided by AP Racing twin-piston ventilated discs for fade-free stopping power.

Adding to the go-kart like handling are Yokohama Advan A052 tyres which provide loads of grip both on road and track where the standard steel roll over bar adds yet more strength and torsional rigidity to the chassis.

My test car also had the optional Carbon Fibre

Aero Pack which includes a front splitter, rear wing and bargeboards to help the Cup 250's radical aerodynamics modify airflow over, under and around the car to increase downforce at speed. So it is quick, fun and great to look at – but all this comes at a price as the 250 Cup is £47,800 although you do get supercar acceleration... and around 40mpg with some careful non-track style driving.



Lotus position: a '77 Esprit and, top, today's Elise Cup.

As I said earlier the Lotus team brought along cars from their heritage fleet including a couple of Esprits - both much better than mine.

One was a white series one model with a very famous number plate – although a lack of burly security guards gave away that fact that this was not the original James Bond car from the 1977 film The Spy Who Loved Me but an identical model.

Unfortunately it didn't have the ability to go underwater! Now that car would have been much more suitable for motorways in the pouring rain!



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