



Camping it up...

Going off grid
with a Renault
called Reta



BERNARD GENT
1930-2022
Tributes on
pages 3&4

Lights, camera, action!



IT ALL started as an organisation to represent newspaper motoring writers, but over the past few years, the Northern Group has diversified and expanded its membership criteria to include northern-based broadcasters and, more recently, writers and movie makers working in all forms of digital media.

As a group, we've been visible for some time on the internet and on various social media sites including Facebook and Twitter, but now we're going to the movies, courtesy of two of our newest members - videographers Ben and Annabelle Quirk.

They've set up a dedicated YouTube channel for the Group. They've upload plenty of their own material and are anxious to have more contributions.

Says Annabelle: "Media takes many forms, and as the Northern Group is coming up to its 50th Anniversary, we thought it rather fitting – as the group's first YouTubers and video content creators – to launch a channel for the group."

"It has been a rather impressive first few months for us, with subscriber numbers now at 338. Over the last three months, we have garnered 37.5K views, with a watch time of 15,996 minutes, making our yearly average minutes watched at 64.5K."

So far, the channel has covered a number of launches and Northern Group events, including the Genesis drive day in County Durham, the launch of the new Range Rover, Kia's North Yorkshire event for the Northern

Group and the recent Goodwood Festival of Speed.

Annabelle, pictured filming, right, adds: "We are excited to see where the channel goes over the next few weeks, months and years, as we attend a host of automotive events. Many of the manufacturers we have spoken to about the new channel have been excited to see what we can do."

Find our YouTube channel at:
<https://www.youtube.com/c/NorthernGroupofMotoringWriters>

And if you would like to add a video to the channel, please send it to:
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ngmw NEWS

IT'S an extremely sad month for members of the Northern Group following the sad passing of long-serving treasurer and former chairman Bernard Gent.

Bernard also edited this publication for a number of years and was a personal friend. He was no mean cricketer and I know he would appreciate me saying he had a great innings. We have tributes to Bernard on pages three and four.

Elsewhere in this summer edition, we head into the wilds with Frederic Manby and a campervan called Reta; take to the rails with Ben Harrington and focus, as ever, on the latest motor industry PR news with Alan Domville. I hope you enjoy this edition.

- 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, Andrew Clews, Andy Harris, Ben Harrington, Steve Howarth, Graham King, Frederic Manby, and Martin Ward.

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

A toast to a proper Gent

On a gloriously sunny Sunday morning in July we lost our dear friend Bernard Gent.

It just didn't seem right for a death that day – and for Martin Ward there was more sadness when his mother died that afternoon. Like Bernard, she was also in her 90s.

Said Martin: "Bernard was a lovely bloke and a proper gent" – sentiments repeated many times by members on hearing the news.

And Andrew Evans observed "A cloud was definitely added to the sky that day."

**- ALAN DOMVILLE
leads the
Group's tributes**

BERNARD GENT was one of our founder members and he served as our treasurer from 1974 until last summer. He was also our chairman from 1990 to 1992.

After retirement and being made a life member, he remained so very active within the group, continuing to edit our newsletters and handbooks and organising annual dinners and the annual cricket match between us and the industry.

He could not attend our annual meeting in May despite it being held so close to his home but he



☐ Bernard and Alan Domville get into the spirit of a Viking banquet in Sweden in 1984.



was on the phone to me a couple of days later, wanting to know everything we had decided.

Bernard and I became good friends from the outset when I became the first weekly newspaper writer to be admitted to the group just after it was established officially following an Austin Allegro launch in Harrogate 49 years ago.

I was concerned I would be considered an upstart and not "fit in" but Bernard, along with David Whinyates and Keith Ward, quickly put me at my ease.

And Bernard and I became an effective double act after Alan Fawcett's untimely death, organising so many successful

annual group dinners and also liaising continually when I became chairman and then general secretary.

Our dinners raised many thousands of pounds for deserving causes and they included the James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough where Bernard had received treatment.

We drove together many times over the years both in this country and abroad; on one occasion I took him and Hazel to Winsford to show them where my family shared an idyllic weekend home on the banks of the River Weaver when I was a youngster.

On another test drive he reminisced about his own youth and told me how he was evacuated from Middlesbrough to the Yorkshire countryside when it was a target for enemy bombers during the Second World War.

Bernard and Hazel loved to be involved in all our social activities and they would happily travel all the way from Middlesbrough to Manchester to enjoy lunch with Irene and myself.

I tried, in vain, to convert him into a rugby league fan and I had it in mind to take him to a World Cup match at Boro's Riverside stadium in the autumn; it was not to be.

The Boro paid tribute on their website to his contribution to the club over many years and his death was reported on local Tyne Tees TV news.

From force of habit over the years I shall still be checking Boro's results each week and thinking of a very special person.

I last spoke to Bernard and Hazel a couple of weeks before he died; we agreed that a plan to take them out for one of our occasional lunches be postponed until Bernard felt up to it and we returned from France after the summer. He struggled to chat but even joked about his reputation in our heyday of car launches as "Big Breakfast Bernard" no matter how late it had been the night before. We continued our chats and banter about our respective football teams - Boro and Sunderland - over the years.

- Keith Ward

He was a lovely man with a great sense of humour. During my brief spell as secretary and then as chairman he helped me no end of times.

The group owes him an immense debt of gratitude.

- Julie Marshall

Such a genuine, good guy. He was a great help to me when I started out. A man who lived life to the full and never missed an opportunity. Yet he unselfishly served the group for decades.

- Jonathan Smith

That Bernard achieved so much in life is all down to his dedicated efforts and outlook. We will miss him.

- Malcolm Bobbitt

Gent by name, gent by nature. Always helpful to me and a friend to all.

- Roy Woodcock

That Bernard gave his all to the group is clear, that he had passions outside of "our world" likewise.

- Guy Loveridge

Bernard was highly respected as an "old school" journalist and the degree to which he was respected is revealed by the fact that a tribute to Bernard was broadcast on Tyne Tees TV's Six O' Clock News.

- Les Oliver

Bernard had such an amazing constitution that I thought he would go on forever.

- Maurice Glover

Bernard: a Boro boy through and through

BERNARD worked in the Northern Echo's tiny Middlesbrough office - just a stone's throw away from my desk at the somewhat grander Evening Gazette buildings.

Our jobs ran pretty much in parallel. When we first met, we were both news reporters and we were both the motoring correspondents of our respective newspapers.

We should have been rivals, but we became firm friends. We drove together on car launches and shared many memorable experiences - and more than the odd glass of expensive plonk - at events around the world.

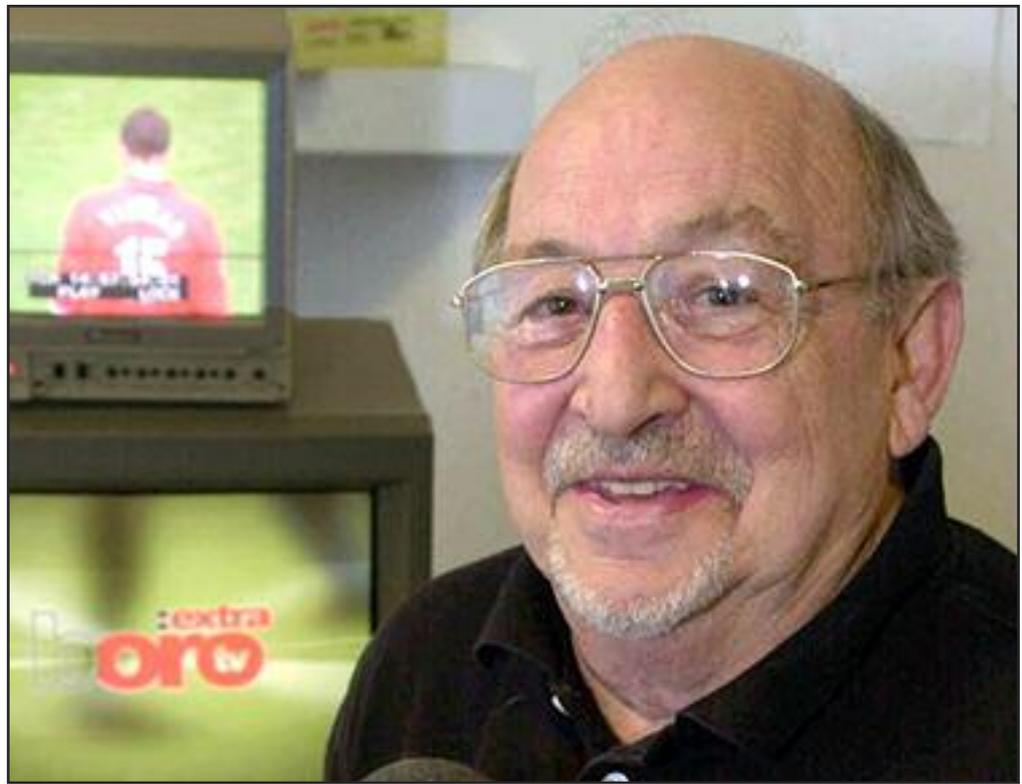
Occasionally we had our differences - most notably when he put on his treasurer's hat and left me to pick up the bill in a seedy Amsterdam night club - but we remained the best of friends, a friendship which lasted the best part of 50 years.

Bernard will, of course, be remembered by his colleagues for his unstinting work on behalf of the Northern Group.

His credits go back to the group's earliest days having served as treasurer, chairman, annual dinner organiser, handbook editor, editor of Northern Group News and even cricket team skipper until his dodgy knees put an end to his wicket-keeping career. A man of many talents - a real multitasker.

But in Middlesbrough, his home town, he will be remembered for a very different reason.

Bernard was known throughout the town as 'the voice of Ayresome Park' having been the man on the mike for around a quarter of a century at the original home of his beloved football club,



DAVID WHINYATES looks back on the sporting life of a Middlesbrough legend

Middlesbrough - the Boro for short.

And his death brought an outpouring of emotion and tributes from fans and football colleagues with hundreds of Twitter tweets. The football club, now housed at the Riverside stadium, described Bernard as being "synonymous with Boro for generations of supporters" while fans and figures associated with the club past and present also paid tribute.

Former international referee Jeff Winter tweeted: "Part of older fans' childhood memories. His dulcet tones were as synonymous with Ayresome Park as The Power Game theme we ran out to."

Back in 2017, Bernard was interviewed by the local radio station, BBC Tees, in which he looked back on his time as Ayresome's announcer.

He said: "I started to do the announcing at the end of the World Cup, the beginning of the 1966/67 season. Nothing had happened like that at

Middlesbrough before, they used to have a local steward who would come up and read the team and do the changes, put a record on and that would be it.

"It was great. People still say, 'you are the voice of Ayresome Park'. Sometimes that's my tagline, people remember me as the voice. I've always been a Boro fan, ever since my brother took me when I was seven."

He set up Radio Ayresome and Boro fans would be greeted by Bernard's soothing tones and his catchphrase: "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome to Ayresome Park."

Bernard decided that Radio Ayresome also needed a theme tune. He chose the theme from a current TV series of the same name, *The Power Game*. The series starred Patrick Wymark and the theme music was performed by the Cyril Stapleton Orchestra.

There are still discussions to this day on messageboards and social media regarding the records Bernard played during that time. Songs such as *Oh Well* by Fleetwood Mac, *Dance With The Devil* by Cozy Powell, and Van McCoy's *The Shuffle* and *The Hustle* were all played with gusto and are still remembered well on Teesside.

One song which provides a topic of debate to this day - over 30 years since Bernard stepped down - is the tune which he played as fans filed out of Ayresome Park at the end of each game.

Bernard always refused to name that tune and it remains a mystery to this day, although the consensus of opinion is that it came from a radio advert for the Renault 5.

His love of cars and football almost in the same breath - that was Bernard Gent to a tee!



□ Above: a grainy still from a video shows Bernard at the Radio Ayresome mike and, right, Bernard with the Boro shirt which the Northern Group presented to him earlier this year, to mark his retirement as group treasurer.



From the sublime, to the...



□ Exceptional supercars at the Bicester Heritage Scramble and, below, Russia's finest at the Hagerty Festival of the Unexceptional

AN ENGLISH summer, you can't beat it and I remain upbeat even though the rain is lashing down outside my office window and temperatures are definitely below the seasonal average.

You see it's car show time and this year I intend to make more of an effort to attend as many as possible.

FROM THE CHAIR with Andy Harris

"Maybe 'green' motoring is buying an unexceptional car at a modest cost and running it until it's not economical to repair"

A couple of weeks ago with engagements across the south of England, I finally made it to Bicester Heritage for one of its excellent Sunday Scrambles. The variety of cars on display was exceptional and there were friends and acquaintances to catch up with too.

Next on my hit list is the Festival of the Unexceptional, set to take place once again at Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire.

Put 30th July in your diary - it is likely to be one of the highlights of my motoring year. It is a

celebration of humble, everyday motors and one in which a basic 'L' model will be lauded over a top spec 'Ghia', if you get my drift.

After last year's event, I resolved to buy a suitable car for this year's excursion and that I have just done. Did I really need another car to add to my ageing fleet? Well of course not, and I am not sure the car really qualifies as unexceptional, but it was cheap and very cheerful. It was bought unseen and currently languishes on a friend's driveway awaiting collection.

Car launch season is in full swing, which has involved many trips to the Cotswolds, the location of choice for so many manufacturers. We have much better driving roads in the north – just a thought!

Fuel prices are one of the hot topics at present and the garage in my local market town now has diesel on sale for a whisker under £2 a litre. Our remote location means more miles covered in everyday life and people are feeling the squeeze.

So, is the future really an electric one? Electricity costs are rising too and are set to increase yet again in the autumn. Not only that, EVs are expensive to buy and out of the reach of many ordinary motorists and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

A good friend, currently working at the HQ of a leading European car manufacturer has told me

...Moskvich



that the more expensive the EV, the easier it is to sell and the more profit there is to be made. You can see where their focus lies.

So, maybe 'green' motoring is buying an unexceptional car at a modest cost, sucking up the price of fuel and running it until it's no longer economical to repair. Rinse and repeat.

I wish you all an enjoyable summer and now if you will excuse me, I am expecting delivery of a Rolls-Royce, here for a few days. Now that is exceptional motoring!

Doing it for Yorkshire

Once again Group member **MARTIN WARD** was heavily involved in the Yorkshire Motot Sport Festival.

A reet good time was had by all, says Martin - but times are hard and visitor numbers were lower than hoped. Lessons have been learned, however, and the show will go on in 2023 - with reduced costs for both visitors and exhibitors.

IT'S called the Yorkshire Motor Sport Festival, but the event, staged over the weekend of June 24-26 was about so much more than motorsport.

There was lots for all the family, including funfairs, classic vehicles including plenty of David Brown tractors all made locally in Huddersfield many years ago and lined up alongside Aston Martin owners' club cars - great to see DB cars next to DB tractors.

There was even a WW2 Spitfire and, continuing the historic military theme, displays by US WW2 Army vehicles plus demonstrations by West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue.

On the car front, local Toyota dealer RRG put on a big display of all the latest models, McLaren was selling some really nice merchandise and Park Motor Group's Leeds Lamborghini organised many of its owners and customers to visit the event and make plenty of noise.

Kia UK very kindly supplied two Sportages which were used on the closed road hill climb - one by the clerk of the course and one as safety car. Jeep also chipped in, providing a pair of Compass 4x4s which were used extensively as VIP shuttles.

On Friday and Saturday evening live bands played in the music field, which attracted a good crowd, with everyone enjoying good music, singing along and dancing.



The downside to the weekend was a lower than expected number of visitors - attendance was good, but could have been better.

Twenty one car clubs and owners club had pledged to support the event, and were booked in with spaces, but only a handful turned up.

I did speak to a representative of one of the clubs and was told that their members, many who lived far away, were struggling to justify the amount they would spend on accommodation as well as the huge amount they'd spend on fuel, bearing in mind many of the vehicles were a bit thirsty.

I've since heard that other events nationally are also finding numbers of exhibitors and visitors are down; a sign of the times, maybe, considering the cost of travel, cost of tickets and people just generally saving money wherever they can.

Next June though, the Motor Sport Festival will return, hopefully bigger and better, and a promise of much reduced entry ticket prices, lower food and drink prices - prices generally at outdoor events are a fortune - and more space for more exhibitors, at reduced rates.



Alan's birthday best

GROUP members once again excelled themselves behind the wheel when Kia hosted its annual driving day at Crathorne Hall hotel in North Yorkshire.

At the end of a hard day's driving, Kia PR chief Dan Sayles announced that members had taken to the roads in a fleet of Kia's latest models no fewer than 80 times covering an impressive 1,640 miles - enough to get to Algeria, well into the Arctic circle or 127 times around the Nurburgring.

Unsurprisingly the models in most demand, with 19 test drives each, were the new Sportage and the electric-powered EV6, one example of which, the GT-Line S, clocked up a total of 157 miles through the day.

It was a special day for Alan Domville who was celebrating his birthday. He could have been forgiven for taking it easy - but the committed Group secretary notched up the most test drives, venturing out no fewer than eight times before taking charge of the Group's annual and ordinary meetings in late afternoon.

Alan's reward came later when he was presented with birthday gifts on behalf of the Group by long-time friend and driving partner Derrick Grocock and with a birthday cake from Kia, presented by Dan Sayles.



☐ Clockwise from top right: the line-up of Kias at Crathorne Hall; Dan Sayles makes a point on the day's driving; chairman Andy Harris, left, shares a toast with website manager Andrew Evans; Kia senior press officer Sara Robinson, left, with Frederic Manby, Derrick Grocock and his partner Diane Pilkington; Group secretary Alan Domville with his birthday treats.

The Northern Group continues to expand its membership into the digital media world and the two latest recruits are podcast presenters from both sides of the Pennines. Here new members Graham King and Andrew Clews tell us all about themselves

Car mad? Blame my mother!

IT'S ALL my mum's fault.

I was five when she started reading Val Biro's Gumdrop stories to me, charting the adventures of the eponymous 1920s Austin Clifton Heavy 12/4 Tourer and his owner Mr Josiah Oldcastle.

The stories got me hooked on cars and I was soon consuming every car book and magazine I could get my hands on.

By the time I was a teenager, I could quote the back pages of Top Gear magazine verbatim and identify any car from 100 yards away.

I also harboured a dream of being the next Jeremy Clarkson. My course was set but, for various reasons, it took until my late 20s to start actively pursuing my ambition of becoming a motoring journalist.



□ Andrew Clews



□ Graham King checks out the Ford Puma

In 2011, I embarked on a journalism degree. I graduated in 2014 and went straight into a job with a start-up car website called Only Motors.

I wrote a vast amount of copy, learned a lot and did a lot but the owner had a habit of under-delivering, so I upped sticks and left.

I landed at Motor1 where I worked too hard and burned myself out. I returned to my previous life driving buses and coaches – for rather longer than I hoped – until I got the opportunity to do some freelancing for carwow during the first lockdown.

That gave me a launchpad to get a job in charge of content for Drover, which was subsequently bought out by Cazoo. I was there until I was made redundant at the end of June. At the moment, then, I'm looking for a new outlet for my motoring words of wisdom.

Over the years, I've written millions of words, driven loads of great cars and met some fantastic people. Now I'm staring down the barrel of my forties, I'm hoping my career is getting into its stride.

- Graham King

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Andrew casts his net to help others

ANDREW Clews is the co-founder and co-presenter of the Motoring Podcast, one of the longest running automotive podcasts, as well as being the only weekly news curation podcast, from the UK, covering motoring and mobility topics.

Alongside Alan Bradley he has been recording and publishing the News Show, as well as Special Editions which cover topics in more depth such as car reviews,

companies, technologies, personalities and the likes.

The show has been going for nearly seven years with over 480 episodes published to date.

The podcast was recognised by the Guild of Motoring Writers in 2017, winning the Breakthrough Award.

Since publishing the first episode, Andrew has been busy spreading the word of podcasting explaining how the medium is an excellent

one for motoring related stories.

Following the explosion of car-related podcasts in the last few years, the message is getting out there.

Part of that is helping others to get started with their own audio project, says Andrew.

Andrew says he is delighted to have been accepted into the Northern Group and looks forward to meeting up with other group members regularly.

How Ben takes the strain of the train

MY ALARM wakes me up at 01:45. I prefer an early shift. Not only are the roads empty - which is great for road-testing cars - but finishing early leaves a lot of the day free for other things, like writing about said cars.

When I get to work I have to book on. This involves finding out where and when I'll be driving that particular day, checking for important safety alerts and alterations to the network and ensuring I've got all the equipment I may need for the day.

It goes without saying that I have to be 100% stone-cold sober when I start my shift. The permissible blood-alcohol level is half that you're allowed to legally drive a car, so even a glass of wine with a meal the previous evening is taboo.

An important part of booking-on is ensuring I'm permitted to drive the class of trains involved and the routes on the docket I'm given, too. This is called 'signing' traction and routes and essentially means I've been trained on them.

At Manchester Piccadilly, each driver typically signs up to eight routes and ten classes of train, if you don't sign them you can't carry out that work. Signing traction also involves knowing how to fix any potential breakdowns that could happen whilst out on the network; no pressure with a train packed full of commuters then.

The first couple of hours of a shift involves finding your allocated unit and preparing it for the day ahead. This entails walking around the entire train with a torch and checking everything underneath looks correct. So I'm looking at engine oil levels, water levels, brake blocks, suspension elements, all kinds of compressors, air-con units, couplers; there are hundreds of components underneath a modern train and any one of them could bring things to a halt so it's vital they're thoroughly checked.

Assuming everything is present and correct, I get on to the job of actually driving trains. My routes, are all out of Manchester Piccadilly or Oxford Road and I could be heading for Hadfield, Stoke, Hazel Grove, Crewe via Stockport, Crewe via Manchester Airport, Rose Hill, Liverpool Lime Street or Sheffield.

To qualify to drive a route you have to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the track.

Imagine your commute to work took anything up to 90 minutes with a clear run. Now imagine only being classed as competent to drive that route if you can recall every road name, every speed limit - anything from 5mph up to 125mph - the location of every bridge, every landmark, every traffic light, every crossing, every gradient, every road sign, every junction and even some trees.



Few motoring hacks can make a decent living out of testing cars and writing about the motor industry these days - so many of us need a 'proper' job to help put food on the table.

And as day jobs go, they don't come much more interesting - or demanding - than Ben Harrington's. Cheshire-based Ben drives trains out of Manchester and here he gives an insight into a day in the life of a train driver, sharing a snapshot of his lifestyle and the everyday demands of the job.

Just don't ask him about rail strikes...



On top of all of that we obviously need to know exactly where every station is and, perhaps more pertinently, where to apply the brakes for that station. It can take up to two miles to bring a train to a standstill and, yes, leaves falling on the railhead in autumn create a massive problem for braking and gaining momentum - it's not just a story they make up to excuse lateness.

So, you've memorised all of those factors, plus any temporary speed limits, now you need to do the same for the return journey. And then you need to repeat all of this for every route you could be asked to drive. It takes on average three to four months to learn a route.

In terms of the controls of the train itself, the driver can only influence the speed and braking. It's no secret that there's no steering wheel - it's the signaller who dictates the direction the train goes and they occasionally get it wrong.

If that happens, it's up to the driver to stop and call the signaller to point out the mistake. If the driver doesn't notice the mistake and takes the wrong route, they're just as culpable as the signaller. The driver also then has to do the walk of shame through the train to take the train back and go the right way - sticking it in reverse isn't an option!

Because of the distances involved in stopping a train, the signalling system warns you that there's a red signal ahead. Staying alert to these signals and adjusting speed accordingly is absolutely vital - going through a red signal is the worst offence on the railway for obvious safety reasons.

Just in case, modern technology in both the infrastructure and the trains themselves applies the emergency brake at or on the approach to red signals or if the train's simply going too fast - it's all recorded and serious disciplinary questions need answering should these systems intervene.

The average length of a driver's shift is 8.5 hours and this may involve driving three, four or five routes. Assuming all goes well, and on the whole it usually does, no reports need to be filled in at the end of the day and it's time to go home where normal life can be resumed.

Time to walk the dog, spend time with the family and prepare to repeat the whole cycle the following day. Oh, and make time to write about cars.

Elvis is entering the campsite

DAVID WHINYATES heads for the Spanish Costas in his new motorhome, named after the greatest rocker of all time...

●●●●●●●●●●
OUR first mega road trip with Elvis didn't get off to the best of starts.

Elvis is our latest motorhome - 7.5 metres and 3.5 tonnes of mobile loveliness; crafted in County Durham by Elldis on a Fiat Ducato chassis with a 2.3 litre power plant and nine-speed auto transmission.

We could have followed the Manby naming convention - see Frederic's story on Page 10 - and used the first few letters of Fiat, Ducato and Elldis.

Fidel? Don't think so. Too much Bay of Pigs and not enough Mediterranean beach.

Elvis rhymes nicely with Elldis, so Elvis it is. Let's *Shake, Rattle and Roll*.

But, back to the beginning. We were rockin' and rollin' to the Spanish Costas and Elvis was looking pristine, having been scrubbed and polished ready for our first long-distance trip.

But only an hour after leaving home, the heavens opened and it was stair rods all the way from Sheffield to Nottingham. By the time we reached our overnight spot at a splendid little village pub near Silverstone, Elvis was looking pretty grubby.

The pub, the Stratton Arms at Turweston, is one of many you can find around Britain through a Facebook group called UK Pub Stopovers. It highlights pubs and places where you can pitch up for the night - often free of charge as long as you have a meal and a drink.

The danger of course, is that you could have too much of the latter - so caution is the keyword if you're driving off early in the morning.

☐ **Top: Elvis the Elldis pitched up on site at Benicassim.**



Right, rare Lagondas line up at Bilbao ferry port.



Which is what we did - en route to Portsmouth for the two-night Brittany Ferries crossing to Bilbao.

It was such a smooth crossing of the Bay of Biscay that neither we, nor Elvis, were *All Shook Up*.

Unlike the aforesaid Mr Manby, we're not fans of camping on the wild side. Pauline and I like our little luxuries so Elvis has all mod cons - a bathroom with shower and toilet; fridge and freezer, central heating, full size oven and hob and a very comfortable fixed double bed.

So we weren't phased by having to use a Spanish aire - they provide free overnight parking for motorhomes and campervans - to break the long journey to the Med.

It was in a small town called Cascante just north of Zaragoza. Nothing special, we thought, but when we walked into town the main square was buzzing with hundreds of locals enjoying a wine festival.

A rock band, called Alberto and Garcia, played for the best part of two hours. Didn't understand many of the lyrics but the music was brilliant. We just had to buy the CD.

Back on the road after a good night's sleep, we headed for the Costas - the

Costa Azahar to be precise - and the town of Benicassim, half way between Tarragona and Valencia.

Although our chosen campsite for the next couple of weeks was a resort in itself, Benicassim is a Spanish working town - more fandango than tourist frills.

It's also the Spanish Glastonbury - famed for its' music festivals and noted for its' splendid seaside villas which, we were told, hosted some pretty wild parties for Valencia's elite at the turn of the century.

“ With no signs of modern day debauchery we moved on...”

Apparently Ernest Hemingway stayed in one for a while - but then, he must have stayed pretty much everywhere at some point.

With no signs of modern day debauchery, we moved on to the Costa Brava - a sentimental journey to the resort of Estarit where Pauline and I had camped for many years when we were a lot younger.

Back in the day, we'd become firm friends with a Spanish family who owned a small bar on the outskirts of town. The bar's still there, the family still run it and also own the campsite where we pitched up.

We met up with the son of the original owners. Needless to say he didn't remember us - he was probably about five years old when we last saw him. Our friend, his father, died some years ago.

We had a few favourite restaurants in the old days - sadly our three favourites had all vanished from the face of the Costa. They do say it's never the same if you go back.

After a week it was time to head back north with a couple of stops on the way.

Lake Capse was tranquil. It's part of the Sea of Aragon - a huge lake created by a dam over the Rio Ebro. Haro is another small Spanish town with a big reputation. Billed as the capital of Rioja, it's a bit touristy but the wine is pretty damned good.

And finally we settled for our last couple of nights at Camping Playa Regaton on the north coast - a lovely site with views across the mouth of a river and spectacular sunsets.

A short hop back to Bilbao for the ferry brought a surprise. Parked among the cars, campers and caravans waiting to board were some of the UK's rarest cars - 25 Lagondas of various ages, the oldest of them a 1929 two-litre.

They were on their way back from a Lagonda Club tour of the Pyrenees. How some of them managed the climbs beats me. On the dockside, I asked the club chairman what was their combined worth - "Around £2.5 million," he told me, "Not as much as they used to be!"

It seemed a fitting end to our road trip; a trip throughout which Elvis behaved impeccably, rocking along the generally quiet Spanish autovias covering over 2,000 miles at an average speed of 43mph, returning just short of 28mpg.

Elvis was *Goin' Home* - and that's a track from the soundtrack of Presley's 1968 film, *Speedway*.



A right old mess in shades of grey

ONE of my neighbours bought a new car just over three years ago, and financed it on a PCP.

It is dark grey in colour and recently went in for its first MOT. The eagle-eyed tester noticed the registration number didn't match the chassis number. This was immediately reported to the authorities and consequently the finance company. Within a few days the car was collected and a rental car delivered.

After investigation by the leasing company and DVLA, it was discovered that a similar car in the same colour also had the wrong plates and these didn't match the VIN.

In other words, both cars should have had the others' number plates on them. Possibly a simple mistake by the supplying dealer, who just put the wrong plates on nearly identical cars.

The other offending car, was also very quickly 'apprehended' and taken into custody and, again, a rental car supplied.

The question is now, and nobody has the answer: what happens to them? You can't just switch the number plates, and everything is alright, as the mileages on the cars are very different, my friend's covering 14,000 and the other over 50,000. The service history would never match up, and nor would the MOT.

Technically both cars have been running around illegally, unknown to their drivers for more than three-years. I'm not sure how the finance company will recompense the owners, or whether they have to supply new vehicles. Nobody knows at the moment - it's all a bit of a mess.

But the moral of the story is, do you, or does anyone, check car details with the V5, when it arrives? No of course you don't, I never do, but it might be worth checking, just in case.

The issue has still not been resolved, and both people are still in rental cars.

-Martin Ward

My Disco nights pay off

WHILE the new car scene still seems to be limping back into life, us petrol heads have to keep getting our mechanical fix and one of the few good things about the Covid lockdowns was they gave us a chance to finish jobs that had been dragging on for a while.

One such was Project Disco – saving a rare-ish white series one car from the scrap yard and returning it to former glories – and the road.

I have restored a few cars over the years but this was the first time the result was good enough to enter car shows and a few weeks ago the

STEVE HOWARTH saved a Land Rover Discovery from the scrap yard and the renovation job went so well he decided to enter it into a show...



Disco was proudly lined up alongside some much more exotic machinery at Wrea Green near Preston.

Bought for just £1,000, the car had a couple of things which ensured its survival... a near mint interior – thanks to the first owner fitting factory seat covers and over mats – and a great chassis and bulkhead – thanks to the fact that this car was not ordered with the usual and eventually leaky sunroofs.

But everything else body wise – inner and outer sills, inner wheel arches etc – had to be replaced and the mechanicals overhauled.

While it did not win any prizes, the Disco did get admiring looks and even a couple of 'would you sell it' enquiries.

Now it is time to get the welder out again as I have acquired another £1,000 banger – a 1978 MGB GT... Watch this space!

I'd also planned to take my Lotus Esprit to the first Footman James Coffee & Chrome event of the year at a Worcestershire stately home, but time ran out to get it back on the road after a two-year lie-up.

However, undeterred along with my wife Angela I joined some Bolton petrol heads to attend the event at the amazing Chateau Impney.

We went in convoy with some real exotica, including the likes of a Porsche Turbo S, Corvette C2 and Focus RS, but with the Esprit still laid up we stood out just a little in my test car for the week, the new Citroen C3 Aircross.

But the C3 got some attention parked alongside 500 classic Fords, Astons, Triumphs, MGs, Jaguars and an amazing variety of classics outside the huge and currently empty former hotel near Droitwich.

I had been worried they would not let me on site with it... but as one of the organisers pointed out, even the quirky Aircross could well end up as a classic in the future!



Exotic line up at Chateau Impney - but where's the Aircross?

Tyres sir? Sorry, that's going to be extra!

YOU don't give it a second thought. Switching on the radio; listening to music as you drive; following satnav instructions or employing the seat warmers and steering wheel heater.

You've got windscreen wipers that activate at the merest drop of rain, speed limiters that keep you on the good side of radar devices, and head-up displays - all that we've come to expect when driving the modern motor vehicle.

Imagine what it was like 60 years ago when even a radio was an after-purchase accessory; when fog lamps had to be fitted to front bumpers. Neck restraints fixed to the front seat backrests were as much a status symbol as they were safety items, and heaters were as ineffective as bald tyres on a wet road.

Imagine, too, motorists then trying to grapple with the complexity of the electronic fascia displays to which today's drivers have become accustomed.

If that's mind boggling, then consider how drivers 100 years ago would have encompassed dipping headlight reflectors and electrically operated wipers, not to mention automatic gearboxes and power steering.

Two to three decades earlier, what would now be termed car accessories amounted to choosing the most efficient headlights or even the finest protective clothing to defy the vagaries of the British climate, particularly wintry conditions.

Just as essential as the neck-to-toe storm proof garments offered by the likes of Dunhill and Gamages, was the wearing of goggles to protect one's eyes from dust, mud and other debris covering a road's often loose surface.

From radar to cameras - today's cars are fitted with all those things we never knew we needed.

MALCOLM BOBBITT takes a trip down memory lane and uncovers some odd extras from motoring's early days...



For the car owner or chauffeur in the formative days of motoring, luxury was the automobile itself which was devoid of the equipment we think of as now being outmoded.

The whole subject of early motor accessories, or lack of them, was voiced in a recent conversation about the first motor cars, and the ancient models we so love to see battling it out each November between London and Brighton.

This sent me scuttling to my run of The Autocar from the late 1890s to

INSURANCE AGAINST ACCIDENTS.

HAVE YOU NEVER SMASHED A LAMP ON YOUR CAR?

SIMMS SAFETY BUFFER

SAVES LIFE AND PROPERTY.

It is admittedly true that **OUTSIDE RISKS** constitute the dangers over which the motor driver has **NO CONTROL.**

Nine accidents out of ten are due to that cause.

The Simms Mfg. Co., Ltd.
Welbeck Works, Kimberley Road, Kilburn, N.W.
Telephone Address: "EXPANSIBLE, LONDON."

□ The Simms Safety Buffer was a bumper idea (above) while speed indicators and protective clothing (below left and right) were also on motorists' shopping lists in the early 1900s.

DUNHILL'S MOTORIST'S.

Official Clothing - Warm, Soft, and Durable.

Protective Goggles - For use in all conditions of weather and road.

Car Covers - For protection from dust, mud, and other debris.

S. SMITH & SON, Ltd., 5, STRAND, LONDON.

The Motorist's Essential - SPEED INDICATOR.

THE NEW IMPROVED SPEED INDICATOR.

1907, these copies with their blue-green-grey hue covers embodying not only editorial pages but the fine advertisements too.

If clothing was considered the essential accessory, so was the acetylene gas lighting, itself a vast improvement on the oil and candle-power carriage lamps that pre-dated them.

Tyres were also classified as being accessories, especially pneumatic types with anti-skid covers with their chromed leather studs. When

suffering from punctures, an upright hand-operated tyre inflator meant exerting as much energy as the using a lifting jack.

There were some weird and interesting inventions, such as the Simms Pneumatic Safety Buffer which was designed to protect a car's expensive headlamps.

It was reckoned that nine out of ten accidents were owing to a driver's poor navigation and miscalculation of a route, and that Frederic Simms's device allowed the vehicle to escape unscathed from quite serious accidents. It was years ahead of its time and the forerunner of the universal type of bumper.

The Motor Car Act of 1903 meant the sudden appearance of police eager to issue speeding fines, and therefore speed indicators - speedometers to you and me - became an essential accessory.

Advancing technology meant the arrival of the cigar and pipelighter by 1906, at a time when petrol was still being bought in two-gallon cans.

How times have changed!

Among the last of the few

TIM JACKSON, who died in March, was a member of the Northern Group for seven years before moving into the industry's public relations sector.

He would remain in close contact with us all in subsequent years, however, arranging for Renault to

provide the champagne for our annual dinner for many years and also to sponsor one of our meetings for more than 20 years.

He was also instrumental in refurbishing one of the Northern Group's trophy symbols, the stuffed ferret, cared for by successive chairmen – if not always lovingly!

Tim began working as a journalist at the *Workshop Guardian* in 1971

and, having taken on the role of motoring correspondent, he joined the Northern Group in our founding year and remained a member until 1981 when he joined the AA working on its *Drive* magazine.

Five years later he moved into public relations with Renault as its PR motorsport manager. He

would subsequently become press and PR manager and in 2001 he was appointed a member of the Renault UK board. He retired in 2011 when he became our first Group Friend.

Tim remained active within motorsport until 2019 serving on British and international administrative bodies.

Former Group member Steve Kitson, also one of our Friends, who followed in Tim's footsteps to join Renault back in the day, penned this tribute to his friend and PR colleague who he describes as having "intense moral rectitude"

THE word 'gentleman' is often applied to individuals we have lost but I can think of no better tribute to the wonderful, professional, kind and generous individual that was Tim Jackson.

Modern motor industry PR reflects little of what Tim stood for, concerned primarily with delivering a message whereas Tim always sought to be an individual with intense moral rectitude, warm and sincere humanity as well as a desire to seek to discover the nature and heart of every individual he encountered. He was always smartly turned out and never accepted that phrase 'smart casual' ... in Tim's lexicon there was smart or there was casual!

I first came across Tim in his journalistic role with the *Workshop Guardian* – a welcoming and high-spirited motoring journalist in the halcyon days on the late 1970s. His bear-like figure loomed large over any and every gathering and his sense of humour, delicious love of a practical joke and an over-riding commitment to excellent writing and communication made him shine out in a period when there were many 'wannabes' and part-timers who seldom matched his energy and enthusiasm.

He persuaded me to leave the north and move south to join Renault just as the brand was making major waves with exciting product underlined with enormous presence in motorsport that Tim worked

tirelessly to develop. He single-handedly made the Renault 5 Turbo Cup, Formula Renault, and then the Clio Cup and Renault BTCC entry, a mainstay of British motorsport – something that was later properly recognised by his role with the governing body.

His love for high-octane motorsport led him to help so many talented individuals develop their careers in the sport and he also worked behind the scenes to maximise Renault's involvement with the then all-conquering Williams F1 team – Mansell, Hill and Coulthard all benefitted individually and professionally from Tim's unstinting support.

"His guidance, friendship and attitude ensured I had the best grounding in the business..."

It was an intense pleasure to sit in his office with one of the Williams' British pedallers discussing the current season and the potential of the latest product from the minds of Frank and his vital sidekick, Patrick Head.

By that time Tim had quit smoking due to his diabetes so I benefitted for a massive supply of Camel cigarettes!

But most of all Tim was just such a pro. He used all of his personal charisma to entice me to move to the deep dark south but thereafter he taught me an inordinate amount about maintaining a balance between the demands of the company and the needs of the



media. He tore me off more than one strip! But it was justified in every instance and I never made the same mistake twice.

His guidance, friendship and attitude ensured that when I eventually left Renault I had the best grounding in the business I could have wished for.

When he married Ann, none of those who knew him were surprised! He had quietly but effectively sought her attention and even developed an affection for Preston North End FC to make sure his courtship delivered on his ambitions!

And what a pair they made - with two wonderful children – Tim

Junior and Helen – and a happy life away from the business with a lot of it spent cruising on their canal boat. Tim and Ann carved their own channel and lived the life they desired.

Tim was a true friend, a wonderful mentor and a magnificent professional.

There are very few of his ilk stalking the corridors of the motor industry these days. The industry is poorer for it but those of us who knew him, spent time with him and worked with him are very much the richer for that experience.

So many of us will miss him but will be enlivened for having shared this world with him.

Scott moves on after 25 years at the Toyota helm

AFTER more than a quarter of a century in charge of the Toyota and Lexus PR operation, **Scott Brownlee** has left the company.

But he says he is “not retiring but looking forward to new opportunities in the future.”

Scott studied mechanical engineering at Strathclyde University before joining Austin Rover in Coventry in 1984. Three years later he moved to Peugeot Talbot to become PR manager and in 1989 he took over the same post with BMW.

He made a further move to Cosworth before joining Toyota where he created their social media operation in 2011.

Kim Palmer and **Chloe Yemm** have joined Polestar UK’s PR operation. Kim has succeeded **Graeme Lambert** as head of public relations while Chloe has been appointed to a newly created role as PR and communications manager.



□ Rachel Granger

Motor Industry News with Alan Domville

Kim was formerly PR head at Land Rover while Chloe was previously press relations manager for Fiat, Fiat Professional and Abarth brands.

Graeme is now focused solely on a global role as new markets PR.

In a revised PR structure at Jaguar Land Rover, **Tracey Tompsett** has now assumed the role of PR manager and senior press officers **Charmaine Lewis** and **Mark Griffin** have taken responsibility for lifestyle and automotive median relations respectively.

Mason Finney has been appointed PR manager at Citroen having previously been with Stellantis as its digital PR manager.

Mason has succeeded **Simon Broome** who has moved to the DS car sales division.

A former campaign executive with the Blackstar music agency, **Maria Galea** has joined Hyundai as PR coordinator which includes fielding media inquiries and handling test car bookings.

At Suzuki, **Jessica Grimditch** has been promoted to senior press officer after seven years with the company. Head of PR, **Alun Parry**, says Jessica’s promotion comes “in recognition of the development in her current role and strong commitment to the Suzuki brand...”



□ Scott Brownlee

New head of PR at Mercedes-Benz is **Emma Passmoor**, formerly head of the company’s digital marketing team. She has replaced **Andrew Dean**.

And its new automotive PR manager is **Hunter Skipworth**, previously global digital PR manager at McLaren.

Back at SEAT and CUPRA is **Laura Reeder** (nee Margott) to become its media relations manager. She had previously been with Audi.

Wendy Towler has joined Skoda as media relations manager, replacing **Natalie Southerden** who is taking maternity leave.

In the past, Wendy has held roles with Jaguar, Vauxhall and General Motors.

Sam Buckingham has been appointed the Genesis brand’s press officer working alongside Simon Branney, its head of PR and communications.

Sam is now our first point of contact as the luxury Korean brand continues its UK launch.

He had previously been studying business and management at university and gained PR experience with the Formula Student team at Oxford Brookes Racing.

Volvo’s new PR and media events



□ Sam Buckingham

coordinator is **Rachel Granger** who had been overseeing media events with BMW before she moved to Australia where she also worked on similar activities.

Joe Watters has left his post as press fleet coordinator with Volvo. Until his replacement is appointed test car requests should be made to bcafs.volvopress@bca.com

Honda’s press fleet coordinator is now **Donovan van der Walt** who was previously working with the Volkswagen driving academy in South Africa on events, marketing and training and supporting media projects.

I'm living the dream!

Driving both a Ferrari Roma and an Aston Martin DB6 turned a trip to see his cousin into a weekend to remember for chairman
ANDY HARRIS

MY LOVE of cars does not stem from my parents, one of whom never passed a driving test and the other had given up driving before I was born.

Obsessed from an early age, one of my enduring memories was my annual visit to the Earl's Court Motor Show. My patient father would find a cosy corner, unfurl his copy of the Guardian and puff away on his pipe.

Once the show moved to Birmingham, a family friend would take me every year until I was able to go under my own steam. I mourn the loss of a proper British Motor Show and the Goodwood Festival of Speed, for all its attractions, is no replacement.

My cousin Nick is a car lover too and having been most successful in business, he has some lovely cars in his garage. An invite to join him for the recent Summer Scramble at Bicester Heritage was eagerly accepted, not least of which because I was hoping for a spin in his new Ferrari Roma.

Much to my amazement, he was happy to let me have an hour or so behind the wheel, adding quite a few hard-charging miles to the thousand or so he had already accumulated.

The roads around his Oxfordshire base are not the most exciting, but the Ferrari's excellence shone through.

It will be a high days and holidays car, ideal for popping to Paris for a long weekend perhaps, or maybe coming to visit me where it



can be properly exercised on challenging Dales roads.

The Scramble event was most enjoyable, with a diverse assortment of automotive treasures parked neatly within the extensive grounds of the former WW2 RAF bomber training station.

Being in the company of a fellow petrolhead was truly convivial and we could have spent the whole day wandering around, reminiscing about cars we had owned, cars we should never have sold and cars we should have bought.

“ I'm used to driving expensive cars but I was a tad nervous about setting off in the valuable Aston... ”

A call to return to his comfortable home for Sunday lunch curtailed our activities.

We had travelled to the event in Nick's beautifully restored Aston Martin DB6, a car he regularly uses all through the summer. I wouldn't have dreamt to ask to get behind the wheel, but as we made our way back



□ The treasured Aston Martin DB6 at Bicester Heritage (top) and the Ferrari Roma owned by Andy's petrolhead cousin, above.

to the car, the keys were thrust into my hands.

Bond fans will know that it's a DB5 that features in the films, but the '6' was the correct silver in colour - good enough for me.

Although quite used to driving expensive cars that do not belong to me, I was a tad nervous about setting forth in the valuable Aston.

I need not have worried, for once the gearbox oil had warmed up, making second gear selectable without a crunch, it was an easy enough car to pilot.

Heavy steering contrasted with the light, delicate gearchange and the brakes needed a fairly hefty shove before doing their job. I could sense

my passenger burying his foot into carpet on more than one occasion.

The car had attracted plenty of attention at Bicester, but there were smiles and waves from passing cars as we burred back to base in the warm sunshine. All too soon the drive was over and the car once more returned to its cosy garage.

Quite the weekend then. Needless to say, I hope to pay a return visit both to see Nick and to the next Scramble, set for October.

I doubt the Aston will be allowed out so late in the year, so maybe I need to borrow something suitably exotic for the occasion.

Not too early to start making some calls!



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