

SWINDON & DISTRICT GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS
www.swindondrivers.com
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Newsletter
February 2002

Editor's Note

Here it is at last - our first newsletter of 2002. Hopefully we are now back on track for our usual publication schedule this year. Any contributions for these pages will be gratefully received. Please send any such material to me in electronic or paper format - my e-mail address is **simon@byford.plus.com**.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributor and are not those of the editor, the group, or of the Institute of Advanced Motorists.

Data Protection Act 1998

The Swindon & District Group of Advanced Motorists retains the names and addresses of all group members on computer for mailing and administrative purposes.

Who's who?

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Mr Peter Clifford, Mr Dennis Wood, Mr Kenneth Turner and Mrs Dorothy Wells

PAST VICE PRESIDENTS

Mr H.B.Bristow and Cynthia Howard

Chairman's Report

Welcome to this, our first newsletter of 2002.

Some of my happiest memories of last year took place during the summer - ah those long hot sunny days!

Big thanks to Derek Sheldrake for organising the day out to the test centre at Thatcham - a great day was had by all who attended.

Also the fantastic car rally organised by Dave and Ginny Hewitt, the best I've ever been on. It was not until I took part in this event, that I could appreciate the time and effort Dave and Ginny put into the planning of it. Thanks guys.

We also held a Barbecue at Savernake in July as we have done for the last few years, but this time it was extra special because it rained. We were the only people in the forest, which turned quite scary once it got dark. Although it rained all night, I think everyone enjoyed themselves huddled together in Linda's gazebo, while Dave did the cooking with Ginny holding his umbrella. (The only down side was I got my car dirty) It did eventually stop raining and we made a fire to warm us, and told each other jokes.

We must support all events so that they can continue. Someone always goes out of their way to organise these things to ensure that, as a group we have a good time. Even if you cannot help to organise something like this you could support the event by coming.

In September we held our AGM, where Chris Glead, Dave Hewitt, Bob McVay and Paul Cox all stood down from the committee. I would like to thank them personally for their support, time and help they have put into the group over the years. Dave, Bob & Chris will carry on supporting the group by

concentrating on their roles as observers.

I would like to wish Kirsty, Derek and Simon best wishes for their new roles and thank Kirsty for the work she put in as secretary. We have also got a new events team which is made up of Kath Penny and Ken Long. If you have any ideas of events or know of someone who could be a speaker please contact Kath or Ken.

If anyone is interested in joining the committee please don't feel you have to wait until September. You can ask any one of the committee members for details or information about joining.

I look forward to the year ahead and your continued support for the group.

Ian Marshall

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A Message from Alan Stillman

I am sorry that I will not be able to attend the AGM - as explained at the last group night, holiday arrangements were made some time ago to fit in with the family. I hope that there is good membership response; looking from the sidelines at the recent group meetings, I have become aware that within the group there exist several members that would be a great asset within the committee. Have a good fruitful evening.

I have been much concerned by the several resignations from the committee, especially your resigning the Chairmanship, however I do understand about your many commitments and I should like to thank you personally for the way you have steered the group during the past year.

My thanks are no less to Kirsty and the others leaving the committee for their sterling work.

The group has been well managed during the past few years by a caring team with what I consider the right attitude and objectives. All members should appreciate that.

I am delighted to learn that Ian is to take over, he and I have talked at some length on many occasions and I know he is concerned not only that the group should do well but that we should (must) encourage a high standard.

I take the opportunity to mention something that Ian and I have discussed and that is we should not forget that we exist for a specific purpose; that is to improve motoring skills - that is why the members joined! To that end I would like to suggest some thought be given to more "better" motoring topics and/or in-house discussions on the subject.

My best wishes to you all for the coming group year.

Successes

Several associates have passed their tests recently. Congratulations to all of the following people :-

Name	Observer
Peter Webster	Dave Hewitt
Keith Newland	Linda Simpson
Ruth Ambrose	Bob McVay
Getta Sutton	Ken Long
Tim Piggot	Mike Newman
Andrew Henner	Cynthia Howard
Nigel Donald	Chris Gleed
Andrew Domeracki	Chris Gleed

Forthcoming Events

The following events are scheduled to take place at the Blunsdon House Hotel:-

06 March 2002	Steve Berry from Halfords
03 April 2002	Dial A Ride - John Reeves
01 May 2002	Wiltshire Constabulary Traffic Management Unit

Additionally on the 8th March we have a Skittles Evening at the White Hart public house in Oxford Road, Stratton. This event is being organised by Kath Penny and the cost is £5 per person.

All events are subject to confirmation. Those of you with internet access should check www.swindondrivers.com for the latest information.

What's in the News?

Most drivers back speed reductions near schools

Researchers have found reduced speed limits around schools are supported by almost three quarters of motorists.

Of more than 1,500 people polled by Green Flag, the breakdown assistance firm, 72% said they were in favour of cutting the limit to just 20mph on roads near schools.

Hundreds of children are killed in road accidents every year - in 1999, 221 aged 0-15 died, a 6% rise on the 1998 total of 206.

Green Flag's Nigel Charlesworth said: "The results of our online poll clearly indicate that people are concerned about accidents and injuries caused to schoolchildren when going to and from school."

'It's always other drivers who go too fast'

Most motorists think other drivers are guilty of speeding but are less keen to admit their own offence, according to a major annual motoring report.

As many as 71% reckon "most motorists" exceed speed limits on motorways, though only 42% admitted doing it themselves.

And 51% in the RAC survey believe drivers generally drive too fast on residential roads but again just 17% owned up themselves.

More than three in four drivers think speed cameras would deter speedsters, but as many as 69% of those who had been "flashed" by a camera say they faced no action afterwards.

As many as 48% think speed cameras are just a way of raising revenue for the police and the government, and Scots were least in favour of them.

Scottish drivers also had the lowest percentage of drivers (25%) who admitted speeding on motorways.

Asked who was to blame for accidents, most motorists targeted young drivers, with elderly company car drivers also being seen as culpable.

Survey finds drivers ignorant of highway code

Ignorance of the Highway Code is rife among drivers, with the majority of motorists unaware of single-lane road speed limits.

A survey for the The Daily Telegraph found drivers unaware of stopping distances and correct hand signals.

Many drivers were also in the dark on the proper reasons for stopping on a motorway hard shoulder.

The survey of 1,000 people aged 17 and over showed that, in some areas of the UK, as many as 64% of drivers were unaware of the 60mph limit for single-lane roads, with 5% saying they drove at 70mph on these routes.

One in 10 drivers confused the turn-left hand signal with the signal for slowing down while half under-estimated the stopping distance for a car travelling at 50mph by between 10 and 20 metres.

A third failed to name the correct reasons for stopping on the hard shoulder, with one in 10 admitting they would stop to make and take calls on their mobile phones.

Membership Benefits

A range of discounts exclusive to all members of the group are now available. Discounts currently available are:-

Central Tyre Ltd, Newport Street, Old Town - 10% discount on tyres, batteries, brakes, oil and filter changes and shock absorbers, 15% discount on exhausts.

Tel: 01793 528493

MotorWay Tyre and Autocentres Ltd, Hawkesworth Trading Estate, North Star - 10% discount on tyres, batteries and related services.

Tel: 01793 525525

Quick-Lee Cleaners Ltd, 15 Borough Fields Shopping Centre, Wootton Bassett - 10% discount on dry cleaning services.

Tel: 01793 848859

Car & Truck Services (Swindon) Ltd, Transfer Bridge Ind Estate - 10-40% Discount dependent on the product purchased.

Tel : 01793 616151

To obtain your discount you will need to produce your current, valid group membership card when obtaining a quote or before any work is started.

In addition to the above FULL members of the IAM are eligible for a range of additional benefits, details of which can usually be found in the current edition of "Advanced Driving" magazine.

Letter from Europe

Our thanks to Brillo Lainson for the following contribution, giving us a perspective on driving on the continent.

Hello Swindon Group,

I noticed that the newsletter was looking a bit sparse recently, so thought I might put a few thoughts down in writing for your consideration.

First, an update: the last time I wrote was about four years ago, when I gave the group an insight into the comparison between importing and registering a personal vehicle into UK and the same procedures in France, where I lived at the time. I also gave you all a few hints about driving in Europe in general and France in particular.

Here follows an update and a few more comments:

Although a type of highway code exists in France, road rules, and particularly road markings in France can be decreed and modified by the local "prefecture", ostensibly in order to increase local road safety, but actually often with the opposite effect because local choice means only locals understand the road markings applied locally and outsiders, not being able to relate them to their own locality, will tend to ignore or be confused by them.

Those of you who have driven in France will understand what I'm trying to explain here, having seen a multitude of different patterns painted across the road. Do red and pink stripes mean end of speed limit or entry to pedestrian zone? Do yellow squares mean obstruction ahead or don't enter this area until exit is clear? And is a green and blue pedestrian crossing actually a crossing? And who has priority if it is? Or isn't? Get my drift?

The other scandal in France is, of course, the high rate of death on the roads and the remarkable thinking about how to reduce this.

To put things in context, one has to understand the politics of the road and the politics of voters.

Whilst the government recognises that excessive speed is a major contributory factor in deaths and injuries, it is still a sad fact that every four or so years, as a new President is elected and in the run up to the voting, all candidates, without fail, declare their intention to offer amnesty to all those under threat of prosecution for speeding and other traffic offences. So far, no difference in the run-up to next year's elections, with both Chirac and Jospin refusing to bow to road safety group pressure and agree between themselves that there will be no amnesty, whichever party is elected. As a result, all drivers are well aware that the chances of finally being punished for contravening traffic rules (not just speeding) are so low as to be zero, and as a consequence, things are already starting to get out of hand. Be advised: French roads are best avoided by novices over Christmas 2001 and in the run-up to the elections in 2002.

Additionally, the Gendarmerie, that branch of the army that plays policeman on the motorways and rural routes are already starting to talk of "work to rule" (this is the military remember) because whereas real policemen in France are now obliged to work only 35 hours a week, (Wiltshire Constabulary may weep at this point) the paramilitaries are not covered by this rule. In addition, there are voices complaining that they face too much danger on the roads when trying to stop drivers !) (Yes, there was a tragic incident recently where two were murdered, but in this case, they were referring to the dangers posed by speeders and drunkards). And why do the police in France never wear effective reflective clothing. A reflective band around their "kepi" tends to be the limit.

So we are now at the situation where the Gendarmerie's trade union has advised that because of the dangers and the fact that any effort to prosecute for speeding will be voided by next years election, there is no point in them taking action against drivers - unless they are foreign and don't vote in France. So yes, IAM members on holiday will still have to set an example.

As for attitudes, how many of you are aware of the valiant battle currently being fought in the South of France by British ex-pats to save a lot of those gorgeous plane trees that Napoleon Bonaparte planted along the side of the roads in long rows to protect his soldiers from the sun during long marches. Why?

Following a spate of fatal accidents in recent years, almost all caused either by drink drivers or drivers using excessive speed, leaving the (invariably dry, straight and level) road, a "terrorist group" has decided that the way to save lives is not to enforce the rules more rigorously, but to chop the trees down so that drivers leaving the road will only plough into soft fields or hedges beyond. They have also politicised the campaign by calling for voters to elect only mayors who wish to "save the youth of France" from such a death: result, many mayors campaigning on a "chop the trees" ticket.

There are several ironies that result as trees are illicitly chopped down by the "anti-tree terrorists", among them, the brigade of Gendarmerie drafted into the are to catch the culprits as they chop, but with instructions not to apprehend, but just to explain that the government is very concerned and will form an investigation group (after the next election) (!).

And of course, not all trees illicitly chopped down at midnight fall conveniently into the field alongside the road and, inevitably, its now not just speeders or drunks who are crashing into dark trees across dark roads at night. More deaths, more blame on trees. If only they could just persuade these country folk to not drink and

drive and drive less fast, they may have the answer, but speeding especially, is the right of every French citizen and an infringement here could seriously affect the results of the Presidential election.

A final warning for those of you driving in France in the near future, and I do not apologise for repeating my caution of four years ago here. It concerns road markings again, and the fact that many foreign drivers are being booked for overtaking when this appeared to be an admissible action. Let me expand: it hinges on local decisions again. In France, the road lines are similar to UK: solid white, long white with short spaces between and short white with long spaces between them. Until four years ago, these lines had the same meaning as those in the UK: in order of above: no crossing the line, cross but with possible hazard and cross with no unusual hazard. In other words, if the line was not solid, you could overtake if conditions permitted.

Local power was increased and SOME areas decided that the "hazard area" lines would henceforth become "no overtaking" lines to improve road safety, with exactly the same meaning as a solid line. HOWEVER, this rule is applied in some areas, and not others. BUT you don't know which areas. AND the powers that be tend to raise money from tourists by booking them for crossing these lines. And it is not just British drivers who get caught. It's every country in Europe except France and no-one understands why they were stopped.

So my advice is that if you get stopped for overtaking where not permitted, ensure that a) the lines were broken and b) there was no road sign with red car and black car, (you know the one I mean), - and then refuse to pay. As long as these two conditions are met, you can ask the Gendarme to show you where the offence occurred. Often, they will have better things to do than get involved with a foreigner who will argue his corner. But make sure you were in the right first!

Anyway, if you were planning to go through France, don't let me discourage you from doing so. It remains a fantastic country for driving and out of the cities, even the small roads will allow you to make good headway.

In the near future, I hope that I will be able to jot a few ideas down for you about driving in Italy, where my office is. Now that WILL make you think. Just to set the ball rolling, I have translated from the Italian and French highway codes, the rules about behaviour at red lights. I'll get the rest to the group as time permits.

RED LIGHT; ITALY.

Stop for a few seconds (if you are travelling at 30 mph above the speed limit, ignore this stop instruction as sharp braking could be hazardous to your brake linings). Proceed to rapidly overtake any foreign car stupid enough to still be waiting for the light to change green, tap your brake pedal. flashing your brake lights as a "gesture" to the red light, sound horn, avoid cars travelling in cross direction on green light, rush across junction to next set of red lights 30 meters further on. Stop. Repeat.

RED LIGHT; FRANCE.

Stop with bonnet well into junction and mini "repeater" light (*an excellent idea incidentally*) 1 foot from glamorous but incredibly thin blonde passenger's window. Ensure no-one else can overtake when light changes to green. Swig from bottle of Evian water. Edge forward impatiently, 3 inches at a time, until you notice glamorous but incredibly thin blonde driver behind. Stop edging forward and apply foot to brake pedal to illuminate glamorous but incredibly thin blonde driver's face behind you as you study her in your mirror. When light changes to green, do not move off, but keep looking at driver behind until hooted as light returns to amber, thereafter rev engine to max, blast off, arrive at next red light (lights in France are never "phased") 30 meters away. Stop. Repeat.