

SWINDON & DISTRICT GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS

www.swindondrivers.com

07050 682842

Newsletter

May 2002

Editor's Note

Welcome to your Spring Newsletter. Thanks to all of you who have sent articles for publication. Special thanks to Brillo Lainson for another great article. Material of all genres on a motoring theme is always welcome - please send it to me at simon@byford.plus.com or give me a ring. The next edition of the newsletter will appear in August and will include a nomination form for new committee members. Please read Ian Marshall's Chairman's report to see how important this could be to the future of your group.

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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 in Your Group?

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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

Spring has sprung and winter has left us all behind to enjoy a sunny few weeks. The daffodils have been and gone and the birds and the bees are busy doing what they know best.

Spring-cleaning isn't just left to the house, now's the time to start preparing the car for the heat and those long hot traffic jams of summer.

As advanced motorists we all know how important it is to keep our cars in a safe and ready for anything condition. It's all too easy to overlook what the wear and tear of winter has done to the car. Not just the mechanics, but also the body work as well. My neighbours think I'm nuts because I am always washing my cars in any weather.

With the thought of summer coming we have some exciting events. Firstly we have Try Drive at Wroughton over the weekend of 29/30 June. Kath Penny is busy working on arranging two more events. (a car Treasure Hunt and a Bar-b-que). As soon as we have any more details we will let you know.

We will be looking for some volunteers to man the stand at the Try drive and we will be making a list at the next group night. Please come prepared knowing if and when you can help out.

I would like to thank Les Brown for attending the Regional Liaison Forum at Weston Super Mare on March 2nd.

Get well to Chris Gleed from everyone at the group. We wish you a speedy recovery and we look forward to seeing you soon.

In September Linda Simpson will be stepping down as group Treasurer. If anyone is interested in taking over this role please contact Linda or myself to either find out more about it or to

say you are interested. **There are some important roles on the committee and without anyone to fill them the group will not be able to continue**, so if anyone is interested in sitting on the committee please let one of the committee members know.

Safe driving to you all.

Ian Marshall

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What Does Your Company Do With Their Old Laptops - (WE NEED ONE!!!)

As many of you are aware, the committee currently use all their own equipment to support the group. In the case of the secretary we really need a laptop that can be passed onto another member in-case the secretary is away for a while or when we have a change of secretary. We are not looking for anything state of the art, a 486 would be more than adequate.

Within the group a system has been written to make the job of maintaining members details much easier. However every time the secretary changes this system needs to be installed onto another PC, this is where a group laptop would help.

If your company donates their old Computer equipment to Charities, please could you let me know the contact name. I will then contact them and put our case forward, alternatively please feel free to contact them on our behalf. We are prepared to pay for licensed copies of software so would be expecting a blank machine.

If you can help, please contact Kirsty, see front cover for contact details.

Observers News

As well as committee members the group is always looking for new observers. Mark Rawlings-Smith and Frank McKim recently joined our observing team - welcome to them. If you think that you could contribute to the group in this way please contact Les Brown.

A complete list of observers will appear in the next edition of the newsletter.

Successes

The following associates have passed their tests. We extend our congratulations to them and their observers :-

Name	Observer
Jamie Tinson	Dave Hewitt
Karen Blue	Richard Arman
Philip Boulton	Cynthia Howard
Philip Smith	Derek Sheldrake
Robert Carr	Bob McVay
James Brooks	Derek Sheldrake
Rupert Findlay	Dave Abbott
Andrew Ellis	Albert Webb

Forthcoming Events

As mentioned elsewhere in the Newsletter Try-Drive 2002 takes place at the Science Museum, Wroughton Airfield on the weekend of **29/30 June**. Other outdoor events will include our traditional summer barbecue and treasure hunt - keep an eye on our web site at **www.swindondrivers.com** for details as they become available.

Our indoor meetings continue at the **Blunsdon House Hotel** on the first Wednesday of every month. On the 5th June we will be having a presentation from a rally team.

If you need further details of any of our forthcoming events and don't have internet access please contact our indoor and outdoor events secretaries using their contact details shown as shown on Page 1 or by calling **07050 682842**.

In the Real World

Speed cameras to get friendly new name

Speed cameras are to be renamed "safety cameras" in an attempt to improve their image.

The Government thinks they should be viewed as a valuable help to society.

All government and police literature, web sites and policy documents have been altered to accommodate the name change.

The cost of the re-branding, the pet project of Transport Minister David Jamieson, has not yet been quantified.

The move by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions follows new figures showing cameras have apparently cut the number of accidents.

Mr Jamieson told the Independent: "Safety is what they are about, so calling them safety cameras seems to make much more sense."

Speed camera case heads for human rights court

A motorist has vowed to launch a fight at the European Court of Human Rights after being convicted of a driving offence on the evidence of a speed camera.

Idris Francis, 62, was convicted by magistrates in Guildford, of failing to say who was driving his £60,000 vintage car when it was clocked at 47mph in a 30mph zone.

Failing to give the information is an offence under Section 172 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Francis was fined £750 and ordered to pay £250 costs, and given three penalty points on his licence.

The court had heard that the 1938 Alvis was photographed at 47mph on the A325 at Merrow, Guildford, on June 12 last year.

Mr Michael Shrimpton, defending, argued in court that being forced to identify the driver would contravene his right to silence and his right to a fair trial under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Mr Francis, the former director of an electronics firm who owns several other vintage cars, was convicted after making admissions of fact, although he pleaded not guilty to the offence.

He said he would also appeal in the Crown Court over the severity of today's fine.

Mr Shrimpton told the court the issue was "one of law and not of fact" and that the use of speed cameras to catch speeding drivers throughout the UK would now be taken to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Any final decision is likely to take at least five years.

Motorists 'boiling with frustration behind the wheel'

A survey has found that miserable motorists are upset by almost anything while behind the wheel.

As well as being annoyed by the more obvious irritations, those questioned also listed - as nuisances - BMW drivers, tractors, bus drivers and taxi drivers.

Nearly 50 different pet hates were listed by drivers for Forecourt Television (FTV), the company responsible for TV at petrol station forecourts.

FTV director Mike Gull, commented: "We were astounded by the range of issues that annoy motorists. There are some pretty angry and distraught drivers sitting fuming in traffic."

The top dislike for motorists was "people who encourage you to drink alcohol when you are driving" - listed by 78% of those questioned.

Other pet hates include tailgating, non-indicating drivers, "boy racers", non-use of seatbelts, speeding motorists, and traffic congestion.

Things which annoy drivers to a lesser degree are slow drivers, motorcyclists and cyclists.

About 20% are sick of potholes in the road, and the same number is angered by women drivers.

Some of the other dislikes listed by the 1,227 men and women drivers surveyed include Sunday drivers, speeding in the rain, speed bumps, speed cameras, roadworks, and rubbish thrown from cars.

Mr Gull said: "Our survey indicates that quite a number of drivers could be close to breaking point with frustration and boiling anger, which is one clue as to why that anger is sometimes expressed in uncontrollable rage."

Study finds British drivers are worst in Spain

Research shows British motorists are the most dangerous drivers on Spanish roads.

The study found drivers from the UK are relatively more likely to cause an accident than those from Germany, France or Portugal.

A team at the University of Granada studied almost 900,000 smashes between 1990 and 1999.

Spain has around 5,700 road accident deaths each year - 50% higher than the UK's rate, which is the lowest in Europe.

The researchers are keen not to blame British driving skills, saying that drivers may change their habits when abroad.

The Sunday Telegraph reports Professor Pablo Lardelli-Claret, of the university's Department of Preventative Medicine, said: "This factor seems to have been influential for British drivers."

His research, published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, concluded foreign drivers in Spain should be considered a high risk group.

UK road safety experts say unfamiliarity with left-hand drive cars and driving on the right may play a role in British drivers' records abroad.

The Granada team found British drivers had an accident-causing risk index of 2.16, higher than the Swiss at 1.68, Moroccan 1.65, American 1.47, Dutch 1.46, German 1.36, French 1.28, Italian 1.18, Portuguese 1.15, Belgian 1.09 and Spanish 1.0.

Some drivers say they would drive off after minor accident

Ten per cent of motorists would just drive off if they scraped the side of an empty parked car, says a new survey.

But nearly two in three would leave contact details in a message on the windscreen of the damaged car, the survey from breakdown company Autonation Rescue found.

A further 16% would make a token effort to find the damaged vehicle's owner, with 6% waiting for the owner to return and 2% reporting the accident to the police.

Motorists over the age of 55 were far more likely to leave a message on the damaged car than 16-24 year-old drivers.

The survey also found:

When a driver tailgates - drives too closely to the vehicle in front - 37% of motorists play safe and simply pull over to let the tailgater pass.

34% brake gently to encourage the driver to back off.

15% of women and 11% of men slow down to annoy the tailgater as much as possible.

58% of male motorists and 36% of women drivers would stop in bad weather late at night if they saw a woman alone with a small child in a broken-down car at the roadside.

11% of women drivers would not stop at all, but would call the police while 4% of women would just continue their journey.

AA urges motorway 'safe havens'

The AA is urging the Government to introduce "safe haven" areas on the side of motorways to reduce hard shoulder accidents.

Each year, 250 people are killed or injured on Britain's hard shoulders, equivalent to one in nine motorway deaths.

Last month AA patrolman Stephen Reed was seriously injured after being struck by a lorry while fixing a car on the M25.

"Motorists feel - and they are - highly vulnerable when stranded on the hard shoulder, close to fast moving, heavy vehicles," said Sir Brian Shaw, chairman of the AA's motoring policy committee.

He added: "A practical and low cost solution to the problem would be to introduce emergency refuge areas or motorway safe havens - small areas at regular intervals alongside the hard shoulder, where vehicles could be temporarily parked and protected behind safety fencing."

Raising 70mph motorway limit ruled out

The Government has ruled out raising the 70mph speed limit on motorways.

Transport Minister John Spellar was asked about introducing an 80mph motorway limit at the House of Commons Transport Committee.

He replied that 70mph is more appropriate on environmental and safety grounds.

Asked if a 60mph limit was likely, Mr Spellar replied: "The current limit is well understood and is working well."

Members Discounts

A range of discounts exclusive to all members of the group are 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 China & Hong Kong

*Once again many thanks to our oversea correspondent **Brillo Lainson** for another special contribution to our Newsletter*

Hello chaps, hope you are all alright in sunny England.

Simon asked me if I could write a little bit for you all again. I am a bit pushed for time, so this article may seem a bit ambling around abit, but I hope it gives a small insight into another way of life.

I was in China in March, so I thought I would drop a small commentary on some of the things that I saw there whilst being driven around. However, it's important to understand that China is a huge country with a lot of underdevelopment, so this may not apply to the majority of regions.

Firstly, having visited China on many occasions, I can say quite clearly that this is not really the bicycle country anymore - that tag is probably best given back to Holland. No, China is now the cheap 2 stroke motorbike capital of the world and it shows - the pollution and noise are both overbearing and a quiet walk down a city street in the morning will soon have you looking for cover in one of the many air-conditioned hotels that are springing up all over the place. Status is very important in China and the vehicle you are seen to be driving, or being driven in, is a matter of intense observation by your neighbours. At the bottom of the scale are pedestrians, followed by mopeds and motor bikes. (I was interested to see a type of taxi which consisted of a small moped with garden shed nailed on to the chassis and offering two seats plus the driver's). next up are cheap second hand cars from Europe and then a jump to the ubiquitous Mercedes S class. With wealth concentrated at the top, there are still few private cars around, but the rich and their businesses make up for the shortfall of "middle class transport" Funnily enough, Citroen ZX's seem to be the chosen transport of the lucky few at the middle

class level, and many of you may remember the advertising that was done for this car in Europe, ZX racing along the Great Wall, etc. Citroen got a jump on other manufacturers and launched a joint venture in China, hence all this French paraphernalia on the roads.

It seems to me that almost every car has blacked out windows, consisting of dark film over the side and rear windows. The front windows are obliged to have this cut off so that driver can easily refer to the wing mirrors and of course, the front windscreen remains clear. However, the translucent strength of the film runs from just about see through from outside to completely opaque as if the windows had been painted with Dulux gloss.

I imagine that we all know that Henry Ford originally offered his Model T's in "any colour as long as it is black", and the same goes in China for most of the cars below luxury level, except that "black" needs to be substituted by "sickly blue colour". It's nice at first, but after a few days, it makes you wonder a left wing Maoist/Marxist state ever decided to opt for Mrs Thatcher's colours for its transport fleet. Still, I imagine that it saves money and keeps the costs down.

Some other observations: well, not too many police around, surprisingly enough, but I think the penalties for infringement of the rules must be high, because at traffic lights, no-one even considers edging forward until the lights are in their favour (unlike Italy - see my previous reports).

And as far as traffic lights are concerned, I can offer you the following comments: Firstly, every light I saw had a LED panel attached with a countdown to when the lights would change (green to red, red to green, etc) and I found this to be a good idea, as even in long phased signals, there appeared to be no impatience by other drivers. Secondly, a large majority of the lights are LED, not conventional bulbs, (I don't actually

remember seeing any bulb lights at all) and this not only allows them to be seen from a distance (or clearly, through the smog), but also saves power and diminishes the risk of failure, because they are not reliant on one bulb, rather on many LED's. I was also interested to see that they have started to introduce large black "traffic light cubes" above intersections which consists of only one big clump of LED's which can shine red, orange or green, so it was rather like watching a television set with a picture of a changing light above the traffic. The example I saw was probably about 5 ft by 5 ft - quite large.

I was also interested by the pedestrian signals at the lights. Again using LED technology, they actually animate the character, so for "don't cross", there is a red hand opening and shutting, and for "cross" there is a green figure with moving legs. More amusing however, is that instead of flashing when the light is about to change, the legs are made to move more quickly, giving a picture of a green man running extremely fast to get out of the way of oncoming cars.

Roundabouts still remain a mystery to me. Ostensibly, they should operate as in the UK, because there are clearly painted white lines indicating give way to the entrance of the roundabout. However, every driver I have used has always stopped on the roundabout to let traffic enter, à la France circa 20 years ago. I cannot to this day tell you what the rule is, just caution you to be careful if you encounter a Chinese roundabout in the future.

I was struck by the patience of the drivers, even in heavy traffic, and I was interested to see that no infringement of personal space, or any faulty driving, was taken personally - rather both drivers just ignored each other after hooting and carried on about their business.

The condition of roads is good in the developed regions that I travel in. Between most cities, a motorway will exist which

permits fast transfers. These are, without exception, toll roads and a journey of about 60 miles will set you back about a pound sterling equivalent. (Although this makes them expensive for the majority of the population and therefore free of traffic, except lorries). They are well maintained and efficient, except that all tolls are collected by hand. There is no system of automated tolling at this moment

Moving swiftly to Hong Kong, this is an interesting cosmopolitan area to be in. The roads would be familiar to most of you because they are a throwback to the days when HK was still a British colony and for the British driver, there is the comfort of double yellow lines, traffic wardens dressed like the ones in Swindon, traffic lights with red and amber before green, Norton style police bikes, driving on the left, etc, etc. I admire the way they have made a maze of flyovers and dual carriageways in such a compact area, and I remain convinced that many unpopular traffic experiments were carried out in HK and adopted there, but not in UK where they would have been resisted by the populace. However, in the long term, they have actually worked to the benefit of drivers and in a very small area, and outside of rush hour, it is reasonably easy to get around in a car. The majority of cars are company owned and serve as status symbols. There is a HUGE fleet of top level Mercedes, BMWs and Lexus's here, far out of proportion to the size of the place. In my mind, I could not see the value of having an S class with a 5 litre engine here, but my agent assures me that it is necessary to make people take you seriously, so who am I to argue? (Interesting thing here - if you want to see a REAL Jaguar S type, come to HK. There is no Euro law to prevent the traditional cat statuette being supplied, so all of them have a leaping Jaguar on the bonnet. Less safe, but inspiring none the less).

However, HK also has an excellent integrated transport system which make a car unnecessary and mobility is not a problem. The underground system is fast and efficient, the buses are regular and plentiful and if you want, you can take a long trip along the

important HK islands points by tram for 20p. It is quite clear that a lot of investment is put into the transport system and contrary to what seems to be argued politically in the UK today, because it is reliable, people use it and it pays for itself to a large extent.

Investment also means well maintained roads. From the hotel in which I was staying last week, I watched a police motorcyclist stop traffic as a 2 lorry crew started work at 11.00 pm on resurfacing a 300 meter stretch of road which already looked in good nick to me. The traffic was allowed to continue flowing after the crew was safely cordoned off. After resurfacing, they called up a lorry with bitumen, follow shortly by a heavy roller. Following this, they started to paint the lines and directions (English and Chinese) and then the police arrived to hold the traffic again while the crew cleared up (5 minutes) and then they were gone - all within 1 hour, 20 minutes. Apart from the two five minute periods, the traffic continued to flow and the road was available for use almost immediately.

It is also interesting to gauge car caused air pollution levels between China and HK. Even though there are far more cars in a much smaller area, HK has a lower level of pollution due to the fact that the latest motor technology is incorporated. In China, almost every car below luxury class will have blue smoke coming out its rear end. In addition, I understand that the fuel is better quality in HK, and there is more incentive to use less of it, being that it costs about £1.10 a litre for petrol as opposed to about 25p a litre in China.

Finally, traffic lights again. In HK, all traffic lights have a small box attached which makes a quiet ticking noise. This is to allow blind people to find them to cross the road in safety. As the crossing light is red, the box ticks slowly, as it changes to green, it ticks more rapidly. Blind people can also get around the underground system easily as all entrances and stairs are locatable by a small loudspeaker which emits a noise similar to that of a submarine sonar.

Anyway, enough from me, sorry if you all found it a bit backwards and forwards this time - such is the nature of typing whilst trying to keep to business deadlines. However, I am sure Simon would be grateful to anyone who could jot him a short essay or two for each newsletter. For those of you who think they have nothing to say, I would simply propose thinking of a traffic relevant subject and then writing an opinion. For example: Are speed limits too low in UK? Should all cars over 5 years old be scrapped to improve air quality? Is black an appropriate colour for a car or is it unsafe? Where are all the drive-in services that one sees in the USA? Should they plant trees down the middle of motorways to shield night drivers from oncoming glare? Is the hard shoulder really necessary - why not make it into a fourth carriageway? Should motorways toll be introduced when there is no alternative route that does not mean driving thorough towns to get to the destination - shouldn't we be encouraged to use motorways, not forced off them? Should the licence fee be divided into two parts, one for normal roads and another for motorway - that way, the UK could legitimately impose a Swiss style vignette system on foreigners who use our motorways. You have to pay in France, Switzerland, Austria, so why they should they not pay to use our system?

Get the idea? Please contribute anything, no matter how small, to make the magazine more readable and more something by the members, for the members. Let's share the burden and share the eventual enjoyment of a professional magazine with more articles than advertisements or "notices".

Happy and safe driving to one and all.

TRY-DRIVE 2002 & MOTOR SHOW

TO BE HELD AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM, WROUGHTON AIRFIELD
ON SATURDAY 29 AND SUNDAY 30 JUNE

Come and try driving buses and lorries etc plus many other activities and attractions.

The Swindon Group are having a stand and require members to assist. Please contact Group Secretary or any Committee member if you can help.

This family show gives you a chance to try your hand at driving, under expert guidance, a wide range of vehicles, including buses, lorries, fork lift trucks and JCBs, plus model aircraft flying displays and a full range of activities for children. Also cars and motorcycles displayed by dealers from across the region, and trade and business stands. Organised by the Swindon Borough and Wiltshire County Council Road Safety Units.

Science Museum collections will be open for viewing.

Open 10.00 - 17.00

Admission Charge applies