



Mid Wales Matters



The Newsletter of Mid Wales Advanced Motorists

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I AM a better road user ...

In this issue:

Chairman's Comment	1
Editor's spot	1
Assessment Drive	2
Assorted articles	2
Insurance and the RAC	3
Musings of an MWAM member	4
Good News	4
Warning	4
Associate Course Dates	5
Committee	5

Chairman's Comment



"The IAM is for old fogies driving aged Volvos, isn't it?" ...A very unfair but prevalent judgement, I think you'll agree. I've just looked up "fogey" in the Oxford Dictionary - "a dull old fellow/a person behind the times/over conservative or slow/fuddy-duddy/stick-in-the-mud" - and now I'm really upset!

I may be a bit on the old side, but I'm definitely not a fogey. I may not be sleek, elegant and highly desirable, but just look at my lovely old Porsche! And I know plenty of other IAM members who are with-it on the car front – there's one with an AC Cobra and another with that superb red E type Jag. The centre photo shows Nigel, our Group Operations Director with his nitrous oxide boosted XJ40 5.3. I could go on, but the Editor wouldn't like it!

These few examples represent a significant section of our membership that most certainly couldn't be described as 'old fogies'.

However, old fogies or not, our IAM training enables us to drive our cars with the utmost safety and to be in complete control at all times, whether we drive one of the beauties below or, dare I say it, a Volvo.



Editor's Spot

The Wales Enduro came to town a couple of weeks ago, and Llandrindod was filled, as it is for three days a year, with bikers from all over the UK and various parts of Europe. There are so many vans parked on the approach roads to the starting point at the lake that only single file traffic is possible, and every available square inch of the Common and the road around the lake is transformed into a huge camping site.

As I sauntered past with my dogs this time, I was taken by the variety of temporary accommodation on view, from basic one man tents to luxury six-wheeler camper van limos. In a previous edition, I was a bit scathing about such vehicles and their drivers, but having had a guided tour of a particularly fine example, I have to admit to being impressed. I forgive them for driving slowly, and I can see the attraction of owning one – just as long as there's a Mini at home to do the Tesco run!

Assessment drive report

It was in March 1989 that I passed my Advanced Driving Test and I had no other assessment until recently, when I decided to take up the offer, made by MWAM to its members, of a free assessment drive. I contacted Geoff Smith and a convenient time was made for me to meet him at Llanyre. We started off with a few questions about the checks that a driver needs to carry out before entering the vehicle, and then off we went.

First we drove across some lanes to the main A44 near Crossgates and turned towards Rhayader where we did some town driving before picking up the A470 towards Newbridge. Before reaching Newbridge we took some minor roads and lanes through Disserth before joining the A483 at Howey and heading into Llandrindod where I had to demonstrate my parallel parking skills. It was then time to head back towards Llanyre. The whole trip took about an hour.

I love driving, so the experience was most enjoyable. But I found it also invaluable to have an experienced IAM driver with me. I had picked up some bad habits over the years, which Geoff was able to point out to me, and these I know have in writing to refer to and hopefully correct as I carry on driving. I would like to thank Geoff for his time and would encourage other members to take up this offer. Your driving could and should improve from the experience.

Haydn Davies

Traffic lights to stop speeding

Drivers who speed will be punished by being forced to wait at traffic lights under a pilot scheme which could be adopted across the country. Swindon will be the first place in Britain to implement the system which uses sensors in the road to monitor drivers' speed. If a car is exceeding the limit the next set of lights is instructed to turn red, bringing the speeding car and all those behind it to a standstill.

This autumn equipment will be installed in one road in which more than two thirds of cars are estimated to speed and in another where more than a third are alleged to sin. The sensors will activate traffic lights which are already placed at junctions. Number plate recognition will ensure that emergency vehicles are given the green light.

"I've been talking about this with my team for about two years," said Swindon's planning and transport supremo. "I've seen it in Spain and France and it seems to work really well. I couldn't understand why we weren't doing it here in the UK. It's an intelligent way of managing traffic flows and ensuring that cars are driven safely. The whole key is to monitor drivers' behaviour without beating them over the head. It may annoy them initially, but I think that they will soon work out that if they maintain a constant speed at or about the limit, then their journey times will be much shorter because they won't be delayed by traffic lights."

In 2009 Swindon became the first town to switch off its speed cameras, saying the money could be better spent on other safety measures. Since then the council has been planning this alternative which tackles speeding without hitting drivers' pockets. If it's a success, the lights at all Swindon's 200 junctions will be adapted.

A month in a car park

A German lady who forgot where she had parked her car finally recovered it after 39 days. She was visiting Munich for a concert and, following a friend to a parking spot, she was distracted by her 11 year old daughter and followed the wrong car – into a private garage. After the concert, she couldn't find the car and had to take a taxi home. It was only after a newspaper appeal that a city resident called to say that a mysterious Audi had been in his parking spot for over a month, and the lady was reunited with her car.

Petrol prices

OK, petrol's not cheap here, but there are 9 countries in the world where it's dearer. Turkey is at the top of the list at £1.64 per litre, but then at the other end of the scale there's Venezuela at a mind-boggling 1.4p! Even in Turkmenistan (where ever that may be) motorists are paying just one tenth of our price.

Insurance.....

Fraudsters, liars and ambulance chasers are an unwelcome and costly problem for insurers and brokers. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) conceded last year that what it describes as "dishonest claims" cost about £2billion a year.

However, that figure has to be seen in the context of an industry that's raking in tens of billions from sales of motor insurance certificates. On top of that it earns additional billions in other lucrative areas, such as 0845 calls to its staff, or hefty financial penalties when drivers need to pay for their insurance in monthly instalments.

The insurance industry's defence that it doesn't make money from selling motor insurance policies appears increasingly less believable. No doubt some car insurance companies are like some banks in that they have been so poorly managed, wasteful and customer-unfriendly that they have not made the healthy profits they could and should have made. Like those hated banks, the equally odious car insurance companies are currently trying to bail themselves out via excessive price rises dumped on their bruised and battered customers.

Government immediately needs to step in to curtail this legalised theft from the pockets of law-abiding motorists. Until that happens, everyone should shop around and haggle hard for deals before paying for cover.

In the longer term, you should only buy or use cars with low insurance ratings. And if, like me, you believe there's something seriously wrong with your insurance company/broker, report it to the Office of Fair Trading and the relevant regulatory authorities.

...and the RAC

A recent RAC report states that the cost of motoring is at the top of the list of concerns for drivers in 2011.

Also featuring in the "most important" category are issues such as drink-driving, the state of the roads, untaxed or uninsured drivers and motorists using mobile phones while driving. All familiar territory.

Interestingly, however, the authors point out that while the rising cost of car ownership and usage is clearly the primary worry for motorists now, it was only their fourth biggest concern this time last year.

The report blames soaring insurance and fuel prices as well as high motoring taxes for this sad, wallet-busting state of affairs. As a result, the RAC formally calls for "fuel duty to be frozen, and the inflationary rises scrapped", in addition to action from the Government and others to "reduce/control the price at the pumps."

Regulation on fuel pricing and a public inquiry are further demands, as are calls for more investment in public transport, cycling and park and ride. It recommends long-term repairs of potholes, wants the Government to consider an 80mph speed limit and local authorities to do a speed-camera audit. There are also calls for more random breath testing, improved enforcement of existing traffic laws and more subsidies for the electric-car industry.

All fair enough. The RAC and the 1,002 motorists it consulted via the internet are entitled to their opinions.

However, cynics might well question why the RAC (which in just the last month has been sold by the British insurer Aviva to a private equity firm) thinks it right and fair that the price of petrol and diesel should be reduced and controlled, with oil companies receiving more punishing regulation and even a public inquiry, yet isn't calling for similar measures for insurance prices and the insurance industry that has to be blamed for sending them through the roof.

Page three space filler

Nearly 70% of Brighton motorists claim to have got amorous in their cars – the country's highest figure, according to a survey carried out by confused.com. At the other end of the scale, only 22% of Worcester drivers admitted to such activity. There was no mention of Mid Wales.

Musings of an MWAM member

Having already become an IAM advanced car driver, I'm now in the middle of preparations for my motorcycle test.

At the beginning of my tuition I felt that bike observers were a little picky compared to their car colleagues, but I've come to the conclusion it's just because comments on faults and bits of advice come in "bunches" at the end of a run rather than during it.

My IAM training has made me very conscious of the thoughtlessness and ineptitude of many other drivers and bikers: bad road positioning at junctions and traffic lights, dangerous overtaking, dangerously high and slow speeds, wrongly adjusted or non-working lights – I could go on!
But most importantly, it has made me more conscious of my own safety on the road.

Incidentally, I recently read an article in a monthly bike magazine which was aimed at improving cornering skills. Not once in several pages did it advise looking in the mirror or taking a glance behind! Clearly not written by an IAM trained biker!

It is nice to see the stories of restorations by associates. Can I suggest that more articles with accompanying pictures would make interesting reading? I have some work in progress at the moment, and will probably write an article in due course. I also have a website dedicated to bikes I have owned/restored, but it does need updating so no details just at the moment.

Howard Roberts-Jones.

Good news – but room for improvement

Latest road safety figures from the DfT show that compliance with 30mph urban speed limits continues to improve while pedestrian fatality levels are falling.

In 1998, 69 per cent of cars were driven faster than the limit in 30mph zones in free-flow conditions – by 2010 this had dropped to 46 per cent. Those exceeding 40 mph in a 30mph limit has halved since 2003, now down to 16 per cent. At the same time, traffic levels are declining on all types of road – a trend observed from 2006 onwards.

Pedestrian fatalities have also reduced significantly, down 40 per cent since 2005 from 671 to 405. Ninety-six per cent of pedestrian accidents happen on urban roads.

Reducing traffic speeds and risk in towns has been high on the road safety agenda, but rural roads, on which drivers are still most likely to be killed, now require even greater priority to reduce casualties further.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: "The good news is that drivers are not driving faster on the less crowded roads – and more people are sticking to the limit in urban areas where there are many hazards. A combination of consistent road safety messages, new road layouts and police enforcement appears to be paying road safety dividends for city people.



"However despite this positive effect in urban areas, road safety on rural roads, where the majority of serious accidents and fatalities occur, needs much more attention. In the UK, between two-thirds and three-quarters of fatalities occur on rural roads, yet driving on rural roads still isn't a mandatory part of the basic driving test. Most young drivers get plenty of exposure to urban hazards but often their first experience of a rural road comes after the test when they are on their own. This is unacceptable."


Warning

Last year a motorist was prosecuted for flashing to warn an oncoming driver of a speed trap. Basically if the police cannot prove that the oncoming drivers were either speeding or intending to speed then a flasher has no case to answer. But the man prosecuted last year flashed a van when it was already in the sights of the police laser gun so they could prove it was speeding when he flashed it and that's why he got done for impeding a police officer in the course of his duty. Be careful!

New Members

Congratulations and a warm welcome to the following associates who were successful in their IAM Advanced

Driving  or Riding Test 

Name	Location	Observer	Date
Peter Wingrave-Newell 	Bleddfa	Geoff Smith	Jan 11
Steve Clinton	Berriew	Nigel Godman	Mar 11


Associate Course Dates



Denotes Car Course



Denotes Motorcycle Course

Course	Start Date	Day	Times	Location
 11/5	28/09/2011	Wednesday	7:00 PM 9:30 PM	The Bracken Trust, Llandrindod Wells

Static Observer Training Dates

Date	Day	Times	Location
29/10/2011	Saturday	2:00PM 4:00PM	The Bracken Trust, Llandrindod Wells

Please note that all the above-published dates and venues may be subject to change due to circumstances beyond the committee's control. For the latest information, visit our web site: mwam.powys.org.uk or contact the group secretary. **Please contact our Chief Observer John Scott if you require any further details.**

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