

Here, Ken London, Group Treasurer, Membership Secretary and one of our National Observer team members tells us about his cars and driving history.

When did you pass your driving test and what was your first car?

I started driving just after my 17th birthday and passed my test 3 months later in 1969 in my dad's Singer Chamois (posher Hillman Imp). My first car that I bought in 1973 when I was at university in Edinburgh, for £140, I think, was a 9 years old Triumph Spitfire Mk2.

What particular things do you remember about your early motoring years?



I couldn't really afford the petrol for the Spitfire when I was a student in the early 70's, but in any case, it was the time of the petrol crisis so it was parked up for most of the weekdays. The car was a bit of a banger really. I had to replace valve stems because there was so much blue smoke. There was a hole in the floor and the soft top roof used to fly off from the front windscreen after you hit 45mph. I got very wet travelling down to Cumbria once because of that. However, I did quite a few miles in it, even travelling round part of the North Coast 500 before it was called that. It went to the scrap heap in the end and I graduated to a Hillman Imp Sport (Wow - Marketing brochure claimed sparkling sports performance with luxury saloon comfort).

Can you tell us all the different cars that you've owned?

I've had about 30 different cars personally, not including my wife's cars. There are 5 marques in my list of sporting or performance cars that I've owned:

- Triumph:** Spitfire Mk2, Spitfire 1500, TR7
- Ford:** Escort XR3, Escort XR3i, Escort RS turbo, Sapphire RS Cosworth
- Jaguar:** XJ6 Sport, XJ V8 Sport, XJR, XK60, XF Sport
- Lotus:** Elise Mk1, Esprit GT3
- Alfa Romeo:** 159 V6 Q4, Giulia Quadrifoglio.



I've also had 4 x 4s including a Suzuki jeep, 2 Ford Mavericks and 3 Fiat Pandas as well as a selection of family cars.

Current cars in the fleet

Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio and Fiat Panda 4 x 4 Twinair. This is my 3rd Panda which replaced my last one which was written off after a tree fell on it at Strichen.

This is my 2nd Alfa and is by far the most powerful car that I've owned. The 2.9 V6 biturbo develops 510bhp. It can reach a speed of over 190mph and get to 60 in less than 4 seconds.

My wife's car is a Skoda Fabia Estate.



What is or has been the best car that you've owned and why?

I have really liked all my cars at the time but each time I move on, I think the latest one is better etc. The current Alfa is really special though. I've had it 3 years and has been no trouble whatsoever. I can't see me changing it

Do you regret selling any particular car? Why?



When I visit the classic car shows, I always see cars that I once owned, and it makes me think that I should have kept it; not practical and I didn't have the cash to do that, anyway.

*If I had to choose one, the **Elise Mk1**. It was a hoot to drive, sharp as anything in the dry although a bit skittish in the wet. I bought it in 2002 from Murray Motors in Edinburgh when it was about 15 months old. I sold it in early 2017 just before I bought the Giulia.*

I think I had a bit of a tear in my eye when I saw it being driven away. It was immaculate and had only 30K on the clock when I sold it.

What has been your most exhilarating moment driving?

I did a Ferrari experience day at Silverstone and single seater experience at Knockhill which were both great fun, getting to speeds not achievable legally on the road.

I also took the Giulia for a performance driving coaching session at Knockhill which really showed the full potential of the car's performance.

I also found the F1 simulator experience very exciting; Jenson Button driving in the McLaren on the circuit de Cataluna in Spain.



What has been the scariest moment driving?



It was in March 1987 when I was driving down to work in Venice in my Escort RS Turbo. I was south of Lyon on a 3 lane Autoroute heading for the tunnel through the alps.

It must have been on a Friday afternoon because the route was packed with motorists heading to the ski slopes near Chamonix. Everybody in all 3 lanes was doing more than 150kph with little thought for keeping adequate distance.

They were jostling lanes and when they got to the slip road off, it was chaos with folk trying to jump places by whatever means. It was very scary.

Which are your favourite roads in Scotland?



There are so many great driving roads in Scotland, I would find it difficult to choose.

Close to home in Aberdeenshire, I love the:

- A944 / A939 Alford to Speybridge.
- B974 Banchory to Fettercairn.

In the Highlands, I really enjoy driving the:

- A85 Tyndrum to Oban.
- A832 / A896 Garve to Torridon and onto Kishorn.

In the borders, I like these roads:

- A702 Abingdon to Hillend in Edinburgh (after leaving M74)
- B6355 over the Lammermuir hills to Duns
- A697 from Carfraemill to Coldstream

What is your least favourite road in Scotland?

No doubt about it, the A96 from Aberdeen to Inverness must be the most tedious drive with virtually no overtaking opportunities and heavy traffic both directions. Roll on the dualling of this horrible route.

Thank you very much, Ken.