

# OAD Newsletter

May 2020



[www.iamroadsmart.com/groups/oad](http://www.iamroadsmart.com/groups/oad)

## Oxfordshire Advanced Drivers 2020

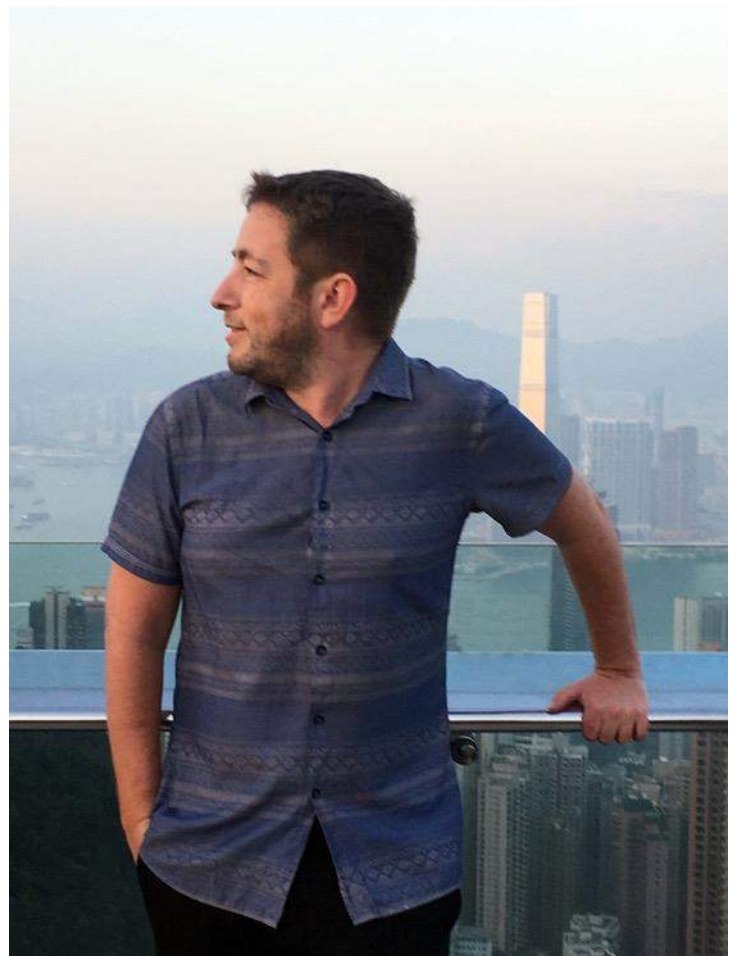
### An Update from OAD Chair, Alex Lewis

#### Where we have come so far

On 2 October 2019, Oxfordshire Advanced Drivers (OAD) held its inaugural AGM. The new group aims, whilst covering a larger geographical area, to be much more focussed on the interests of car members. I believe we have made a lot of progress since then and OAD is in a very strong position.

The new committee have spent a lot of time behind the scenes, establishing new systems, amalgamating finances, and aligning training practices. These measures will ensure that the group runs as efficiently as possible, whilst adhering to the relevant legislation, and providing a consistent, high quality, training experience to our associates.

Our website is being developed to provide up-to-date information about the group along with the latest news. Information will continue to be disseminated in Andrew's excellent



newsletter and on our social media profiles. Contributions, including both articles and photographs are always welcome.

I am pleased to say that in this newsletter we are celebrating six test passes including one who achieved a F1RST – that's eight passes with two F1RSTs since the beginning of 2020. We have also been pleased to run a number of events:

- Drive outs - open to full and associate members
- Signpost Scatter event
- Tour of Williams Formula One
- Christmas meal
- Talk by our ASDM Robbie Downing

Thank you to all committee members, event organisers and observers who have made all this possible.

## **Membership Renewals**

Thank you to the majority of members who have set up direct debits to renew your membership. This will vastly improve the efficiency with which we are able to operate the charity. Particular recognition is due to Nik and Karen who have worked very hard on this process.

The few remaining members who have not set up a direct debit now have until 31 May to renew at the standard subscription rate of £30 with payment allowed by direct debit, bank transfer, standing order, or cheque. If any member has been subject to extenuating circumstance during April, and hence been unable to set up a direct debit, please do contact me directly ([chair@iamoxon.org](mailto:chair@iamoxon.org)). If payment is not received by 31 May we must assume that you wish to terminate your membership. Your details will be removed from all our systems at this time. Data will be retained on IAM Roadsmart systems in line with their policies.

Our primary source of new members is from associates completing the advanced driving course. It is now clear that we must make recruitment of new associates a real focus. To this end I am delighted to welcome Elizabeth Jones to the committee in the role of Recruitment Manager.

## **Gift Aid**

An important step in ensuring OAD remains in the best financial position possible, is to maximise our revenue from Gift Aid. This allows us to claim an extra 25% of membership subscriptions and donations from eligible members from HMRC. Members may also be able to reduce their tax burden as a result. Please do look out for additional communications on this matter and complete a gift aid declaration if you are eligible. If possible, BAM and OAGAM Gift Aid declarations will be carried forward, and we are looking into the details of how to finalise this.

## **Suspension of Activities**

On 17 March I wrote to the membership to say that, due to the risks associated with Covid-19, OAD would suspend all activities with immediate effect. At that time, we stated that

this decision would be reviewed around the end of April. A committee meeting was held by video conference on 29 April and we agreed that, due to ongoing restrictions and uncertainty, the suspension should now become indefinite. We absolutely want to resume operations as soon as it is possible to do so and we can be confident that the level of risk is acceptable. Any decision around resumption of activities will be based on:

- UK government laws and advice
- IAM Roadsmart instructions and advice
- The specific risks associated with our activities
- A recognition that many of our members may fall into Covid-19 high risk groups
- Prioritising the health of our members

It is likely that resumption of operations may need to be phased. As ever, our core aim remains improvement of road safety primarily by provision of the advanced driving course. This will therefore be our priority if at all possible. At the same time we may need to recognise particular risks associated with close proximity in cars. It is possible that other events, which are lower risk, may be able to resume earlier. We have established small committee subgroups who will monitor the situation, and when appropriate, bring proposals forward to the committee for consideration.

More immediately, we will investigate the possibility of holding online speaker events. This will begin with an initial short meeting to gauge interest – please see page 7 for more details and make time to join the meeting if you can. Keep an eye out for notices of further virtual meetings. If you have ideas for, or contact with, speakers you believe would be interesting please send these to Elizabeth at [recruitment@iamoxon.org](mailto:recruitment@iamoxon.org).

I hope you and your families remain healthy during this time and I look forward to seeing you at an OAD event, even if only virtually, before too long.

## COVID-19 Reflection



***Mike Quinton**, IAM RoadSmart CEO, reflects on how much has changed for IAM RoadSmart members, groups, staff and communities over recent weeks as the country reacts to the impact of COVID-19 and ongoing lockdown. He shares his thoughts on the effects the Coronavirus has had on our work to improve road safety and how, collectively, we have responded to the extraordinary challenges faced.*

Just a few short weeks ago, we were looking forward to the start of the busiest part of the year for IAM RoadSmart and its 182 local groups as the days got longer and the opportunities to recruit and coach new associates to advanced driving and riding standards usually begin in earnest.

What none of us could have known then was how quickly Coronavirus would overtake our efforts to make roads across the UK safer through driver education and training. Looking back over the last few weeks I am filled with pride for the way everyone – staff and

members – have pulled together and how the IAM RoadSmart community has stepped up, as one, to the formidable challenge facing our whole country.

Through an extraordinary team effort, we are keeping our charitable mission on the road, continuing to spread the word about the importance of road safety and the part every driver and rider can play in reducing the number of people who die and are injured on our roads each year.

Exceptional times call for exceptional measures. Staff and members have adapted with equal enthusiasm to a world where we all keep in touch over video conferencing, socialise with our family and friends online and use social media to keep sharing our road safety message.

I take my hat off to all those groups who are using video conferencing to continue holding regular committee meetings, AGMs and social events. I congratulate all those who are holding webinars for associates to keep their journey to advanced driver or rider status ticking over. To those who are using regular e-newsletters to keep in touch and looking ahead to a time when we can all enjoy some restored freedoms, I salute you.

Many of our members are among those who are currently on the frontline of the fight against Coronavirus and we are grateful to you for all your dedication and hard work in these extremely challenging circumstances. I have tried to make sure all of us at IAM RoadSmart are playing our part by staying at home to protect the NHS and save lives. I've been on my doorstep for the weekly #ClapforCarers, along with so many of you. It's a moving and exhilarating experience to see how we have all come together in this national crisis.

So many more of our members have taken their incredible volunteer spirit out into their local communities, to support the vulnerable, joining the NHS Volunteer Responders and doing other invaluable work. Staff have also signed up or are rolling their sleeves up to help in their local communities. From shopping for a vulnerable neighbour to keeping in touch with those on their own, you have shown just what a strong community IAM RoadSmart is.

Wherever we can, we have used our role and reputation as the UK's largest independent road safety charity to reinforce the Government's messages and offer people sensible, practical advice on everything from vehicle maintenance to managing speed and being considerate of more vulnerable road users to minimise the risk of adding yet more pressure for the NHS at this critical time.

We now know we will be continuing to remain locked down for at least another three weeks. And while it's vital everyone continues to follow the Government's social distancing advice to protect all our health, at some point our social distancing measures will be relaxed, as we're seeing in other parts of the world.

It is not yet clear how soon we will be able to resume our on-road training safely but I believe this will be more important than ever after such an extended period of restricted vehicle use. Roads busy with traffic may seem daunting to many initially. Our driver and rider coaching can do a great deal to sharpen dulled road skills and rebuild confidence dented by time off the streets.

*Mike is booked to give a presentation at the OAD **September Meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> September at Woodstock Social Club**. We very much hope that the Covid-19 lockdown will have eased enough by then for the meeting to go ahead as planned.*

## March Meeting

### ***Some Further Development May be Required...***

A Presentation by Robbie Downing



*Robbie Downing is our IAM Area Service Delivery Manager. His role is to support OAD and provide a direct line to IAM RoadSmart Headquarters. Robbie has been with the IAM since 1988. His previous roles have included examiner for car and motorcycle, up to the level of Masters.*

Robbie's presentation described the level of advanced driving that is required to gain an IAM RoadSmart Masters qualification. His talk covered a range of driving situations and offered lots of advice to help us improve our driving at all levels.

Robbie summed up what high level advanced driving looks like. As a Masters examiner, on the test he looks for driving that follows the following criteria...

- The drive must be safe and legal.
- It should demonstrate the IPSGA system *throughout*.
- A successful candidate will follow the sequence: Observe; Anticipate; Plan – in accordance with the vehicle speed.
- The driver should use opportunities to make good progress – within speed limits, of course.
- Cornering principles should be applied consistently and appropriately. This will mean a good use of limit point analysis and demonstration of all stages of the system, including acceleration as the bend unwinds.
- Overtakes should demonstrate efficient assessment, planning and execution.
- The 'spoken thought' commentary doesn't have to cram in too much detail but should be fluent relevant and continuous. It should reflect good knowledge.
- The driver should demonstrate sound judgement of speed and distance – of vehicles both coming towards them and those following.
- All hazards should be assessed and prioritised.
- Slow manoeuvring must reach DVLA standard at least.
- Positioning should be used to gain advantage in terms of better visibility, but *never at the sacrifice of safety*.

In essence, the drive should be smooth, systematic, polished and flowing. In other words, 'quietly efficient' at all times.

Plenty there for all of us to aspire to, even if we aren't preparing for the Masters test!



## **Group Activities During Lockdown**

### **Good ideas welcome**

*The aims of IAM RoadSmart are to improve the standard of driving and promote road safety. Your committee is working hard to extend the range of support we offer to OAD members and associate members in achieving these aims. We therefore welcome ideas – and practical help - from members that will maintain engagement during this unprecedented time.*

In particular, we'd love to hear your thoughts and suggestions in the following areas:

#### **Virtual Webinar Speaking Events**

The OAD Committee is already holding meetings remotely, using videoconferencing. It's not the same as meeting in person, but it works and we are getting jobs done. So why not extend the idea to monthly group meetings? Full details of our first online group meeting – to explore the possibilities of this idea – can be found on the next page.

## Sharing Driving Experiences

Are you interested in sharing a previous driving experience with the group?

At a time like this, we need positive energy, previous experiences, and a future to look forward to. If you have a story, we are keen to hear from you. We can publish your story on the OAD website and include it in the next newsletter.

## Newsletter Items

Interesting articles and photos are always welcome.

## Nominate New Members

Sooner or later, thousands of drivers who have been under lockdown will be returning to the wheel. It will be an ideal opportunity to recruit new associate members to the advanced driver course. Or existing members might be keen to sign up for refresher drives.

How can we support you, your family, your friends, and your colleagues in ensuring that safe driving skills are implemented at that critical time?



If you have an idea, make a difference and speak up by writing to [newletter@iamoxon.org](mailto:newletter@iamoxon.org).

## A chance to have your say

Our first Virtual Event is taking place on

**13 May 2020, 6.00 to 7.00pm.**

To join, follow this link: [meet.google.com/hxr-icgv-bnw](https://meet.google.com/hxr-icgv-bnw)

*The meeting will be open from 5:45pm to give you time to log in.*

We welcome *all OAD members* to the forum to discuss future virtual meetings:

- Who would you like to hear from?
- What topics are you interested in?
- How can we help you to maintain your driving enthusiasm and your skillset during this time?



## An Adventure into kit car ownership

*OAD member **Dougie Hore** passed his advanced driving test last year with a F1RST. By profession, he is a mechanical engineer, so is well placed to fix problems with any car he drives. Not satisfied with that, Dougie also likes to rebuild the cars he drives...*

I recently completed and sold a nut and bolt restoration of my 1934 Austin 7 – not quite old enough to be a true vintage car, but venerable nevertheless. But that's a story for another time because with the newly found space in the garage I've now become the proud owner of a nearly roadworthy albeit scruffy Westfield SE kit car. The Austin, with around 10 HP and a top speed no more than about 50mph (downhill with a following wind) compared to the Westfield SE, with over 100 HP, weighing around 600kg, and a top speed well over 100mph are clearly two very different vehicles. Acceleration-wise, the Westfield will be significantly quicker than most other road going traffic. Much as I may have continued to enjoy ownership of the Austin, I was keen to get my hands on a hardened sports car with a good level of performance.



So, what is a kit car? Kit cars are project cars assembled from a kit of parts sold by a manufacturer. There are many types to choose from; mine is a Westfield SE, completed in 1992. It's made from a part kit combined with donor parts taken from various Ford cars, mainly the 1979 Capri, but also bits and pieces from the Ford Cortina, Escort, and Sierra.

The attraction of getting the Westfield was born from sitting in the passenger seat of a similar car owned by a member of my family. I was amazed by the handling characteristics, acceleration and the general good feeling of being in a lightweight, open-top, 2-seater sports car. I immediately knew I had to have one of my own.

Encouraged by a family member, I was offered this Westfield. It had been registered as SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification) for over fifteen years, so it was quite a challenge, but also a real bargain.



After collecting the car from Newcastle and bringing it home to Oxfordshire, I started writing a list of all the technical problems with the vehicle that needed fixing. The list grew to cover several sides of A4. The more I looked into the car, the longer the list grew. But it didn't put me off. I started logically, dealing with the most significant elements first: brakes, steering and suspension. The existing rollover bar, a thin walled hoop of tube, with no real support, had been replaced by an [MSA](#) specification rollover bar which is more than suitable for road use. Unfortunately, the trade off for extra head protection is that the 'convertible' weather gear no longer fits, so I need to resolve this or I will get rained on. I'm not too worried, though, as this really is a car for sunny days.

I have fitted a new stainless steel petrol tank, extending the range from around 90 miles to a much more sensible 200-250 miles. I've newly rewired the car, having chopped out everything electrical and started again. Confusingly, the original builder had used 98% purple wire - 100% rats nest! The new much tidier relay/fuse box in place of the scattered array of components mounted on the bulkhead is a significant improvement, teamed with the remanufacture of many parts of the vehicle which had been bumped, scratched or scraped. During the rebuild, my introduction of a genuine Ford wiper switch for operating

the lights, wipers and windscreen washer made it possible to get rid of around six different buttons, switches and knobs on the dashboard. That alone makes it a lot easier to drive.



The restoration has included the replacement of a large number of rusty components with an assortment of new shiny stainless parts and I am most pleased with the removal of an awful silicone/aluminium (mostly silicone) concoction which was intended to form a box round the pedals, sealing the bulkhead. The replacement is a much neater substitute which I developed by making a range of templates from old cereal boxes before cutting any actual metal. Also, the old clogged radiator has gone and been replaced by a more efficient VW Polo radiator to improve the cooling of the engine.

It is fair to say that my day job as a mechanical designer and my general interest in both mechanical and electrical engineering has aided my restoration of this car and helped me to overcome many challenges. For example, I had to work out why, after all my initial tidying up work, the car simply wouldn't start. This turned out to be the result of a number of cumulative issues both electrical and mechanical left by the previous owner. After some careful fault finding and a meticulously logical approach to problem solving, it was a good day in the workshop when I finally got life into this engine.

The next milestone will be passing the MOT.

Other changes to come in the future include: a replacement stainless steel exhaust silencer – the existing one is functional, but very noisy and very ugly; a new number plate and backing to replace a tired one; new seatbelts to be ordered and fitted at some point – the existing ones are untidy, and reaching the end of their useful life; new tyres as the existing ones are 29 years old - one of the major safety concerns I must address before taking the car on the road.



There's a number of people who are excited on my behalf for this car to finally be roadworthy: parents, friends and family included. They have all been waiting to see the finished article, vying to be the first to take a ride in the passenger seat. Overall, I have had some lucky cost savings, but incurred some costs I didn't expect. Nevertheless, I should end up a good few hundred pounds under my worst case scenario budget.

What to do with the Westfield now? I am a regular member of the North Oxfordshire Westfield Sports Car Club so will head to there first to show off my new vehicle. I have plans to do the North Coast 500 run with a family member paired who'll be driving their [Caterham](#) kit car. But generally, I intend to drive around and enjoy the glorious roads around Oxfordshire using it as an opportunity to hone my advanced driving skills even further.

## Gas Guzzlers of the Fifties: The Cars of Cuba

*If you're a classic car buff, Cuba is just about the greatest place on the planet. It's like one big car show, where automobiles from the 1940s and 1950s motor along the streets and highways. There are Chevrolets, Fords, Pontiacs, Buicks, Dodges, Plymouths, and Studebakers.*

*Chief Observer and camera enthusiast, **Geoff Ayres**, goes car spotting in the streets of Havana...*

Stuck at home in the lockdown, I was sitting in front of my computer and flicking through old travel pictures. Then I came across images from my trip to Cuba in 2013.

It was a weird and wonderful country which was still firmly in the grip of the old communist ways. In 1959, Castro had taken over control and the western way of life disappeared along with any new cars. Fast forward to the present day and these wonderful American gas guzzlers of the fifties continue to motor.

Camera in hand, I snapped away and here are some examples of cars that are still going strong. I'm not sure of all the makes and models but it's dreamland for the classic enthusiast. Maybe OAD members can help to identify some of these magnificent machines.



*Old amongst the new and magnificently preserved.*



*A taxi with a difference...and it was jam-packed.*



*This Harley was an absolute gem - a genuine original 50's hog.*



*These two slightly battered beauties were parked up in a back street.  
Note the chicken in the road!*

*(next page)*

Quite often we would see a stripped back car in a yard or garage being rebuilt for the umpteenth time. Lots of the spare parts are built from scratch but at last these days imports are coming in.



A superb rebuilt Buick, this was a taxi that we took back to the hotel. No power steering, a huge brake pedal that didn't match the stopping capabilities and we stopped for a litre of fuel on the way! A lovely V8 rumble.

From 1959 these old cars were kept alive simply because there were no new cars coming into the country and this old beast of a workhorse has been kept going as a needs must. It's all changing now and this era is slowly disappearing and I realise my good fortune to have had the opportunity to see them.

: To finish up I have three crackers



*The Ford Fairlane was showboating around Revolution Square...*



*...the taxi was whizzing by the hotel*

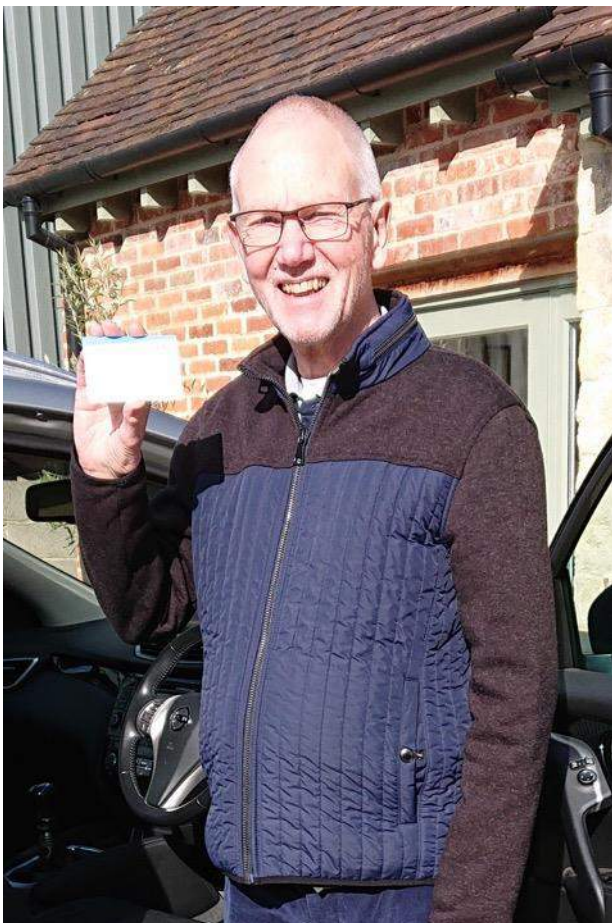


*...and a Che Guevara poster was overlooking this yellow and cream masterpiece.*

## Test Passes: January - March 2020

*Before the lockdown brought our training activities to a halt, OAD had started 2020 in excellent form, with a string of test passes and no fails. Here we celebrate the most recent of these successes and sympathise with all our associate members whose training has been interrupted, especially the three who had their tests booked and were gearing themselves up to demonstrate how much their driving had improved.*

*Let's hope things will be back to normal before too long.*



*Passing the advanced test earned **Derek Smith** praise from Mrs Smith...*

I had wanted to do the advanced driving test for some years but somehow life got in the way. However, when I was invited to do a free 'taster' drive I convinced myself it was now or never. Prompted by comments from family members about my driving and also by an awareness that, as I was getting older, at 75 I was becoming more cautious and hence slower.

So I signed up for the course and it turned out to be probably one of the best things I've ever done. It was harder than I expected to change the habits of a lifetime but, thanks to the patience of the excellent observers, they got me there in the end. My examiner put me at ease from the outset and - dare I say - the test wasn't nearly as much of an ordeal as anticipated!

Achieving Advanced Driver status has done wonders for my self-esteem and even won some praise from my wife..... although she doesn't promise to stop nagging me.



**Catherine Smith** reflects on her experience of the advanced driving course.

I live in Banbury with my husband, daughter and son. I work three days a week at a large veterinary practice based in the town. I have been known to drive the ambulance, which unfortunately doesn't have flashing lights or sirens!

I was really keen to get driving so, as soon as I was 17, I had my first lesson. After several lessons my dad felt brave enough to let me loose in his car. So whenever we went out as a family, I was allowed to drive. Having this extra practice I think enabled me to pass my test first time. That was 37 years ago and a lot has changed since then!

This was highlighted to good effect when my daughter started to have lessons. As my dad did to me, I felt that having practice between lessons was great. However, when she started to tell me what I was doing wrong, I felt that perhaps my driving knowledge was now rather outdated!

I have always enjoyed driving and up until this point I felt that I wasn't too bad at it. I was particularly proud of my reverse parking and parallel parking!

Living so close to Banbury town centre, I very rarely drive into and park in town, but one particular day I did this and on returning to my car, someone had left a flyer on my windscreen about a Skills Day in the market square. I thought that this would be a great opportunity to show off my parking skills. Unfortunately, things didn't quite go to plan and



I got the worst score for reversing into a garage space and the parallel parking was almost as bad! It did however bring me into contact with IAM RoadSmart and OAD and I booked on to the course that afternoon.

Kromer was my designated instructor. We arranged to meet in Halfords car park, where he went through what the course and drives involved. We set off for our first drive where Kromer had the opportunity to observe me driving. As we drove, he pointed out things that needed changing and we discussed them at the end of the drive. On returning to the car park, we then drove in Kromer's car where we did the same route and he was able to explain and show me where I could make improvements. It was all very constructive and I really enjoyed the drives that followed. Not only was I changing the way I drove, but it was nice to drive around the local countryside.

My son is about to embark on driving lessons and I hope that, having completed this course and passed the test, I won't be getting any comments from him when I take him out for practice drives!

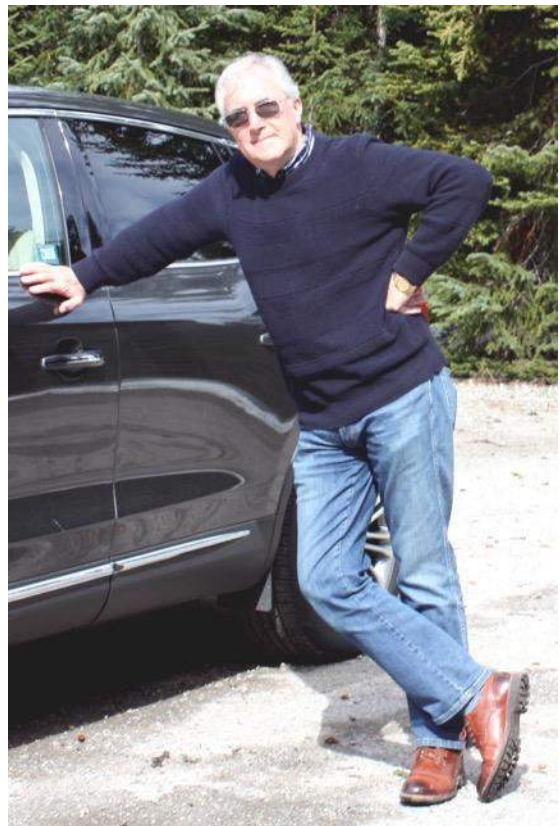
***Martin Howden*** is proud of his achievement in passing his advanced test with a **F1RST**.

For the last 16 years I have been a Design Manager in construction, prior to which I have a background in Shopfitting and Site Management. In an earlier life I drove trucks all over Europe and to date I reckon I've driven around two million miles in 28 countries. So, if I hadn't got at least a pass in the advanced test, I would have been deeply ashamed, but am really chuffed to get a F1RST.

During the 1960's a friend used to instruct High Performance Car driving for the BSM and it was he who taught me how to drive at speed, long before I ever passed my driving test. In fact in 1967 I drove a coach load of people from Camberley to Dover and in 1968 I passed my driving test - at the third attempt. I put my initial fails down to overconfidence.

In 1971, after four only days tuition for the HGV1, I knew I had only one chance to pass that and fully applied myself to the task. Thus began a career driving dirty, very noisy, gutless "lorries" - from Avonmouth, all around South Wales, and up to Scotland. After two uncomfortable, deafening years, I will never forget my first drive in a Scania. You could actually hear the radio! It had POWER STEERING! The seats were comfortable AND the heater worked. There is little wonder that UK truck makers have disappeared. Apart from dust carts, and fire engines, it's all gone to Europe, and deservedly so.

I could witter on for hours about my driving years, but have no wish to induce a coma...





**Keith Ingram** has had a lifetime of driving, both professionally and as a volunteer.

After some time spent in various jobs in the field of electronics, my occupation for thirty years for my sins was as a postman/driver for Amersham post office, followed by 15 months at Ocado before finally retiring

Driving has also been an important part of my spare time. In the early nineties, I spent three years as an ambulance driver for an ambulance first aid charity. That was followed by ten years as the operational manager for Bucks Search and Rescue.

After that I switched response roles to 4x4 response driving for the Bucks and Oxfordshire 4x4 response team. Then after moving to Brackley when I retired, I joined the Northants 4x4 response team.

Alongside this, since the late nineties I have also been a member of RAYNET who provide emergency communications in support of the emergency services and other users.

My present pet project is to supply the Air Ambulance Association with trained personnel from the response services to provide the safety element in landing zones for the Helicopter Emergency Medical Services and - when required - police helicopters.

**James Winnacott** took the advanced driving course from an enthusiasm for track driving.



I have driven 30,000 miles a year for the last 20 years for my job as a director for a large essential infrastructure company. Although traffic congestion, ineffective traffic calming measures and 'middle laners' are a big downside, I have always thoroughly enjoyed driving. I also thought I couldn't learn anything more about how to drive.

One of my hobbies is doing track days in my Caterham 7 310R. It really focusses the mind on choosing correct lines, awareness of other cars and not running out of talent. The Caterham has no driver aids at all. There's no ABS, traction control, power steering etc, so it's all down to the driver. I had the

opportunity recently to have some free track tuition. Although I didn't think it necessary, I learnt a great deal even though I have been tracking cars for years. This improved my confidence and enjoyment of track driving. So, accepting one can always learn something, I thought maybe some advanced tuition on road driving would be useful and so embarked upon the IAM RoadSmart programme.



I found the observed runs - lessons, really - to be very enjoyable and informative. Nigel Champken-Woods was my observer and he was very patient and offered me good advice and useful tips for the test. Like many associates, I found 'spoken thought' the hardest thing – it just did not come naturally to me. I had about eight observed runs and following a practice test - with more useful tips given - I took my test on 29<sup>th</sup> February.

The test went OK but I made a couple of silly mistakes which prevented me getting a F1RST but overall I was very pleased I passed.

I think doing the IAM RoadSmart programme has increased my general road awareness. I now, as a matter of course, set my speed limiter on entering a restricted speed zone and mentally go through the spoken thought process. I would certainly recommend it to anyone who thinks they can't learn anything.

Now all we need is for the lockdown to be eased so we can enjoy driving again...

***Jan Atherton found the advanced course transformed her driving.***



I'm an independent management system consultant living near Banbury with hubby, Ian, and our dog, Jet, an adolescent pointer cross. My work covers health & safety, environment and quality systems and involves driving around 25000 miles each year.

I was previously working for a standards certification body and, as a full-time employer, they would ensure I did a three yearly hazard/risk test and occasionally a 'sit with' with an advanced driving instructor. These were interesting drives, but very limited in what was covered - it did however help provide a bit of information for us field-based staff to help keep us a bit safer on the roads. When I started my own

company in 2018, I realised that I would need to address my driving risks. I was approaching a milestone birthday, driving up to two hours each way and after long days of work, in an older car, driving around unfamiliar places most days. I began noticing a few slip ups in my concentration – one of which led to a speed awareness course.

I attended the Health & Safety Event at the NEC in 2018 as part of my job, and while I was there I visited the IAM RoadSmart stand, and discovered how easy - and inexpensive - it was to do the Advanced Driving course. I didn't get around to it for a good while, but spurred on by a friend having passed his test, I signed up in April 2019. I had my first drive out with a local IAM observer soon after. It was interesting to see what bad habits I'd got into and how my skills had lapsed. I continued for a couple of months, but with my work commitments and limited availability of my observer I wasn't making much progress. Trying to improve your driving skills whilst tired is not a great combination!

So, after a hiatus over the summer, I was placed with a different observer, Lisa Collins, and we hit it off straight away. I had downloaded the Highway Code and quiz app onto my phone and had been brushing up on all those things that had changed since I did my test in 1988. Back then the only theory test was a verbal one at the end of the driving test; there were no red routes, and lots of new things. Do you know what a Toucan crossing is? I do now! It all helped me get my head in the right place for learning about driving again.

My drives out with Lisa were always well structured and we both knew what we were trying to achieve. At the end of each drive I got a report on three things to focus on for the next drive. However, my confidence took a bit of a knock in December when I hit a deer on the drive to work. It was very upsetting but I was lucky I'd been travelling more slowly due to the weather conditions or it could have been worse for my car and for myself. It took a few drives to get over that incident, but Lisa was fantastic at building my confidence again. Geoff Ayres also observed on one drive and then Andrew Carter did my pre-test drive.

So, what are the things I learnt from the driving with Lisa...

Observance of speed limits. OK I'm sure we have all done this, either missing the speed limit or accelerating too early. I learnt how to look ahead to anticipate changes and look out in the right places for speed signs.

The limit point of vision. I've always looked ahead at the road to gauge my road position but not used the premise that I should be able to safely stop in the limit of visibility. This really helped to adjust my speed for the road conditions.

Gear changing. I tended to be a gear changer but being able to relax in a well-chosen gear feels so much better than constantly changing and I can do this now because of my improved observation and anticipation skills.

Horses! Having Lisa explain the problems from the horse rider's point of view has led me to be much more cautious around them.

Finally, the 'spoken thought' commentary. It took ages to get this and yes I'm still self-conscious about it, but now it's there I will always use it when I'm feeling tired or in a new place. It really helps me to be aware of the hazards and it improves my concentration.

I did my test last month, with Andy Giddings from Northampton and whilst I was a bit apprehensive with someone looking so critically at my driving I quickly relaxed and started to talk the commentary. We drove an area very close to my home so it was mainly roads I'd used before; up to Gaydon and the motorway, back through Banbury. It wasn't a perfect drive but I was happy it was good enough for a pass.

The Covid-19 restrictions have led to me doing far more work from home, which is great as I get lots of time back that would normally be spent in my car, and my monthly fuel bill is a lot less. But I still visit clients who are doing essential work, and I still need to go out to collect the shopping, prescriptions, and take our puppy to the local enclosed dog field. It's these little drives close to home where I am conscious that there are fewer vehicles on the road but there are more cyclists, walkers, horses and more people out of practice driving.

So I'm very glad of the skills I've learned - skills that I hope will stay with me and keep me safe in my many years of motoring to come. I think it's important that we help other road users improve their skills and as part of my job I now recommend the IAM Advance Driver course and the Driving for Work course to my clients to help reduce their driving risks.



## How to Contact Us

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Please don't use our personal email accounts for OAD business.