Sunny outlook
Siân Lloyd’s week at the wheel of a MINI Convertible

On tour in a motorhome through the glorious Highlands of Scotland

Blue Light Aware: seven years after we launched our safety video, it’s still doing its job

COMPETITION: win a two-night break at a stylish Derbyshire inn
GEM Motoring Assist is officially the UK’s number one breakdown provider

Just look at the range of benefits available as part of your GEM membership:

- Good Motoring magazine posted to your home four times a year
- FREE technical advice
- FREE road safety advice
- FREE GEM breakdown app
- Great value driver assessment scheme
- Specially negotiated discounts on airport parking, hotels, car hire and much more

We’ve been with GEM for many years and every time used, they have been superb. At the first point of contact, the team is very friendly. Timing is good, and we’re kept well informed. The guys are quite thorough with their investigations, ... plus, the quarterly Good Motoring magazine is an excellent read, and there is a variety of Member benefits with insurances, technical advice, vehicle inspection, airport parking, car hire to name a few. Just excellent value for money.

Anne-Marie Lloyd
How you rated the GEM breakdown service...

We care a great deal about the quality of service you receive when you need us for breakdown recovery. We thought you might like to see some of the many five-star reviews about GEM Motoring Assist recently submitted to the independent review site reviewcentre.com...

Puncture assistance

I had a tyre puncture on what was a very busy day, but from the initial phone call, I received a pleasant and efficient service. The breakdown vehicle arrived in good time and fixed my car and my day was completed without further hiccup. I was very impressed and very grateful. Thank you.

4 January

Car would not start

The telephone was answered by a very helpful and friendly person at GEM, even though I rang at an ungodly hour! The friendly mechanic arrived on schedule and got the car going immediately by jump starting. Unfortunately he was unable to tell me whether the battery was dead or just needed charging and did not carry a replacement battery. The battery was in fact faulty so I replaced it the following day.

30 December

GEM there from start to finish

Brilliant service. GEM staff checked regularly to make sure the recovery had turned up. Whether this is because I was a lady on my own or if this is standard practice I don’t know, but it was very reassuring.

21 December

Very pleasant to deal with

I have used GEM for a few years now and they have never let me down. The staff are very pleasant.

21 December

GEM are my heroes

Within 1 week I had to call GEM twice due to my door locking problem and the second time because I was stuck in snow. Even in such busy times, they helped me in less than an hour, which was amazing. The first time my door would not close for weather issues so they took me to the garage and I had the car back the next day. The second time I was stuck in snow and the guy pulled me out. I am a satisfied GEM customer and would like to join again when needed and would recommend to family/friends. Thanks GEM.

18 December

Puncture on the M6

As a woman on my own, the call centre phoned me every 10 to 15 minutes to make sure I was alright until the recovery van arrived. I was very impressed by the service I received. As a result, I would be pleased to recommend GEM to anyone.

17 December
FEATURES

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GEM’s road safety officer Neil Worth volunteered to put himself through a mock-up of the new test, which includes some unusual manoeuvres.

18 Op Snap: caught on camera
How a group of police forces have put the necessary processes in place to consider dashcam footage - and other digital media - to bring offending drivers to justice.

24 Siân Lloyd’s sunny outlook
The long-serving TV weather presenter hops into the driving seat of a MINI Convertible for a few days. Thankfully the car appears to go down a storm for her.

28 Blue Light Aware: the police perspective
Russell Higham joined officers from Sussex Police on a response driver training course, to find out all about their priorities and what they expect from the public.

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We head to Nottingham, where we find out about a new project to improve safety for first-time scooter users.

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66 The Last Word: Selwyn Kendrick signs up for a place on the Dakar Rally.
IT IS always good to know that we are delivering a top-quality service. Judging by the many letters and emails I have received in recent weeks - and consulting recent reviews from our members - I can see that our recovery operators have done a pretty amazing job through what most of us will recognise as a pretty tough winter period. I trust that the worst of the weather is now over, though I am reminded by colleagues to ‘cast ne’er a clout till May be out’. Well, whatever conditions we may face in the coming weeks, I hope you will enjoy a particularly bright and sunny edition of Good Motoring!

You can feel the warmth when you look at those lovely pictures of weather presenter Siân Lloyd. We organised for Siân to try out a MINI Convertible for a few days, and we sent our photographer Billie Charity up into the wilds of mid Wales to collect some mementos, which we share on page 24. Believe it or not, we managed to pick a day of almost wall-to-wall sunshine for the appointment, and Siân was extremely generous with her time and input. I am told she even laid on the most magnificent lunchtime spread in case Billie grew faint through lack of nourishment… a vast local game pie, three different cheeses, bread, salad and locally-pressed apple juice. I think I might be in the wrong job…

For many years GEM has enjoyed a great two-way relationship with its members. I am passionate not only about maintaining a truly personal service but also about listening to what you think on issues relating to motoring and road safety. In this edition you will see details of a survey we will shortly be asking you to complete. We will also shortly be sending a link to the survey by email. The survey asks for your thoughts on issues relating to the car you drive, your own approach to road safety and your thoughts on important medical matters connected with driving. You can complete the survey anonymously if you wish, but if you include your details when you complete the survey, we can put you into a draw to win a £150 prize.

There has been a lot in the news recently about plastic and the effect it is having on the environment when not disposed of responsibly. I thought I would take this opportunity to remind you that Good Motoring comes to you in a plastic wrapper that can be recycled at home as part of your general recycling. Do check with your local council, because if they won’t take it, then you will find appropriate recycling facilities at most major supermarkets.

Enjoy this edition!

Paula Williams, Chief Executive
Aguri Car Sat Nav with built-in DVR Dash Cam

Is this the most advanced sat nav & dash cam you can buy?

Not to be confused with the sat navs you have seen or used before. Aguri Car is the most advanced driving companion. With a high resolution touch screen for easy viewing, built-in DVR dash cam to record every moment of your journey, live traffic updates to keep you out of jams and speed camera data & E-Speed to keep you the right side of the law. Easily updated over wifi without the need to connect to a computer, you can even browse the web and even watch a film! Ready to go straight from the box loaded with your choice of maps.

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Built-in High Definition dash cam
The Aguri’s built-in dash cam, with 150 degree wide-angle lens and GPS antenna, will monitor your every move as you drive, enabling you to pin-point the exact location of any incident or event and confirm the exact time and date. The Aguri Car will automatically save all video and GPS data to the 8GB SD card included, which can be reviewed on the large LCD. The recorder with automatically loop once the card is full. Any specific incidents are saved to the memory and stored.

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“I bought the GT700 because it incorporates a drive recorder for added peace of mind on the road. It’s really simple to use, the maps are excellent as is the speed camera and speed limit display.”
Mr D Grundy ★★★★★

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Feedback

One size fits all for older drivers?
Regarding the questions and answers in the Winter 2017 issue concerning car insurance, I notice that in the initial paragraph the man from the insurance company says ‘one size does not fit all’ and that there are a number of rating criteria attached to both the policyholder and the vehicle so that a premium may be calculated. However, in the second paragraph, with respect to senior drivers it seems ‘one size does fit all’ as they are unable to adopt this approach as the motor insurance market ‘needs to evolve its technical capabilities’ and therefore after the age of 70, an insurer will load premiums across a broad footprint which isn’t personal to the individual.

Sounds to me like insurance companies having their cake and eating it too!

John Gilbert

Nigel Coppen from Vantage replies: It is a fact that younger drivers and older drivers face increased premiums due to their age; younger drivers get penalised not only because of their inexperience but along with older drivers they face the prospect of additional loadings due to the increase in claims frequency as well as severity befitting their age profile. Whilst technological advances have assisted the insurer to take a more pragmatic approach when analysing the risk profile of the driver and his/her vehicle, they are unable to drill down to the minutiae.

To this end, when it comes to age and specifically for the older driver, the insurer is unable to understand the absolute welfare of each policyholder adequately. As a consequence, insurers have to take a generic view based on historical performance data, and apply a blanket rate accordingly. At this point it could be argued that ‘one size fits all’ depending on age. However, after this, all other rating criteria surrounding the driver and the vehicle apply, resulting in varying premiums across the age spectrum. To this end ‘one size does not fit all’, regardless of age.

We’ll continue to report back on any developments in this field, as we know it’s something that can cause confusion and disappointment, especially among those members who continue to enjoy excellent health and have a flawless driving record.

John Gilbert

Electric car conclusions
Although ‘Vehicle power’ (Winter edition) was mostly factual, the overall conclusion is disappointing, also the advice to the correspondent considering another diesel car; for economy reasons. That would have been fine if you had stopped before adding the last sentence in your conclusion. If your quoted 20,000 miles were all within range of a pure EV (say 70 miles per day) then that driver would be saving at least £1500 per year on ‘fuel’ costs alone, plus the additional saving of zero VED. The public charging infrastructure for EVs is still woefully inadequate, except for Tesla’s system. There are encouraging initiatives in the pipeline though, so it should get better.

Nigel Coppen from Vantage

Key protection for meanies
Your readers may have heard of a keyless entry Mercedes being stolen, where the miscreants had read the radio code from the key fob which was in the owner’s house. Having thought this through and realised that a Faraday Box type shield might prevent the signal being read illegally, I tried putting my key fob in a small tin and - hey presto - even standing beside the car no signal was detected. I see you can buy a small wallet to do the same thing, but a tin or a metal spectacle case should save the car and a few pounds on the wallet.

Alastair Armistead

Daytime running lights
Your article on winter driving prompted this letter about daytime running lights. I would however urge GEM to go further and actively campaign for the modification of this badly written and dangerous regulation.

Ostensibly, this was designed to warn pedestrians of the approach of the ‘huge thing just behind the lights’ but in a stunning example of unintended consequences this often means no other lighting is switched on for the rest of the vehicle. With nearly all instrument panels permanently lit or electronic, drivers do not ‘see’ the imperative to switch on lights.

Nigel Coppen from Vantage

A hydrogen solution?
I was interested to read the article on the different options for electric powered vehicles which clarified what is, for many, a confusing choice. However, may I suggest a future article on electric power produced from hydrogen. Whilst obtaining this electricity has proved more problematic, the benefits are clear. The existing petrol forecourts can be used to dispense hydrogen, and it would only take a few minutes to fill a tank rather than wait for a charge to be complete - assuming a charging point is available - and the only byproduct would be water.

Terry Clifton

Editorial contact:
We welcome your letters and we do our best to publish as many as we can. Do please keep any letter meant for future editions of Good Motoring. Please don’t send any membership enquiries or change of address notices to the editor.

Making contact:

editor@motoringassist.com

www.motoringassist.com
Feedback (continued)

As with most conditions, early detection is absolute key. I can only assume that Vision Express did not talk about it since, as with other multiple chains (despite what their advertising will suggest), they are dragging their heels and are always playing catch-up with the premium service provided by independent practice. Any patients, no matter who or where they have their standard sight test, should be advised to ask around in their area to see who provides this extra service if they have any concerns.

David Dickson (BSc Hons optom)

Spreading the safety message

I just wanted to say how much I enjoy reading Good Motoring. Not only are the articles well informed and well written but, as I ride more miles on my motorbike than I do in my car, I really appreciate the focus on safe driving. My hope is that the message of road safety and considerate driving reaches the ears and minds of our transport policy-makers. It would also be a bonus if the road safety message tapped deep in the consciousness of other road users.

Nicholas Webber

Smart motorways

Many so called ‘Smart Motorways’ are now being fitted with HADECs 3 speed cameras which are able to react to any changes in the speed limit as they occur. Travelling on the M25 recently, as I approached a gantry displaying a 60 sign, it changed to 50. I was able to slow safely to the new limit, but had I been closer to the gantry with a vehicle following me closely, I would have been in a dilemma: to brake hard would have been the wrong thing to do. Is an allowance made in this technology to give drivers time to react safely to speed limit changes?

John Norfolk

Good question, Mr Norfolk. We have established that a delay is built in to avoid the need for harsh braking. Ed.
Extremely comfortable and well cut trousers in a nice range of colours. I ordered two pairs first, then ordered more.
Nick3000, Kent.

- Softly peached cotton
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ME AND MY MAG: IT’S BEHIND YOU...

Long-standing GEM member David Wicks, from Northamptonshire, is known in his local area as an accomplished amateur pantomime dame. Here he is, ready to go on stage as Nurse Nelly in Sleeping Beauty at The Castle Theatre in Wellingborough.

David says the best thing about the role of Nurse Nelly was being able to talk and interact with the audience, more so than with any other character.

His favourite line was, “Hello boys and girls!” However, we thought ‘Don’t cry for me, Marge and Tina...” came a close second. Anyway, thanks very much to David for submitting the picture.

If you’re off anywhere exotic, interesting or out of the way, do make sure you take your copy of this edition with you... and send a picture to us at editor@motoringassist.com. Who knows, next time £50 could be heading your way!

TECHNICAL QUERY?

Part of the service we offer you - at no cost as a GEM member - is access to our extensive technical know-how. You can consult our growing library of technical issues at motoringassist.com/technical where there is an online form to complete if you can’t find exactly the answer you need.

Great hotel, parking and airport deals for GEM members...

EUROPEAN BREAKDOWN: We recommend Euro Plus from P J Hayman. It’s a great value policy offering complete peace of mind while you are motoring on the continent.

AIRPORT HOTEL: Book with APH (voted Best Airport Parking Company) and you’ll get an excellent deal on car parking. Call APH on 01342 859536, quoting GEM, or visit aph.com/gem

Competition winner

Congratulations to the lucky GEM member who will be looking forward to a two-night break for two in the pretty town of Hay-on-Wye. We really had a huge number of correct entries, but the person drawn as winner was Mr Richard Rees of Prestatyn in Denbighshire. Well done and we are sure you will enjoy your time in and around Hay. Don’t forget, the prize includes an activity of your choice, as well as plenty of time to browse the many lovely bookshops and cafés in Hay.

Don’t miss the competition in this edition, where you can win a two-night break for two in Derbyshire. Details on p12.
Once again we are keen to enlist your help by telling us what you think about certain road safety and motoring topics

To complete the survey, go to: motoringassist.com/survey2018

We can then enter you into the draw to win the £150 prize. However, you may if you prefer complete the survey anonymously. It’s entirely up to you.

What we can guarantee is that we will pay close attention to the answers you give, and any accompanying comments you may wish to include. This will then help us with our 2018 programme of press notices, the articles we plan to include in forthcoming editions of Good Motoring and the advice we provide as part of our regular lobbying of politicians and policy makers. The survey will be open until Friday 30 March 2018.

Annual General Meeting

The President and Council of GEM Motoring Assist extend this invitation for you to attend the 2018 Annual General Meeting, which takes place on Wednesday 9 May at the Crowne Plaza Felbridge Hotel, London Road, East Grinstead, RH19 2BH. The meeting starts at 12 noon and light refreshments will be served afterwards. If you plan to attend, please contact us on 01342 825676 by Friday 4 May so that we can make the necessary arrangements. Thank you very much.

APH: win your money back

You are sure to be familiar with our long-standing association with APH. As well as offering excellent rates on parking, lounge access and airport hotel bookings, APH has now organised a prize draw, so that if you make any airport car park/hotel booking through APH before midnight on 20 May 2018, your name will be entered into a prize draw to win all your money back. See the APH advertisement on page 51 where you can also find a link to the promotion’s terms and conditions.
Win a luxury break for two in rural Derbyshire

Stay two nights at this former village pub that's now a boutique hotel

A two-night break for two, with a £50 dinner voucher and a bottle of house wine make up this lovely prize.

New for 2018, The Cow, Dalbury ticks all the boxes when it comes to luxury and comfort. An extended period of renovation and restoration is evident upon arrival, pretty hanging baskets framing the front door of this whitewashed boutique hotel perched alongside the village green.

A short drive from the city of Derby, Dalbury Lees is one of many delightful parishes that can be found amongst the rolling Derbyshire Lanes that lead to the gateway of the Peak District. Much is made of the spectacular National Trust properties to explore in the county, notably Kedleston Hall, just a few short miles as the crow flies, Sudbury Hall, Calke Abbey and the much lauded Chatsworth House on the fringe of the county.

Well Dressings take place across the county between the months of May and September, whilst the long-standing and much reported Royal Shrovetide football match played across the town of Ashbourne is held annually to coincide with Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. Derby Feste celebrations will unfold across the city during the month of September, and music festivals (Ynot, BlokOUT and Download) litter the summer season.

The Cow, Dalbury demonstrates all the detail you would expect from a hotel that has been lovingly created by those with a lifetime of travel behind them. Their own guest experiences steer many of the small touches so often overlooked by hotels yet so very necessary to the discerning traveller. Whether a visit is necessitated by work or a desire to escape the ordinary, each guestroom has been individually designed with every consideration given to ensure a memorable stay. All twelve bedrooms
benefit from en-suite facilities, whilst the six rooms located on the ground floor boast private patio areas and welcome dogs to join their owners. Unspoilt views of the surrounding countryside are enjoyed by those rooms on the first floor, and much is made of the smart key technology which permits room access via a smartphone.

No stone has been left unturned when transforming this once village pub with rooms into the enviable boutique hotel it is today. Still very much centric to village life and residents from far and wide, the open plan bar restaurant sprawls over much of the ground floor, a copper-topped bar central to this space. With beams overhead and quarry tiles underfoot it embodies quintessential English charm. Roaring fires beg for a chair to be pulled alongside during the winter months, whilst the overall ambiance is one of conviviality.

Let us turn our attention to the menu, which has justifiable bragging rights and rolls across lunch and evening service. Underpinned by a commitment to using local ingredients anchored within a 30 mile radius where available, and making good use of its own well-stocked kitchen garden, it showcases the brilliance of Executive Chef Gareth Ward and Head Chef at The Cow, Ben Peverill.

A traditional menu has been shunned in favour of a more fashionable small plates offering, encouraging dishes to be ordered for the table rather than for individual guests, and shared amongst all. It’s clear from the crowded tables throughout the stylish bar that this has found favour with a wide audience; dishes that extend to confit pork belly, ham hock Scotch egg and Stilton and plum rarebit have diners salivating at first glance, it would seem. You’ll be reassured to find larger plates that play to a more traditional eating style available, including half a roast chicken and shin of beef with star anise.

Undoubtedly a jewel in Derbyshire’s crown, The Cow affords the perfect base to explore the wider county. For those looking to remain local, there are some delightful walks right on its doorstep, conveniently detailed within the room information pack. Furthermore, their sister establishment, The Horseshoes, Long Lane is a mere hop, skip and jump away, offering a reputed fine dining experience that has earned them regional Gastro Pub of the Year 2017. Wonderfully casual yet elegant restaurant rooms afford hours to linger, their à la carte menu spoiling for choice with a tantalising array of dishes that serve up contemporary twists on classic creations.

A short break based at The Cow, Dalbury is fast becoming sought by those seeking a retreat from the ordinary, and we thoroughly look forward to organising a memorable and exciting visit for our lucky winner. GM

**ENTER NOW:** Just answer this one question:

**Who is Executive Chef at The Cow, Dalbury?**

Please send an email, with your answer, to us at competition@motoringassist.com

Please put 

Cow Competition in the subject line of your email.

Please also include your GEM membership number.

The closing date is 30 April 2018. You can also enter by post (address on page 4).

Don’t risk missing out!

You MUST put 

Cow Competition in the subject line of your email entry.

**Terms and Conditions**

Please also note that some dates will not be available. This promotion is subject to our standard competition terms and conditions, which you will find on our website (motoringassist.com/goodmotoring). Or write to us, enclosing SAE to the value of £1.95. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, we urge you to read the terms and conditions carefully before entering the competition.

For more details about the hotel, please visit cowdalbury.com

For further information about things to see and do in the area, check out visitderby.co.uk

**About the prize**

The prize is for two people sharing a double room at The Cow, Dalbury for two nights (Sun-Thu, excluding Christmas, New Year and other holidays), with a £50 voucher for dinner on one evening and a bottle of house wine provided. Breakfast on both days is included. The prize must be redeemed by 30 January 2019.
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LEARNING TO drive is one of those rite of passage things that most of us will go through in our lives. For me it started when I was 17. On my birthday my parents gave me a package of 10 lessons with a local driving instructor and my grandparents’ old Fiat Uno. I couldn’t wait to start. I remember the nervous anticipation of those first lessons in my instructor’s Rover Metro and the feeling of elation when I passed first time.

In the 21 years since then, lots of things have changed. In 1995 the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act introduced the rules relating to drivers losing their licences if they accrue six penalty points in the first two years of driving. In 1996, the year I passed, the government introduced the separate theory test which was expanded in 2002 to include a hazard perception test. In 2010 the practical test was updated to include an independent driving section to the test that saw candidates following road signs to get around a route for 10 minutes.

Fast forward to December 2017 and the test has been updated again. Out went reversing around the corner and the infamous ‘turn in the road’ and in came some new manoeuvres which supposedly better reflect real-world driving conditions. These include driving into and reversing out of a parking space, and pulling up on the opposite side of the road and then reversing for two car lengths before re-joining the traffic. The independent driving section has also been extended from 10 to 20 minutes with the introduction for the first time of following the directions of a satnav.

The overall aim is to increase the amount of pre-test learning and the variety of roads that this takes place on. There is research from Australia that suggests that the amount of supervised driving undertaken in various road conditions reduces collision risk in newly qualified drivers. When I was invited by insurer Marmalade to experience the new test, I jumped at the chance. So it was I found myself, on a very bright and windy day, being put through my paces in a ‘mock-up’ of the new test in Peterborough.

I was met by Adam Moger, one of the Marmalade directors, who told me about the company and its ‘Safer, Fairer, and Simpler’ motto. Their typical client base is 17- to 24-year-olds. So why had Adam invited me?

“We are trying to raise awareness of the new driving test,” he said. “There have been a lot of changes and it is important for young drivers...”
testing times

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“We are trying to raise awareness of the new driving test,” he said. “There have been a lot of changes and it is important for young drivers to understand what’s happening so they’re prepared for it. A recent survey we did found that 50% of young drivers didn’t understand what the new test involved and were worried about it.”

After speaking to Adam, I was introduced to Lew Whittaker, one of Marmalade’s network of approved driving instructors, who was going to play my examiner for the day. After a chat about how the day was going to work I was straight into his Vauxhall Corsa.

The first part of the test hasn’t changed; Lew asked me to read a number plate at a distance of 20 metres. Once in the car we covered the “tell me” section. Candidates are asked how they would carry out a safety task such as turning the lights on to demonstrate that they are familiar with their cars. Lew asked me to show him gently. That would please my mum.

Yep. I feel my acceleration sense is improving, but the area for me to work on is to brake earlier and more gently. That would please my mum.
Collectors will love this authentic replica model, so hurry while stocks last!

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Ever wished your footage of someone else’s risky driving could help make the roads safer? Well, thanks to Operation Snap, offenders are running out of places to hide. James Luckhurst reports

Picture the scene: you’re innocently trundling down a one-way street when – dangerously and illegally – another car decides to ignore the signs and push past you in the wrong direction. Or you’re overtaken by a motorcyclist across a solid white central line… or the impatient driver behind you gets fed up of waiting at traffic lights and goes through the red signal… three classic examples where you just wish you could see risk-takers get their come-uppance.

Hang on, you say. With dwindling numbers of traffic police out there, we know that most of the time we are going to be denied justice. Or are we? Not if Teresa Healey and Inspector Steve Davies have anything to do with it. Teresa is the Partnership Manager for Go Safe, the Welsh casualty reduction partnership, while Steve serves with South Wales Police. From a small office near Llanelli they are spearheading a revolution in the way offenders are identified and brought to justice. Better still, if we have a digital record of an offence being committed, we can send it to their office for review and – potentially – further action against a driver or rider.
Our objective is to influence offending drivers’ and riders’ future behaviour...

Teresa says all the process capability already exists. “Go Safe covers all four Welsh police forces and sends out around 200,000 offence notices every year, so we are more than geared up for the administration burden,” she says. “We are now able to take in any digital media that shows an offence being committed. For example, that could be an image taken by a mobile phone, or footage obtained from a dashcam. Our objective is to influence offending drivers’ and riders’ future behaviour so that the roads are safer.”

This is an approach endorsed by Steve Davies, who stresses that it’s not all about seeking the greatest possible number of driving convictions. “It’s about discouraging bad driving, and changing driver behaviour,” he says. “If you look at the number of killed and seriously injured in Wales, then you will see that 40 per cent are down to poor driving – just the types of offences we believe SNAP will discourage from happening; taking chances, using mobile phones, injudicious driver actions… all that sort of thing.

“As an example, a cyclist sent us helmet camera footage of a van passing very close during an overtaking manoeuvre. As a result, the driver was offered the opportunity of attending a driver improvement course as an alternative to points and a fine,” he says.

Sometimes, though, the full force of the justice system kicks in. Not long ago, on the A55 in North Wales, a couple were in their car, following a lady whose driving was erratic and alarming, with sudden swerving and frequent changes in speed. They overtook her, and took a photograph that showed the lady was on the phone. They found out about Operation Snap, uploaded the image along with a few details, and this led to a successful prosecution for dangerous driving.

Before Operation Snap went live, the team ensured there would be a sound legal basis...
for what they proposed, and consulted the deputy prosecutor on the requirements of any statements that might be needed. The early days were – shall we say – not as streamlined as they have made the scheme today, with each submission requiring up 15 officer hours.

“Other forces were starting to look at similar schemes, but there was little consistency. Some said straight out that they wouldn’t accept digital media from members of the public, while others placed a maximum period of 72 hours between time of offence and making the submission.

“But we have an obligation to investigate if people are driving unsafely. The alternative is that we do nothing and someone continues risk-taking and offending… until an innocent road user gets hurt as a result. That’s not acceptable.”

When you make a submission, your photographs or video footage will be accompanied by a questionnaire, which will auto populate a statement acceptable in court. However, Teresa says that instances of members of the public being required to attend court are very rare (only around two per cent of submissions require this). “When someone is confronted by the digital evidence, they seldom try to argue their way out of it,” she says.

“It’s important to state that the footage is viewed by a warrant-holding roads policing officer. The guidance is that if the officer had seen the same actions from a patrol car, what decision would he or she make? Outcomes include: no further action, a verbal or written warning, a driver education course, a conditional offer of fixed penalty or a summons to court.

As Steve points out, Operation SNAP has not been created by the police to increase prosecutions. “We are not asking people to submit footage,” he says. “We have put in place a process allowing people to submit footage quickly, simply and effectively. The public wanted, we delivered.”

A word of warning to conclude, and this comes straight from the FAQs section of Go Safe’s Operation SNAP website. The question states: Will my own driving, or the way in which I captured the footage be scrutinised? And the answer couldn’t be more clear: You must be aware that when the police review the footage which you submit they are duty bound to also review the manner of your driving and also the manner in which the footage was obtained. For example, if you were exceeding the speed limit in order to catch up with an offending driver and then proceeded to film them with your mobile phone whilst driving, then the police will consider also taking proceedings against you.
THINK BACK to Christmas. Did you find a dash cam under the tree? For those of us who were unlucky but may have considered purchasing one, what does the market have to offer? Dash cam devices had been popular in the commercial sectors for fleets of vans and lorries, along with emergency vehicles, for a number of years. But they were expensive and out of the budgetary reach of many motorists.

However a surge in popularity and advancements in technology have seen a price drop and reduction in size so they are now within the grasp of the rest of us, and available from high street and online retailers alike. Prices start at just £25 and can increase to several hundreds, with varying degrees of quality. Dash cams are perhaps victims of their own success, as there is now so much choice it can be bewildering to know where to start.

What are the advantages of a dashcam?
As fraudulent insurance claims increase, a dash cam provides vital evidence of what actually happened and who may have been involved. Following a collision or incident on the road, a driver’s memory of events or the position and action of other motorists can sometimes be unclear. So the footage helps corroborate that detail.

A dishonest motorist may be less likely to pursue a claim knowing that video evidence is available. The installation of a dash cam could see a discount from your insurance company, so it is always worth asking what they can offer you and may even cover the initial investment.

So how do you choose?
Quality: the most important consideration is the quality of the footage. This is described as resolution or pixels and should be clear enough to provide a sharp image of a registration number without enhancement. Find one where the minimum resolution is 1280 x 720 pixels. Direction: consider how much coverage you wish to have, as some are front facing only whilst others are both front and rear (dual). Commonly front facing are simpler to install and plug into the 12v socket. A dual facing camera has the advantage of collecting footage in the event of a rear end shunt, but can often be more expensive and may need to be installed professionally. Cable: check out how long the cable is from the camera to the socket. A long cable can be fitted neatly around the windscreen and along the dash, whereas the shorter cable may be hanging untidily around the inside of the car. Data Storage: most dash cams use an SD card to record footage. Once this is full, if the data is not downloaded to another device such as a laptop, then the device will record over previous images. This is known as ‘loop recording’. Some will overwrite older information, apart from events it deems to have been significant, with a high G force (explained below), which are protected. GPS: this allows the device to pinpoint your exact location in the event of a collision, along with the route you may have taken and your chosen speed. G force: sensors within the dash cam pick up if there has been a high G force, usually from a collision through harsh deceleration. It will store the footage, for a period of around 30 seconds before and after, and then protect it from the continuous loop recording. This allows it to be downloaded or used as evidence for insurance or prosecution. Sounds: some devices will record audio but bear in mind that this is not necessary for the purposes of insurance claims.

If you do decide to take the plunge and find one that suits your needs, then make sure it is fitted discreetly on the windscreen (such as behind the rear view mirror) and does not obstruct your vision in any way. Costs are low, and with so many vehicles on the road, it makes perfect sense to take the plunge, protect yourself and purchase one for the coming year.

Safe travels!

Sandra Macdonald-Ames has some sound advice if you’re thinking about buying a dash cam of your own...

Fitting a dashcam
Stay on the right side of the law:
■ fit your dashcam in the centre of your windscreen, behind the rear view mirror.
■ ensure it does not obstruct your forward vision, but not obtrusive to your line of sight.

A dual facing camera has the advantage of collecting footage in the event of a rear end shunt...

Safe travels!

www.motoringassist.com
Car crime without keys

We investigate the growing threat of keyless car theft, and suggest simple ways you can go about protecting yourself and your vehicle.

THIEVES ARE FINDING ever more elaborate ways to overcome the very technologies fitted in our cars designed to keep them out. One area of particular concern is with keyless locking systems, as this type of vehicle theft appears to be on the rise.

What is keyless car theft?
Keyless cars use a transponder key which doesn’t require the driver to press a button or insert the key to unlock or start the vehicle. As long as drivers are near the vehicle with the keys, then they can get into the car and drive away.

Thieves have realised that if they can trick the car into thinking that they have the key, they can also get into the car and drive off in it. Since we tend to keep our car keys near the front door, with cars often on a driveway close by, then a simple transmitter can be used to relay and extend the range of the keyless transponder, without the need for the thief to gain entry to a premises. You will hear this activity referred to as ‘keyless car theft’ or ‘relay crime’.

What is being done by the experts?
The insurers’ research centre at Thatcham is working closely with police, vehicle manufacturers and insurers to develop preventative measures and to stay one step ahead of criminal activity. Thieves are continually looking at new ways to steal vehicles and the automotive industry is naturally working hard to fight this crime, according to a spokesperson. Thatcham has been aware of the issue for around two years and has responded by issuing a new version of the insurance vehicle security standard. Manufacturers must comply with this standard for insurance purposes, so they are therefore well on the way to introducing viable preventative measures.

Is it just high value cars that are at risk?
No. They were originally what the criminals wanted, but a growing number of makes and models are now being targeted in a similar way.

How can I protect myself?
There are various ways you can make it as difficult as possible for criminals to target and ultimately make off with your vehicle. Here are some suggestions:

- Anything you can do to deter thieves from even attempting to steal your vehicle is a good start. Steering wheel locks and driveway posts are very good visible deterrents that a gadget-equipped thief will find difficult to overcome.
- Speak to your vehicle manufacturer; they will be looking at ways and means of improving their keyless entry systems to make them more impenetrable. They may have a software update available to increase the effectiveness of the vehicle’s security or may have a solution to ‘turn’ your key off when you are indoors so it isn’t always transmitting.
- Don’t leave your keys near the perimeter of your home. Keyless transmitters have a limited range. Therefore, if you can, don’t leave your keys downstairs, near exterior walls, windows and doors.
- Stay vigilant and if you notice any suspicious activity in your neighbourhood, report it immediately to the police.
IT IS NEARLY seven years since the launch of GEM’s Blue Light Aware safety resource, designed to help keep road users safe and legal when assisting an emergency vehicle on a ‘blue light’ run. Since the video was made, it has been regularly watched and checked by experts from the emergency services to ensure the advice it contains remains relevant and accurate.

With the expansion of the ‘smart motorway’ network, and with a greatly increased array of social media opportunities for playing and sharing the material, we thought it would be right to launch a consultation among the blue light services to establish how we could continue to give them the most appropriate help with a possible ‘version 2’ of the resource.

We invited feedback, not only from emergency responder representatives, but also from driving instructors and members of the public. The response we received has so far proved overwhelmingly positive, with examples of how our original video has been used and shared. As well as achieving nearly half a million views to date on Youtube, Blue Light Aware has its own website from where anyone is able to download the video. This has proved a popular option for emergency service and training organisations, but they have also embedded links to the video from their own websites, played the video to their student drivers, used it at public open days and events, shared it across social media platforms and included it in other educational scenarios.

Regarding what could be included in a new version of Blue Light Aware, respondents had some wide-ranging ideas: many asked for more attention to traffic light scenarios; others pointed to a need for more information on rural road situations, use of bus lanes and - of course - what constitutes a safe and legal approach on a smart motorway.

GEM road safety officer Neil Worth believes the original video had made a worthwhile contribution to road safety. “It is heartening to read the feedback and see what the video has achieved,” he said. “We hope now that we can build on the excellent relationships we have developed with many emergency service organisations, to build and publish a new version that will represent good practice for the coming years.”

Road Safety Charity
Consultation launched for Blue Light Aware update

We take a look at one of the Charity’s most successful projects, and consider ways to adapt it for future use.

Roadcraft Online
Thanks to everyone who entered our promotion in the Winter edition. We are collating responses and will be in touch very shortly to distribute details to the winners.

stillsafetodrive.org.uk
As we grow older, it’s perfectly normal for our driving habits and skills to change. The important thing is to recognise these changes, especially the ones that may compromise safety, so that we can ensure we also take steps to reduce any risks. In that way, we will hopefully continue driving long into later life. GEM’s ‘Still Safe to Drive’ resource, presented by Valerie Singleton OBE, offers a raft of practical assistance to help you - and your loved ones - stay as safe as possible on the roads. Do take a look, and share the information with friends and family members.

Support us via BT mydonate
GEM members have been generously supporting our Road Safety Charity for many years, and we are proud of the many projects we have been able to assist. If you would like to make a donation, we would be very grateful.

You can donate using the cut-out form on this page, or why not visit the charity page of our website? This allows you to make an immediate donation using BT MyDonate. Every penny will be used to assist worthy road safety causes. Thank you!

Visit: motoringassist.com/gemroadssafetycharity

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www.motoringassist.com
Life in the shades

At the wheel of a MINI Convertible with Siân Lloyd, the UK’s longest-serving female weather presenter

According to Siân Lloyd, we Brits are famous the world over for being obsessed with the weather. Apparently her own fascination started when she was very young, thanks to her father’s passion for all things outdoors. “We were always out in all weathers,” she says. “Coming from Wales, where we get continually walloped by fronts spinning off the Atlantic, you certainly see a great variety of weather and you soon get used to coping with whatever gets thrown at you.

“I remember eating egg and marmite sandwiches on Gower beaches, wearing a cagoule and listening to my father telling us that the rain would soon stop. He was always an optimist.”

But it’s not just Siân’s own experiences that captured her fascination. She says the myths and legends of the Celtic landscape she grew up in were important, too. “Virtually every story has weather in it – from violent storms, to great floods, or the tranquil calm of a summer’s day,” she explains. “So for me, weather represents the drama of life and is the very stuff of our literature. So it doesn’t surprise me that, wherever I go, people are always keen to talk about the weather...
Siân feels that we tend to take weather forecasting for granted, but to her the ability to predict the weather days ahead is a true feat of human ingenuity and one of the great triumphs of science. “In 1922, the mathematician Lewis Fry Richardson estimated you would need 64,000 people doing endless calculations to get a forecast in time to make it useful – looking just a few hours ahead.

“Today meteorologists take in observations from all over the world, from the top of the atmosphere to the depths of the oceans, put them in a supercomputer that does trillions of calculations a second to make forecasts... then people like me interpret that output to put together tailored forecasts which can be transmitted around the world in seconds. Truly amazing,” she says.

We caught up with Siân at the end of her week at the wheel of the MINI Convertible, and we were pleased that she had found plenty of opportunity to get the roof down and enjoy some open-top motoring in and around her home in Wales.

*Find out Siân’s verdict on the MINI overleaf*
What’s great about the MINI Convertible?
“The mix of retro chic and a fabric hood that stows away in just 18 seconds holds great appeal,” says Siân. Our reporter Al Suttie says it’s good value, too. “Choose the MINI Convertible and you’re buying the most affordable four-seat drop-top with a proper cabriolet hood rather than an extended sunroof. Another party piece is the top works at speeds of up to 20mph, so you don’t have to pull over to raise or lower it,” he says. “The interior is just as chic and you have the large trademark central display that’s easy to read and most versions come with an excellent infotainment system. Space in the rear is compact, but fine for kids. All in all, we really like it.”

What’s it like to drive?
“Fun,” says Siân. “That’s the word that comes to mind every time I drive it.” It’s not as razor sharp in corners as its hatch sibling, but it still feels very agile and deals with lump-added roads with compliance, though the John Cooper Works’ firmer suspension can be a touch harsh.

Power for the Works and Cooper S models comes from a turbocharged 2.0-litre petrol engine and performance will keep any hot-hatch fan happy. For most, though, the 1.5-litre turbo petrol in the Cooper or the Cooper D’s 1.5-litre turbodiesel are more than up to the job of being entertaining and affordable.

Owning it
“I thought it was mine to keep,” jokes Siân. “I have big plans for it...” Well, sadly we couldn’t persuade the press office to let Siân hold on to the car, but the good news is that the MINI Convertible won’t break the bank with running costs. The diesel model has a combined economy of 74.3mpg and emits 100g/km of CO₂, so it’s ideal for company drivers. Choose the petrol Cooper and you’ll see 57.6mpg and 114g/km. You can also opt for MINI’s TLC servicing pack to fix routine maintenance costs for up to five years.

How much should I expect to pay?
The Cooper model costs from £19,265. It has a good level of standard equipment, but most owners add the Pepper or Chilli packs. An automatic gearbox is another £600, while the Cooper D starts at £21,000. Used prices for this third-generation model start at £14,000 and you’ll get the balance of the warranty and any TLC pack included.

Others to consider
Al Suttie says the Audi A3 Cabriolet is every bit as sleek as the MINI and comes with a little more rear-seat space. “There are plenty of engine options, but it’s not as much fun to drive as the Brit,” he advises. “Another German option is the BMW 2 Series Convertible that’s dazzlingly good from behind the wheel and has some frugal engines. However, it misses some standard safety and luxury kit.” GM
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Blue lights across town

At the wheel with Sussex Police for a blue light training run from Lewes towards Brighton.

Nearly seven years after launching our ‘Blue Light Aware’ programme, we are keen to remind drivers how to stay safe and legal when assisting an emergency vehicle. Russell Higham reports

WE’VE ALL been there: comfortably driving along at what we think is the legal speed limit when a pair of flashing blue lights pops up in the rear-view mirror. If you’re like me, your first reaction is probably an involuntary twitch of desire in the right foot to hop over to the brake pedal as your eyes flick down to check the speedometer. Once you realise that you’re not being pulled over, however, the next impulse is to want to let that police car or emergency vehicle get past you as safely and quickly as possible.

GEM Motoring Assist has been working with the emergency services on a programme called ‘Blue Light Aware’ that aims to help drivers give the best assistance possible to police, medical and fire vehicles responding to incidents on our busy roads. As part of this, I joined three Sussex Police officers undergoing ‘standard response’ training, sitting in the back of their police cars as they practise driving to emergencies with their lights and sirens operating, often at high speed or in dense traffic.

The morning begins with officers Alex, Glynn and Kevin, who have all successfully served their two-year probationary period with the force before being put on the month-long £4,000 course, receiving a briefing from police driver trainers Roger Pitts and Terry Nicholls. Roger tells the students: “The public generally all want to do their bit to help us get where we’re going. When they do something that hinders or slows us down, it’s more often than not due to fear or panic, combined with a lack of understanding about how we can all work together.”

The truth of this statement is borne out almost immediately as I sit behind Glynn in a Vauxhall Astra estate, complete with blue and yellow Battenberg-style markings, negotiating the narrow and congested country lanes just outside Sussex Police’s Lewes headquarters. Despite having his siren set to “wail” (the classic police two-tone with the furthest audible reach), the sound is barely noticeable at speeds above 50mph so an
articulated-lorry driver does not become aware of us behind him until he finally checks his mirrors approaching a blind corner on the brow of a hill. Choosing this most dangerous of spots to stop his lorry, he unwittingly forces Glynn to slow right down to walking pace and wait for a long stream of oncoming traffic to pass before he can manoeuvre around this hazardous obstruction - adding potentially vital extra minutes to our journey.

Kevin is following behind in a Ford Mondeo, an estate version like Glynn’s and, perhaps surprisingly, also fitted with manual transmission (the software that controls auto boxes tends to change gears for economy or comfort and is not always suited to the unique demands of police driving). The two cars work together as a team — called “tandem responding” — and it becomes clear that, under the calm but authoritative instruction of Roger and Terry, these drivers are carefully positioning their vehicles on the road to manipulate the traffic around them into reacting a certain way. I notice how Kevin does not follow Glynn in a straight line but sets himself slightly off to the side so that other road users can see in their mirrors that there is more than one car coming; that way, they do not pull out again as soon as the first one has passed. Roger explains: “We want to give the public as much time as possible to assess and react. Our ideal scenario is for them to see or hear us in plenty of time and give consideration to where we want to go. They can then indicate to show they have seen us and are moving aside to let us through.”

After stopping for a side-of-the-road debriefing session, I switch cars to join Alex who has recently transferred down from the ‘Met’. He tells me that, in many ways, response driving in the countryside is more difficult than in built-up areas because the speeds involved are much faster and there are not always safe passing places. “Many people are unaware that, even if we’re responding to a life-or-death call, we cannot overtake where there are double unbroken white lines in the middle of the road, unless the car in front comes to a complete stop. That’s why we turn our sirens off in those areas. But many people do not realise this and so they slow down, thinking we will just overtake, but we can’t, so are forced to slow right down too. In this situation, they need to keep moving as quickly as is safely possible within the speed limit until the unbroken lines end and it is safe and legal for us to pass them.”

Legality is another issue misunderstood by the public that often causes problems for emergency responders. Is it, for example, permissible to move over into a bus lane to allow an emergency vehicle by? Terry assures me: “Yes, as long as it is necessary to do so. If a member of the public is caught on camera and receives a ticket, he or she can appeal because it will be logged on the system that there was a response in operation at that time in the area.”

What is definitely not allowed is to drive through a red traffic light unless you are specifically instructed or motioned to do so by a police officer. Pulling onto the kerb or pavement should be avoided too, as it puts pedestrians at risk. Terry also reminds me that, out of town, you should not be tempted to drive or pull up on the grass verge as there can be a multitude of hidden dangers lurking there that could seriously damage your tyres and your car.

We move out of the country and on to the city streets of Brighton where we suddenly have to navigate the chicane caused by a driver who, on seeing our flashing blue lights behind her, has stopped, rabbit-like in headlights, slap-bang in front of us whilst negotiating a roundabout. “Braking suddenly is one of the worst things you can do,” says Terry. “Even if the emergency vehicle is not going that fast, it will still be moving much quicker relative to the other traffic around it and so may be forced take evasive action to avoid an accident.”

If unexpected manoeuvres are dangerous in slow-moving urban traffic, they can be perilous on faster roads. I’m reminded of this as we’re >>

“

We cannot overtake where there are double white lines in the road, unless the car in front comes to a complete stop...

”
hurtling along an out-of-town dual carriageway at 110mph (emergency vehicles on response are generally exempt from speed limits and traffic signals). I feel safe with Alex at the wheel; his eyes are constantly darting in all directions, taking in information from every angle and assessing potential threats as they appear on the horizon and from the sides of the road. But it’s clear that he needs to maintain total concentration to anticipate even the most unforeseen of events that can rush up so much more quickly at this speed than in the course of normal driving. He tells me that in his opinion, whether on fast or slower roads, pedestrians are an emergency responder’s biggest worry — especially those wearing headphones on zebra crossings, a concern that most drivers share.

Back at police HQ, students and trainers gather to review what they have learnt this morning. I ask them what is the most helpful thing the public can do to assist them and all agree that consideration is at the very top of their wish-list. “If other drivers can take just a couple of seconds to put themselves in our position, and to consider the overall situation and possible repercussions of their actions, rather than just making a knee jerk reaction, it would really help us,” adds Roger.

I’ve learnt a lot from my day with the police, as well as fulfilling a lifelong desire to drive around with blue lights flashing and sirens blaring. Schoolboy daydreams aside, however, responding to emergencies is a deadly serious business and one that can benefit from an awareness and consideration of the intense stress and demands that these highly skilled drivers operate under. Simply taking a moment, on seeing or hearing an emergency vehicle approaching, to observe and assess where it is coming from, and in which direction it is heading, will mean we can all do our bit to help them on their way. And arriving those extra few seconds early just might mean the difference between life and death.

GEM’s top tips:

- Stay safe and legal. No one expects you to put yourself at risk or break the law in an attempt to help an emergency vehicle.
- Remain calm and observant. The earlier you spot an emergency vehicle, the more time you have to plan.
- Don’t make judgements on which emergency vehicles deserve your help and which ones don’t.
- Aim for a consistently thoughtful and courteous attitude that puts safety first in every situation.

Pedestrians are an emergency responder’s biggest worry...
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Fancy a care-free week of exploration in a breathtakingly beautiful part of Britain? Then head for the north of Scotland, says Sue Poulton

There can be few things that scream ‘freedom’ with more power than a beautiful open road. It gets even better when a decent serving of incredible scenery is added to the mix: high mountains, dense forests, thundering waterfalls, glassy calm lochs... A week at the wheel of a motorhome in Scotland pretty well guarantees an unforgettable adventure.

We set off with a plan to complete a pre-planned itinerary on the popular ‘North Coast 500’ route, which combines some of the iconic sights with plenty of remote, secret and unexpected scenery - plus the occasional deserted beach. We considered following a programme specifically with history and archaeology in mind (there are also routes for adventurous types, golfers, castle dwellers, lovers of luxury, foodies, camping addicts, motorcyclists etc). But to be honest, we found it was generally better just to ‘go with the flow’ and stop where we wanted to on our seven-day holiday. As its name implies, the route is around 500 miles in length. Along >>
Main pic: A fine, warm evening in late summer, and the perfect location for watching the sun go down.

Lower pics: (L-R): a view of Loch Broom and Ullapool; life on board the motorhome is comfy for everyone - even bed times are fun; the Kylesku Bridge, which crosses the Loch a’ Chairn Bhain in Sutherland; staying in for supper tonight - but there are plenty of great places to eat along the route.
Motorhome safety tips

- Only use lay-bys on your nearside. Leave off-side lay-bys for traffic coming the other way.
- Don’t travel in convoy.
- Take it easy when reversing and always use a ‘banksperson’.
the way, we made visits to Beauly Priory, the Castle of Mey, Smoo Cave, Reraig Forest and all sorts of other locations. If the fancy took us, we diverted from the formal route, and just made the most of a good weather week to take in the fantastic scenery.

So who would enjoy this sort of holiday? A motorhome is a good value means of touring, so it would suit an ‘empty-nester’ couple, as well as a family with young children who will love every aspect of taking your home with you on the road.

LOCATIONS YOU SHOULD NOT MISS

Loch Torridon: an area of outstanding natural beauty. There is also Loch Shiel from where you can travel inland to Kinlochewe. The area is fantastic for wildlife: you may see otters, sea eagles, golden eagles and red deer.

Bealach na Ba (‘Pass of the Cattle’): an amazing drive up and along one of the most dramatic roads you will find anywhere. There are terrific views across Wester Ross, Skye, and out towards Rum and the Outer Hebrides.

Applecross: a remote, rugged peninsula on the north west coast. If you can, park up your motorhome and explore on foot or by bike (or by boat if you get the opportunity).

The Mam Ratagan Pass: not for the faint hearted, this route to the Isle of Skye from Shiel Bridge offers another amazing drive, rising to more than 1,100 feet above sea level. Beware, though, as it’s a single track road with a fair few hairpin bends.

EATING OUT...

The Seafood Shack, Ullapool Harbour (seafoodshack.co.uk): run by Kirsty and Fenella, the Shack serves only the freshest fish and seafood. Choose haddock and chips (£7) or perhaps 12 creel-caught langoustines (£14.50).

Kinloch Lodge, Skye (kinloch-lodge.co.uk): enjoy the comfort of highland hospitality with world-class food at head chef Marcello Tully’s Michelin-starred restaurant. Three-course lunch costs £40 a head. For a memorable experience, choose the £90 tasting menu... and stay the night.

Sutor Creek, Cromarty (sutorcreek.co.uk): definitely the best pizzas (from £8) on the Black Isle, but there’s also a great selection of main meals and snacks on the blackboard menu.

Find out more from lochnessmotorhomes.scot, where there are loads of ideas for itineraries - and answers to dozens of common questions. Rentals from £90 per night in low season, £155 high season.
Historian Dr Alan Wakely sets out to explore the landscape, heritage and sights of the Hampshire coast

A trip on the Hythe ferry is unmissable. It operates between Southampton and Hythe across Southampton Water, and from it you get awe-inspiring views of the huge cruise liners, like the Queen Victoria or the Queen Mary 2, docked at the Ocean Terminal. Rudyard Kipling knew the romance of big ships when he wrote:

“Weekly from Southampton,  
Great steamers white and gold  
Go rolling down to Rio........

The steamers that seemed “great” to Kipling, writing in about 1901, were soon completely dwarfed by the huge liners that followed in the years up to the First World War, most famously the ill-fated Titanic. Nowadays there are even bigger liners to see. It is quite difficult to grasp just how enormous they are, although watching the tiny figure of a crew member walking on deck gives you some idea.

The Hythe ferry sometimes also gets “up close and personal” with even bigger vessels – the gigantic container ships, each carrying hundreds, if not thousands, of apparently small boxes. Actually of course each box will soon form the back half of an articulated lorry. It is mind-boggling to appreciate the scale involved.

Another very good reason for going on the Hythe ferry is that you end up in Hythe! On arrival, the ferry docks at the end of a long pier, but your fare includes a ride on Britain’s oldest continuously operating pier railway, depositing you in the middle of the little town.

Hythe is very picturesque, with narrow shopping streets, interesting cafes, and lovely walks along the waterfront. You won’t want to catch the boat back very quickly! If you have bought a return ferry ticket, the return train journey is included too, but the bracing walk along the pier in one direction or the other is well worth it, because attached at intervals to the railings are notices explaining various historical facts about Southampton Water, complete with illustrations. These include the use of the majority of the Southampton Water as a naval port, and the 20,000-tonne Ro-Ro crane of the 1960s that could load two full 20-foot containerships on to a single ship. An interesting factoid is the height of the water. The bed of the bay is traditionally 21 feet below chart datum, which is interesting when considering the shipping that enters and exits the port.

Another curious factoid is that the ferry is never more than 200 feet away from one of those vast shipping containers.

“...your fare includes a ride on Britain’s oldest continuously operating pier railway...”
made of the waterway in trialling experimental forms of transport like the seaplane and the hovercraft.

Not long ago, Southampton closed its Maritime Museum, replacing it with a new Sea City museum that understandably concentrates on the Titanic story. This had a profound effect on the city, because practically all the crew lived there.

Interest in the disaster has never waned; rather it has grown following the Oscar-winning film. The displays have interactive features that children will love, together with memorabilia from the Titanic itself, and from the heyday of the White Star Line which owned her.

Further exhibits came from the old Maritime Museum, including a beautiful scale model of the original Queen Mary, holder of the Blue Riband (the award for the fastest Atlantic crossing) in the 1930s and again in the 1950s. I couldn’t find anything about the Don and the Magdalena, two great white and gold ships mentioned by Kipling – although they were only actually painted in those colours from 1900 until 1902 – but there is plenty more to see about the time when Southampton, along perhaps with Liverpool, was effectively Britain’s gateway to the rest of the world, until being eclipsed by Heathrow.

Unsurprisingly, because it was a major port, Southampton suffered heavy bombing in the Second World War, destroying much of the waterfront. The old White Star Line building, where frantic crowds gathered as news of the Titanic disaster filtered through, can still be seen in Canute Road, although the dock buildings where her passengers embarked are long gone. A new Ocean Terminal was built after WW2, but almost immediately became a white elephant as jet aircraft became the preferred method of intercontinental travel. It was demolished in 1983. Then there began an unforeseen boom in cruise travel. An Ocean Terminal was needed again, so eventually a third one was built, opening in 2009. It has been busy ever since, and its berths are where the ships can be seen from the little Hythe ferry.

Standing proudly in parkland opposite Hythe across Southampton Water you can see a building with a round-topped tower, marking the Royal Victoria Country Park, a great place for youngsters to let off steam, with a model railway, play area, and the other facilities that you would expect. It is reached by road through the village of Netley. Approach from the M27 by the B3397 and follow the signposts.

The church-like building in the park is now the only section left standing of what was once the largest military hospital in the country – the Royal Victoria. It was eventually demolished in 1966, except for the chapel building which has undergone extensive building work and will re-open soon as a major museum “partnering” Sea City.

The hospital was opened to receive casualties from the Crimean War in the mid-19th century, and served the same purpose in all later wars until the 1960s. Its waterside location enabled injured servicemen to disembark directly from troop ships, although as such ships became larger they were forced to dock in Southampton, and the casualties were taken the last short distance by train.

During the First World War Southampton became a hugely important port of embarkation for the troops going out to the trenches in France and Belgium, because the same boats could be used to bring casualties back to Netley.

If, on leaving Netley, you go right instead of left onto the B3397, you will reach Hamble, a famous yachting village of narrow one-way streets with plenty of places to enjoy a seafood lunch. There is also a ferry here: a tiny boat with seats for only about six people.

This does not cross Southampton Water (it might be swamped by other vessels) but merely the mouth of a tributary, from Hamble to the even smaller village of Warsash. But the seaside views are worth the trip!

Indeed the whole area is very scenic, and - as is so often the case - just a little exploration reveals much of its illustrious past. GM
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www.stillsafetodrive.org.uk
Sarah Bard has a degenerative hereditary disease which means increasing levels of disability and pain. Thanks to a mobility scooter she can still get out and about, but it’s not always easy. We visited her to find out about her involvement in a Nottingham Trent University mobility scooter safety project, and to explore the frustration she faces when negotiating the city’s pavements and pedestrian areas.

When I was 30 I was on my way to my birthday party when I fell down some stairs. I found I had torn the ligaments in my right foot and broken the ankle of my left foot. Next thing I was in a wheelchair. I had struggled a bit with my condition until then, but at this point I realised I would now be totally dependent on other people.

It was a shock. I can remember all sorts of feelings. Should I declare myself disabled or soldier on? The ironic thing was that when the reality of the situation came, I accepted it, I said I was disabled and I worked out ways to manage it. If you don’t see yourself as disabled, then you don’t manage it.

As my condition deteriorated, friends said I needed a mobility scooter but I was reluctant. I assessed my situation: I couldn’t get through a heavy door and I couldn’t leave my flat. Using a wheelchair I didn’t have the strength to move the doors out of the flats where I lived. I was basically trapped.

I found out about a scheme where I could rent a mobility scooter at an affordable price for a year. Suddenly I was completely independent. I started playing wheelchair tennis and I could use the tram. A great step...
Getting about

>> forward for me and 27 others who also joined the scheme. So you can imagine our frustration when they withdrew it and instead offered scooter loans lasting a maximum of four hours.

I was fortunate as I had some savings and, with the generous help of friends, I was able to buy a scooter of my own. But this cost £21,000... not cheap.

Before the disease took hold, I drove a Mazda MX5. I loved it and I miss it so much. Of course, many of the skills as a driver transfer to the scooter. The biggest problem of driving a scooter is other people. It’s about trust. In a car you are contained to the road, and everybody knows which direction you’re going in. But one of the issues of driving a mobility scooter is that people see you and assume that, because you’re disabled, you can’t drive.

They step in front of you because they think you’re going to hold them up. Or they leap extravagantly out of your way, drawing as much attention to themselves – and to you – as they possibly can. It’s so patronising. Reason leaves them. Four or five times on every trip people tell me to slow down or beg me not to run them over - things you would say to a child pushing a toy car; things you shouldn’t really say to an adult. I spend most of my time trying to smile and reassure people.

I need to ride along surfaces that are as smooth as possible. My condition means that nerves in my hands and feet started dying. But now things have worsened and spread up through my arms and legs. Even the tiniest pothole, bump or jolt can cause severe pain.

The people from Out and Out Mobility who sold the scooter to me made sure I could see, and could drive it and fit it in my house. They came to see me, asked questions about me and my ability. My scooter has a maximum speed of 6.25 mph. I imagine if they felt someone was less confident, they would sell them a less powerful one. They told me they organised a trial for someone who wouldn’t listen to any advice and then drove the scooter straight into a wall. A blind person also asked to drive one, saying his dog would guide him along the way. They turned him down.

In Nottingham, you have to have a test to get your scooter on a bus. Someone watches as you get on the bus, perform tasks and manoeuvre around. The biggest problem on the buses is there’s not enough space. I can’t go on trains, as I would need a different certification; I wish I could because it would be much more comfortable.

Nottingham is difficult for scooter drivers. They do try but there are not a lot of new pavements. I did a journey recently and had to go on the road because there were no dropped kerb points for pavements. This scooter is licensed to drive on the road but no one else knows that.

I live in a flat above the Victoria Centre in Nottingham. Not long ago, I came out of a lift into the Centre. There was a rickety tile outside the lift and workmen had put one of those sandwich boards. It was impossible for me to see it and I ended up reversing over it. Three days later it was still there, so I complained to the Centre management.

People were generally sympathetic but the health and safety man was incredibly patronising. He said, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but if that board had been a child, you would have killed him.”

I considered arguing that no child I know ever sits silently in a tiny space in front of a lift for three days. But I took his name and left.

It would not be a bad idea for everyone to spend some time driving a scooter. That might reduce the occasions when I am patronised, ticked off or treated as though I am stupid.
Negotiating an unpredictable environment

Dr Georgina Gous is the research associate from Nottingham Trent University working on the mobility scooter safety project. Funding comes in the form of a grant from The Road Safety Trust, awarded in 2017.

“When you’re a driver, everyone by and large adheres to rules they know, under a sort of social contract. On that basis you get on with it,” she says.

“But on a scooter – with the number of pedestrians and the sheer unpredictability of the environment – there are countless possibilities for danger and disaster.

“At the moment we have two main studies. The first has been distributing a questionnaire all over the country, asking about the difficulties and hazards, not just at road crossings but anywhere. We ask lots of questions about the problems scooter users face.

“The second study involves creating a group of scooter users. We want to recruit 30 people, and will be asking them to wear eye-tracking glasses, with Go Pro cameras attached to their scooters. This would help us see where people are looking, what they are picking up on. After that we have brought people in, they have watched their footage, and we have reflected in more detail on what they noticed.”

Georgina says their users have ranged in age from 20-something right up to 95. “We can identify different problems with different ages and experience levels, from almost first timers to those who have been using a scooter for 20 years,” she explains.

“The issues depend a lot on individual disabilities. For example, elderly people tend to lack confidence because of being out alone in the busy environment. Also, they may have difficulty turning their neck far enough without pain, or they can’t push the crossing button.”

Plans are for a ‘safer riding’ DVD to be ready by the early summer. Researchers will be testing it with people who are either new to using a scooter or have not used one yet.

“We will take them through the resource and identify whether they feel it has aided them,” concludes Georgina. “You will be able to view it online, or receive a DVD if you prefer. We also plan to create a website, so that anyone interested can have add-on information and use a forum arrangement.”

Do you use a mobility scooter?

Make your own contribution to the safety video and you could win £100!

The NTU research team members are particularly interested in the hazards that mobility scooter users face while out on the road, particularly at road crossings.

They are asking people who use a mobility scooter to complete a questionnaire which takes around 15 minutes.

Everyone who completes a questionnaire is entered into a prize draw with a chance of winning £100.

They are also looking for volunteers to drive a mobility scooter route around Nottingham City Centre.

Afterwards, you will be shown video footage of your journey and will be asked several questions about what you saw and how you felt. To say thanks for your assistance, the team will give you £20 in shopping vouchers.

If you are interested in either or both of these opportunities, please email Georgina Gous (georgina.gous@ntu.ac.uk) or use this link to complete the questionnaire online: https://tinyurl.com/y7krmph9
Where can I get some quality front fogs?

Members of our panel offer their responses to your questions on car buying, technical and safety matters. Send your query to enquiries@motoringassist.com

A FOGGY DAY
I want to buy a front fog light kit for my 2011 Volkswagen Tiguan, so my local garage can fit them for me. So, could you kindly recommend a supplier?
While it is possible to buy a kit of parts and request that a garage fit them, you might run into two problems. For liability reasons, many garages will not fit parts that the customer supplies and, even if they agree, it is reasonable that they will not guarantee the part if a fault develops.
Secondly, while it is possible to obtain and fit an aftermarket kit, most modern cars’ electrical systems need to be programmed after fog lamps have been fitted and this may require a degree of diagnostic work, or maybe even replacement of the Body Control Module computer. Therefore, your first port of call is to a Volkswagen dealer, to see if it can be installed safely. RM

HAPPY TO HELP
From left to right: Neil Worth, road safety officer at GEM Rob Marshall, GEM’s technical advisor and a freelance automotive journalist David Motton, Good Motororing’s road test editor who’s also a juror on the UK Car of the Year awards

SAFETY FIRST
What are the three most important questions to ask (from a safety point of view) when buying a used car? And what significance could I draw from the answers? I am about to embark on the process, either privately or with a dealer, so I regard this as very important.
Firstly, if the car is three years old or more, check it has a valid MoT. The MoT involves dozens of checks on your car, including safety-critical items such as the brakes.
You should also ask if the car has been in an accident or has ever been written off. Cars can be repaired safely after an accident, and Category D write-offs can legally be repaired and put back on the road, but it pays to proceed with caution if you know the car has been crashed.
Thirdly, if buying from a dealer ask what warranty the car comes with. A warranty doesn’t guarantee a car will be fault-free, but it should cover the cost of repairs if something does break within the warranty period.
Most important, don’t rely on the seller’s answers to your questions. Check the condition of the car carefully, and consider paying for an independent inspection if you are not mechanically minded yourself. Always take a test drive and check every aspect of the car is in good working order. Make sure you obtain a history check to find out if the car is subject to outstanding finance or has ever been stolen or written off. If you’re considering a used car, use the discounted inspection rates offered by our friends at DEKRA. Details on page 67. DM

EVEN IN THE WORST WEATHER...
I am looking for a small, economical, used car to replace my 15-year-old Renault Clio. I live in the country and only use it for occasional journeys. Recent ‘proper’ winter weather suggests a front-wheel drive or even four-wheel drive. I will pay up to £7000.
A Suzuki SX4 S-Cross (pictured) is a small and economical crossover and it’s available with Suzuki’s Allgrip 4x4 system. A quick internet search found just one SX4 S-Cross Allgrip within your budget, though. Or consider a Fiat Panda 4x4.
We found a much larger choice in the internet classifieds, several for less than £7000. Alternatively, consider any front-wheel-drive supermini (a used Ford Fiesta or Mazda 2 are among our favourites) but do swap between summer and winter tyres. Indeed, switching between tyre types is worthwhile if you choose a 4x4 as well, as any four-wheel-drive system can only make use of the traction the tyres are able to provide. DM

www.motoringassist.com
BREATH TEST FOR FRENCH ROADS?
We are shortly to embark on a driving holiday which will take us through France. Is it still the case that I need to take a self-test breathalyser, even though neither I nor my husband takes alcohol? What’s the fine for non-compliance?
Yes, disposable breathalyser kits remain on the list of items you need to take with you when you drive in France. The penalty for non-compliance is 11 euros. That said, the law has been enacted in such a way as to render collection of the fine impossible. In other words, it IS a requirement, but you are not going to be penalised if you don’t have the kit. NW

A WORD IN YOUR EAR...
Is it an offence to drive while wearing earphones? If it isn’t, it jolly well should be. It is not a specific offence, but if a police officer believed you to be distracted or not in full control of your vehicle, then you could be stopped and issued with a penalty. For more help, take a look at Rule 148 of the Highway Code. NW

MY MODERN CLASSIC’S WORTH MORE...
A relative’s 1980s modern classic car was ‘rear ended’ in a collision over the winter, making it irreparable - the insurance has offered us £4,000 but I reckon it is worth at least double that sum, especially as it was a limited edition model. Can you advise?
While providing valuations is beyond the remit of this technical advice service, your situation highlights a potential classic car ‘bubble’, as many cars from the 1980s and 1990s are increasing rapidly in value. While not ‘historic’ vehicles (the legally accepted definition for which is vehicles over 40 years of age), values of ‘modern classics’ (a term which holds no legal classification) depend on a number of factors, including desirability, condition, specification and history. The car in question might be rare or a limited edition, but this does not necessarily send its value skyrocketing, especially if it is not a sporting, or range-topping version. Nonetheless, your situation highlights perfectly the need for a specialist agreed value insurance policy, where the car’s worth is agreed between you and your insurer beforehand. Other than that, all you can do is try to persuade the insurance company that the car is worth more but, gather your evidence carefully and be prepared for a long negotiation. RM

A WORD IN YOUR EAR...
Is it an offence to drive while wearing earphones? If it isn’t, it jolly well should be. It is not a specific offence, but if a police officer believed you to be distracted or not in full control of your vehicle, then you could be stopped and issued with a penalty. For more help, take a look at Rule 148 of the Highway Code. NW
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Nothing could be that good. Mrs B, Kent
I have had a back problem all my life. Over the years arthritis has set in and made it worse. I only wish that I had bought my Backfriend when I first saw it advertised, instead of thinking nothing could be that good. It can and it is.

How Wrong Can I Be - Mr F, Lancs
I purchased one of your Backfriends. When it arrived I thought, this is going to be absolutely useless. How wrong can I be. Before I purchased this I could only drive for about 15 miles. 6 weeks ago I made 2 journeys of over 200 miles each. I cannot thank you enough for making this wonderful device, it has brought back the joys of motoring. Many thanks.

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ON THE ROAD
SPRING 2018

I used to find it incongruous when sporty car brands released an SUV. To do so seemed like sacrilege when Porsche unveiled the Cayenne in 2002, but now just about every large manufacturer – even those with a heritage in sports cars – has at least one 4x4 model. And after all, the ‘S’ of SUV does stand for ‘sports’. Alfa Romeo held out longer than most, but has bowed to market demand with the Stelvio. It’s available with rear-wheel-drive as well as four-wheel-drive, which should keep at least some purists happy. But did it please that most demanding of car critics, Sue Baker? Find out on page 60.

David Motton

ROAD TESTS

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46 The Toyota C-HR has a space-age feel, inside and out, but does its 1.8-litre petrol engine and electric motor deliver what it should? James Luckhurst reflects on his week at the wheel.

MOTORING BY NUMBERS

A few figures that might surprise you...

4,554 The length of queue, measured in miles, that would form if all the uninsured vehicles seized by police in the UK between 2005 and 2017 were parked in one line. That’s the equivalent of London to Houston.

83 The percentage of total distance travelled in the UK by car or taxi in 2015. 5% was by bus, 10% by rail, 1% by air, 1% by bicycle and 1% by motorbike.

60 million The number of vehicles crossing the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul each year. The Bridge, which connected Europe and Asia for the first time since 512BC, was designed by engineer Bill Brown, who had just finished work on the Severn Bridge.

30,000 The average number of parts in a new car.

7.7 The average age of a car on the UK’s roads. This compares with 6.7 years in 2004.

50 The percentage of car journeys made in the UK which are between one and five miles long. Only two per cent of journeys are longer than 50 miles.
a week at the wheel

Toyota C-HR

by James Luckhurst

Friday

A rendezvous with the delivery driver is arranged for 9.30am in a Gerrards Cross supermarket car park. I’m 150 miles from home with a few appointments (both business and personal) before driving back to Mid Wales tomorrow. First impressions are positive. The C-HR looks really good – futuristic, definitely a head-turner. Not too sure about the plasticky spoiler that juts out from the rear end of the roof, but otherwise, I’m impressed. Once inside, I take a while to find exactly the right seating position.

Having not long ago spent a week driving a Prius, I immediately see similarities with the C-HR. A 1.8-litre automatic petrol engine with additional electric motor is found in both models. As I quickly discover, this combination has a lot more work to do propelling the C-HR along. However, it appears to rise to the challenge as I move through a series of local appointments in the Thames Valley.

Saturday

Once done with a morning commitment in London, I am reunited with the C-HR in Marlow, having left it in the care of photographer Richard Sowersby. He’s bubbling over with enthusiasm as he talks through everything he loves about the car. The long motorway journey back to my home gives me plenty of time to get used to the performance and the interior, as well as to the noticeable noise from the engine.

The worrying thing is the rather optimistic range guide on the dashboard. Starting at 400 miles-plus as I join the M4 near Maidenhead, it’s down to a little over 100 by the time I arrive home. Ah-ha, you think – I must have been ‘giving it’ some to push the range down so much. Actually, no. I was within the speed limit, grabbing the opportunity to make progress, but never heavy on the gas. Am I on the wrong roads? Or do I need to adapt? Hopefully things will become clearer in the week ahead.

Sunday

My youngest son Dylan, aged seven, is playing rugby this morning. He loves the look of the C-HR as we make ready to leave for the ground, but he can only just reach the very high rear door handle. If it weren’t for his booster seat, he would

NEED TO KNOW

We tested the Toyota C-HR Dynamic Hybrid 1.8 CVT, which is powered by a 1.8-litre petrol engine and an electric motor.

On board safety features include the Toyota ‘Safety Sense’ programme, which features pedestrian detection, adaptive cruise control, lane departure alert and road sign assist.

The Toyota 8-inch touchscreen combines a DAB radio, satnav, rear-view camera, and online connectivity. There’s also a USB port and Bluetooth.

The list of kit is impressive: dual-zone air conditioning; power lumbar adjustment on the driver’s seat, heated front seats and leather trim to the gearstick and steering wheel.

WE SAY: the C-HR looks great, inside and out, but space feels limited and it really needs more poke.
not see anything out of the small rear windows, either. As he and his team mates warm up, I take note of the CH-R’s interior layout, which is smart, dark and futuristic. The floors are black, the ceiling’s black, the seats are black and the door panels are black. The key can sit in one of the cup holders, and the start button is just to the right of the steering wheel.

A blue strip runs from the driver’s door handle, up and over the air vent. It disappears by the two big dials (the left for power, the right for speed and fuel tank), only to pick up again around the large infotainment screen, along the top of the glove box to finish on the passenger door handle. The automatic gearshift is small but perfectly formed, the heating is controlled by four small tabs just above it. The window and wing mirror controls sit on the driver’s door.

**Monday**

On a quick trip to Brecon, I pay close attention to Toyota’s guide on making the most of electric power. It tells me a full hybrid is engineered to run on electric power as often as possible. This saves fuel and reduces exhaust emissions. An ‘EV’ button means I can switch to electric power for times when I’m going really slowly. I drive round Morrison’s car park in this ‘stealth’ mode, being careful to follow the instructions and to drive smoothly and gently, with minimum additional drain on the battery (no Iron Maiden at peak volume, no full blast of air-conditioning). Come to think of it, I couldn’t name a single song by Iron Maiden, as I’m more of a Bach man myself. But you get my point.

Braking early and gently maximises the power that’s recycled from the C-HR’s regenerative braking system, and it would appear best not to accelerate... at all. Or at least to keep out of the ‘power’ band shown clearly on the Eco monitor. That causes a slight problem, especially on the hilly roads around us. But I do my best.

**Tuesday**

Off to Hinckley this morning to be a delegate at the Roads Policing conference. It’s a three-and-a-half hour drive through a lot of city and motorway traffic, but I can’t fault the comfort. Chief Constable Anthony Bangham causes a stir at the event by demanding an end to tolerance for speeding, and in particular saying that there should be fines and penalty points for drivers caught at 31mph in 30 limits. This sets off a furore among journalists, as tomorrow’s papers are sure to confirm.

**Wednesday**

After glancing at the headlines made by the Chief Constable, I leave the Conference and head down the A5 for a short meeting in Stony Stratford, before striking for home. The roads around Buckingham and Banbury prove bone-shakingly rutted, with some seriously big holes that would challenge even the most sophisticated suspension system.

**Thursday**

I have a day at home, so my wife piles Dylan and two other children into the C-HR for post-school swimming lessons in Hay-on-Wye. Feedback supports Dylan’s gripe from earlier in the week that the rear windows are too small and too high, although one child says it feels like being in a spaceship (I think that’s a compliment, but it comes from a girl aged eight, so I am not 100 per cent sure).

**Friday**

An early start to meet the Toyota driver at Leominster. Having been an observer of all the speeding fines debate earlier in the week, I purr through the village of Winforton at 29, as displayed by the C-HR’s speedometer. Winforton has one of those signs that tell you your speed – red if above 30 or green if 30 or below. So the car’s 29 was, according to the sign, 26. Just thought I’d mention it, without using this page as an opportunity to enter any speed-related debate. I manage a final slow march (all 22 seconds of it, according to the monitor) in EV mode to park at Leominster station and wait for my lift back home.

---

**Details and verdict**

| Price:       | £30,225 as tested |
| Performance: | 0-62 in 11 seconds |
| Economy:     | 72.4 mpg combined |
| Insurance:   | 14E |
| Tax:         | £90/£130 |

**Our verdict:** ★★★★★

*Figures for the Dynamic Hybrid 1.8 CVT*
What is it?
Mazda’s updated supermini gets improvements to the steering and suspension to make it more comfortable and fun, while inside there’s plusher upholstery.

How green is it?
There are no diesel or hybrid options for the 2. Its 1.5-litre petrol engine comes in three power outputs and the middle one offers 62.8mpg and 105g/km CO₂ emissions.

Who should buy it?
If you like superminis with a bit of pep to their drive, the Mazda 2 makes a very good alternative to the Ford Fiesta. It’s also very well put together.

Mazda 2

Driving and performance ★★★★☆

The Mazda 2 has always been one of the more engaging superminis to drive and the recent changes to its suspension and steering have improved both even further. Among the upgrades is the introduction of G-Vectoring Control across the entire range. This sends power to whichever front wheel has the best traction. It’s imperceptible but gives the 2 a surefooted deftness on slippery roads.

It also makes the 2 even more fun to drive on looping back roads thanks to the car’s excellent grip and balance. You can also use 1.5-litre petrol engine’s full performance regardless of which power output you choose.

More relevant is the Mazda’s ability to soak up fragmented surfaces much more calmly than before. Where the ride used to be on the firm side, it’s now more compliant to make it better for long journeys and refinement is improved with more sound insulation in the cabin.

Mazda has also rejigged the electrically assisted power steering, so you now have more feel but need less effort when parking and driving at low speed.

Of the trio of 1.5-litre petrol engines on offer, the entry-point unit with 75hp does a workmanlike job, but it’s a little underpowered for motorway driving, so we’d recommend the more powerful 90hp version. This motor is the sweet spot in the Mazda 2 range and offers the best combined economy and emissions when coupled to the slick five-speed manual transmission that’s standard on all models. It pulls keenly and quietly, though like most Mazda motors it needs a few revs to work at its optimum. There’s also the option of a six-speed auto ‘box with this engine depending on which trim level you choose.

Should you choose the GT Sport, this is the only 2 that comes with the 115hp 1.5-litre petrol motor. The manual gearbox is the only choice and it has zippy performance on paper. In reality, it doesn’t feel much quicker than the 90hp version and its consumption and emissions are higher than its less potent sibling.
WE SAY: Underrated and overlooked, the Mazda 2 deserves your attention.

Safety
★★★★★
Every Mazda2 comes with twin front, side and curtain airbags, as well as DSC stability control to give the best traction possible. ISOFIX child seat mounts are fitted to all 2s, along with Hill Hold Assist and a tyre pressure monitoring system. If you want Lane Departure Warning System and Smart City Brake Support, you need to choose SE-L Nav trim or above.

Equipment
★★★★★
There are seven trims to choose from now Mazda has added GT and GT Sport models. This pair have unique metallic paint colours, 16-inch alloy wheels and LED headlights. The GT Sport also comes with leather upholstery. All Mazda 2 get air conditioning, electric front windows and door mirrors, and auto stop-start function. Go for the SE-L Nav or higher to enjoy the seven-inch colour touchscreen, DAB radio and Bluetooth connection.

Costs
★★★★★
The best fuel economy and emissions the Mazda 2 can muster is 62.8mpg and 105g/km CO₂ emissions. Both those figures are middling for this class. That’s offset to some extent by keen pricing and reasonable lease rates. Prices range from £12,895 to £16,995. Every 2 comes with a three-year, 60,000-mile warranty. Service intervals are 12,500 miles or 12 months depending on use.

Space/practicality
★★★★☆
The Mazda 2 gets all of the basics spot-on as it provides more than enough front cabin space for taller drivers. There’s plenty of adjustment in the seating position for any driver to get comfortable and have good vision in all directions.
Clustered around the driver are lots of places to store phones, water bottles and all the other accoutrements of modern life.
Move into the rear and a pair of adults will fit without the need to adopt yoga poses. If you’re carrying a third passenger back here, the raised middle cushion and central floor tunnel demand it must be a child. However, all three occupants get a triple-point belt.
A 280-litre boot isn’t the biggest in the supermini sector, and there’s a drop from the load sill to the floor, though this can be negated with the variable height base in SE-L and above trims. You also need to avoid the entry-point SE if you want split-and-fold back seats to maximise cargo capacity to 950 litres.

Costs
★★★★★
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Agile handling imparts a sense of fun to set the 2 apart from rivals.

Basic models miss some safety kit as standard.

Details and verdict

| Price: | £16,395 |
| Performance: | 0-62 in 9.4 secs |
| Economy: | 62.8 mpg |
| Insurance: | 20 |
| Tax: | £140/£140 |

Our verdict: ★★★★☆

Figures for the 1.5 GT
Buying options

If you fancy driving away in one of our review cars, then this guide to buying options and finance should prove helpful

Prepared by Alisdair Suttie

Alfa Romeo Stelvio
List price: £33,990-£45,390
Cash or finance? Personal contract purchase.
Best deals?
For private buyers, a Stelvio in 2.2 180 Turbo Diesel Super RWD is best from Alfa Romeo itself. You’ll need a £5999 deposit and Alfa contributes a further £1500. Then you pay £379 for 48 months with an optional final payment of £14,660 to own the car outright.
What’s it worth when I change?
The popularity of premium SUVs means this Stelvio will retain 45% of its new price after three years and 30,000 miles, which compares well next to its German rivals.

Toyota C-HR
List price: £21,595-£30,220
Cash or finance? Cash.
Best deals?
Given the strong residual value of the Toyota C-HR, it’s a good bet for buying outright. We found a loan of £24,000 to buy a 1.8 Hybrid Icon model from Clydesdale Bank with an APR of 3.0% and monthly repayments of £530 for four years.
What’s it worth when I change? Over four years and 40,000 miles, the C-HR 1.8 Hybrid Icon would be worth 42% of its new value, which is well above most of its petrol- and diesel-only rivals.

Seat Arona
List price: £16,555-£24,695
Cash or finance? Personal contract hire.
Best deals?
The best we could find was a deal from Fleetprices.co.uk for £177 per month for 35 months and 10,000 miles per annum based on a 1.0 TSI SE DSG model. You’ll need a three-month deposit of £531 and there’s also a £298 admin fee to pay.
What’s it worth when I change?
Residual values for the Arona are good by class standard and you can expect it to retain 48% of its new cost after three years and 30,000 miles.

Dacia Sandero Stepway
List price: £8995-£12,595
Cash or finance? Finance.
Best deals?
The Dacia may have affordable list prices, but a manufacturer personal contract plan with a monthly payment of £129 is very tempting over 36 months for a car in Laureate dCi 90 trim. You’ll need a £2521 deposit and finance is at 4.9% APR. You then have the option to buy outright at the end of the deal for £3889.
What’s it worth when I change?
After three years and 30,000 miles, you can expect to see a 39% return on the list price of a Sandero Stepway 1.5 dCi Laureate.
Jeep Compass
List price: £22,995-£36,545
Cash or finance?
Personal contract hire works well.
Best deals?
Lease Comparison came up with the best deal by offering a four-year deal with monthly payments of £323 on a Compass 1.6 MultiJet II Longitude model. That's with 10,000 miles per annum, a deposit of £969 and a processing fee of £299.
What's it worth when I change?
When four years and 40,000 miles are up, a Compass 1.6 MultiJet II Longitude will be worth 41% of its original list price.

Mazda 2
List price: £12,895-£16,995
Cash or finance?
Personal contract hire.
Best deals?
An internet search turned up a deal from My Vehicle Source for £192 per month over three years and 30,000 miles. It requires a three month deposit up front of £576 and there's an admin fee of £300, but this is still a keen deal for a Mazda 2 1.5 SE-L Nav model.
What's it worth when I change?
By the time three years and 30,000 miles are up, you can expect to see 40% of the original price back with a Mazda 2.
**What is it?**
The Seat Arona is a baby brother to the well received and popular Ateca. Size-wise, it’s a rival for the likes of the Mazda CX-3, Nissan Juke and Peugeot 2008.

**How green is it?**
There’s no hybrid version, but the high-tech 1.5-litre petrol can shut off two out of four cylinders to save fuel. The most efficient diesel achieves 70.6mpg on the combined cycle.

**Who should buy it?**
The Arona will suit young families, or anyone who appreciates sporty looks, a lively drive and good value for money. It’s one of the best cars of its kind.

**Driving and performance**

★★★★☆☆

Seat is positioned as the sportiest mainstream brand in the VW Group. That can be a double-edged sword, with ride comfort suffering in the quest for entertaining handling. With the Arona, though, Seat has the balance spot on. Clout a pothole at speed and you’ll certainly know all about it, but the standard suspension set-up is yielding enough to handle a typical British road without making the driver grimace. The steering is light but direct, and body lean isn’t excessive. It’s up with the Mazda CX-3 as a crossover for keen drivers, and is far more engaging than a Nissan Juke or Peugeot 2008.

Engine-wise, the 1.0 TSI 115PS (113bhp) is expected to be the best seller. You couldn’t call this model quick (Seat claims a 0-62mph time of 9.8 seconds), but the engine’s effervescent character goes a long way to making up for its modest punch.

For regular long journeys, though, it’s worth considering the excellent 1.5 TSI 150PS (148bhp). It’s only a little thirstier than the 1.0-litre, partly because it can run on two cylinders when the engine is under light loads. But it pulls more strongly when overtaking, and has more in reserve at motorway speeds.

We also tried the less powerful of the two 1.6-litre diesel models. With just 95PS (94bhp) you might expect it pedestrian performance, but there’s plenty of mid-range pulling power. It sounds a bit grumbly compared with the smooth petrols. Whichever engine is chosen, though, there’s quite a bit of road noise at speed.

Most versions have a manual gearbox, but an automatic is available with the 1.0 TSI 115PS and will be an option with the 95PS diesel later in the year.

**WE SAY:** The Arona is one of the very best small crossovers; the ride is engaging and there’s plenty of space inside.
Space and practicality

Although it’s not a lot longer than a supermini, the Arona packs in plenty of space inside. There’s lots of room up front, and the driving position boasts a good range of adjustment. However, it’s a shame the dashboard plastics are hard and unappealing.

In the back, there’s more space than you’d find in many rivals with enough head and legroom for a tall adult to travel behind another without feeling cramped. However, we’d like to see air vents between the seats or in the door pillars.

With the back seats upright the boot has a 400-litre capacity. That beats the Nissan Juke but not the Renault Captur. A height-adjustable floor is standard on all versions. Set to its higher level it sits flush with the boot opening.

Safety

The Arona has picked up a five-star safety rating from Euro NCAP, with an excellent score of 95 percent for adult occupant protection. Child occupant protection receives a rating of 80 percent, while the pedestrian protection score is 77 percent. All models have autonomous emergency braking and tyre pressure monitoring, along with driver, passenger, side, and curtain airbags. Xcellence and Xcellence Lux cars have blind spot detection and rear cross traffic alert.

Equipment

The SE comes with 17-inch alloys, metallic paint, air-con and a five-inch colour touchscreen. SE Technology features an uprated eight-inch touchscreen with satnav, smartphone linking and parking sensors. FR and FR Sport have sportier looks and a smattering of extra kit, including different modes for the chassis if you opt for FR Sport. Xcellence and Xcellence Lux add more technology and driver assistance features.

Costs

The range starts from £16,555 - not bad price when you consider equipment and predicted strong resale values. Economy is good in petrol and diesel models. However, it’s a shame the excellent 1.5 petrol is only available in costly FR and FR Sport spec.
A COMMON COMPLAINT among GEM members is that many newer cars possess neither spare wheels nor tools. The weedy compressor and tyre puncture sealant aerosol tend to be viewed as inadequate in an emergency, a view that I share, not helped by many tyre fitters refusing to clean out and repair the affected tyre afterwards. The ‘gunge’ also tends to ruin expensive tyre pressure monitoring valves, replacement of which is a nasty extra expense, which could have been avoided.

Toolkits supplied with modern vehicles are intended for emergencies and not regular use. This includes types supplied by main dealers as optional extras, to replace the compressor and gunge-can combination. Therefore, if you are a DIY enthusiast, or you prefer to swap around tyres at home, it is worth investing in a more substantial jack that is safer and easier to use.

Buying car jacks
Most carmakers supply compact, light scissor jacks that are uncomplicated to use and easy to stow. While you can buy non-genuine alternatives, it is worth seeking out one with a head compatible with your car’s jacking point. Hydraulic bottle jacks are also inexpensive - many caravanners use them, for example - but a trolley jack is preferable, should you wish to raise the car frequently.

Not only have their costs plummeted in recent years but trolley jacks are wheeled, which aids manoeuvrability and reduces the risk of the car falling as it is raised.

Unfortunately, trolley jacks are both heavy and bulky to store. Many of the larger types tend not to fit beneath very low-slung cars and the smaller ones’ heads (referred to as ‘saddles’) cannot be raised sufficiently high to work on a large SUV or off-road vehicle. Therefore, lifting range, weight capacity and physical size should feature in your purchasing choice.

Trolley jack recommendations
A number of smaller jacks boast a low saddle height, such as the expensive Faithfull 2.5-tonne (£141.61), or the more value-orientated Autojack TJ300 3.0-tonne (£46.95), but their compact dimensions result in their becoming relatively unstable when their saddles are extended towards their limits. Yet these options are relatively compact and lightweight.

For larger budget trolley jacks, give serious consideration to the readily available Halfords three tonne hydraulic garage lift (£99.99) and the Clarke Strong Arm (£119.98 - available through Machine Mart). If your car is especially heavy, it may be worth paying extra for twin-piston hydraulics, which reduces the effort needed at the handle considerably.

Draper Tools’ excellent offering comes under its stock number of 16407 (£164.06), although we found SIP Industrial Products’ 03676 just as capable for a lower recommended price (£127.19). While these quoted prices were correct at the time of writing, shop around for the best deal, because different retailers offer promotions that can represent a significant saving.
Safe removal of road wheels

If you are confronted with a roadside emergency but find that raising the car might prejudice your safety, or that of others, do not hesitate to call GEM’s breakdown service. Should you decide to raise the car yourself, apply the handbrake and engage first gear (or select ‘Park’ on an auto-box). If you can, chock a wheel on the opposite side to the one being lifted. Loosen the wheel nuts (or bolts) prior to locating the jack’s head into/onto the appropriate jacking point. Once all weight is off the wheel, unscrew the remaining slack fixings and lift the wheel from the hub. If you plan to get beneath the vehicle, use extra support, such as axle stands,

Maintenance

While not specified by most vehicle makers, a little extra care can get you out of an emergency situation, if you are confident enough to change a wheel yourself. First, ensure that the spare is inflated correctly and can be accessed easily. Some models’ spare wheels are situated beneath the boot floor and the mechanism that lowers the carrying cradle can corrode and seize. If supplied, ensure that your car’s toolkit is complete and the jack is neither rusty nor stiff. Applying some high melting point grease to the threads will make it much easier to use. Familiarise yourself with how the jack locates onto the jacking points, too. Overtightened nuts/bolts can be impossible to remove with an emergency wheel brace, so ask a garage to lubricate the wheel hub threads and tighten the nuts/bolts to the correct tightness specified by your car’s maker, presuming that you cannot do this work yourself. Consider also that aluminium alloy wheels can corrode and glue themselves to the steel wheel hub, although a light application of anti-seize copper-impregnated grease will prevent this, making dismounting the wheel far easier.

in case the vehicle slips off the jack. Refit the road wheel by mounting it to the car and refitting all the nuts/bolts finger tight. Then lower and dismount the jack prior to tightening the fittings, preferably with a torque wrench. That said, most emergency wrenches are designed to ensure you can’t under-tighten or overtighten wheel bolts. Finally, refit any trims.

Media messages

We regularly issue press releases in our efforts to keep road safety high on the public agenda. Here are some of our most recent communications:

MOT RETHINK

Along with other road safety groups, we welcomed the recent Government announcement to scrap plans to extend the period of MOT-free use from three years to four. Our road safety officer Neil Worth told reporters: “We were very concerned that extending to four years the time before a new car’s first MOT would present a big threat to road safety.”

“GEM welcomes the government decision to keep the first MOT at three years. We understand that hard-pressed motorists are always looking for ways to save money, but if this involves compromising safety then it would be false economy indeed.”

The MOT was introduced in 1960, requiring vehicles to go through a first check after 10 years. It was reduced in 1967 to three years.

DRIVER EYESIGHT OVERHAUL NEEDED

In January we renewed our call for better regulation of eyesight tests for drivers, saying a more robust system would cut collisions and make Britain’s roads safer. Our specific request was for a detailed test of a driver’s visual acuity and field of view every 10 years. Speeding, drink or drug driving, driving unlicensed and other offences are actually responsible for a fraction of the crashes on our roads compared with failing to look properly, according to all the official data. Yet, Neil Worth points out, our current testing regime is crude and outdated.

The eyesight test was introduced to the driving test in 1937 and has only been amended in minor ways over the years to reflect changing number plate sizes. It is the only eyesight test drivers are required to undertake until they reach the age of 70.

EARLY DANGER SIGNS IN SENIOR DRIVERS

One of our first notices of 2018 encouraged family members to be wise to the early signs of unsafe driving in their senior relatives. The call followed the tragic case of Gertrude Lister, the 95-year-old driver who put her foot on the accelerator instead of the brake, following a visit to her husband’s grave. She crashed into a hedge and killed a cemetery worker.

Common signs that could indicate an increase in the risks posed by a senior driver include:

- difficulty seeing traffic lights and road signs
- reduced awareness of other drivers
- slow reaction when required to brake or steer
- confusing the accelerator and brake pedals
- erratic decision-making and getting flustered
- difficulty looking over shoulders to check before pulling out
- missing familiar exits or turnings
- drifting in and out of lanes on motorways
- failing to indicate correctly

GEM’s stilsafetodrive.org.uk is an excellent resource to consult for more information and useful tips on having that potentially difficult conversation with an elderly relative.
What is it?
The newest car to wear that iconic Jeep identifier seven-slot front grille, and the second generation of a model that first appeared a decade ago.

How green is it?
Reasonably so for an SUV. The most efficient model is the 1.6 Multijet II 120PS 4x2, which achieves 64.2mpg on the combined cycle and emits 117g/km of CO₂.

Who should buy it?
Adventurous types who want the rugged looks, elevation and off-road capability that comes with the territory of choosing a Jeep, and family drivers after something a bit different.

Jeep Compass

Driving and performance
★★★★★

The first thing you notice about the Compass is the sound it makes. The test car’s 2.0-litre diesel engine has a bit of a gruff sound on start-up, and there is a background grumble as you drive that suggests the motor’s noise output isn’t as well suppressed as it might be. It’s less noticeable at motorway pace, but remains a constant accompaniment as you drive. Jeep offers both two- and four-wheel-drive versions of the Compass.

The 4x4 models are capable in the rough, but the Compass’s off-road prowess does mean a bit of on-road compromise. It isn’t as pert or precise in overall feel as the best of its type, and isn’t particularly entertaining or at all sporty to drive. That’s partly because the steering feel is a bit muted, which is often the case with on-road/off-road capable cars.

That said, the ride quality is mostly comfortable and cushions all but the worst potholes tolerably well. Body control is pretty fair, there isn’t much leans on the bends and handling is predictable.

The six-speed manual gearbox has a slick action and makes the car more enjoyable to drive, so that’s the better choice unless you really must have an auto. The test car’s nine-speed auto transmission is a bit disappointing, it feels somewhat leisurely to respond at times and lacks paddle-shifts that would let you override it and select gears manually.

As well as the 170PS (168bhp) 2.0-litre diesel we drove, there are also two 1.4-litre petrols with 140PS and 170PS. There are diesels with 120PS and 140PS.

As you might expect, the least powerful 4x2 diesel is the most economical version, but even the 170PS diesel auto 4x4 returns just under 50mpg according to the official figures.

The way the Compass drives has moved up a notch from its predecessor. But meanwhile the goalposts have moved and the Jeep’s driving behaviour is outshone by others, notably the Seat Ateca and VW Tiguan.
The Compass was tested for Euro NCAP crash safety after new tougher standards were introduced, and achieved a top five-star rating in all categories. The car features more than 70 safety systems as standard kit or available optionally. All versions come with advanced forward collision warning that combines radar and a video camera to pre-empt a likely impact.

**Equipment**

Standard kit includes a leather steering wheel with audio controls, air-con, cruise control, 60/40 split rear seat, 16-inch alloys and LED tail lights. Moving up to popular Longitude spec adds keyless entry and go, dual-zone climate control, bigger alloys, CarPlay and Android connectivity, front fog lights, electric lumbar support and 8.4-inch audio and navigation screen. Limited spec has silver roof rails, privacy glass, leather seats and auto parking.

**Costs**

Pricing starts from £22,995 for a 1.6-litre diesel in base-level Sport trim. Next up is £24,995 for a 1.4 litre petrol model in Longitude trim. The best-equipped cars are the high-spec Limited trim versions, with prices kicking off at £27,995. All-wheel-drive models begin at £28,495 for a Limited 2.0-litre diesel 4x4. The range-topping and ultra-rugged Trailhawk version arrives this summer priced at £35,595.

**Space/practicality**

This new Compass has grown very slightly in overall length compared with the old model, and as a result it feels a little roomier inside. Underneath its smooth chunkiness, the Compass is based on the same base structure as a Fiat 500X, although in the Jeep’s case it’s stretched by seven centimetres. Back seat kneeroom is pretty similar to other like-sized SUV rivals, such as the Volkswagen Tiguan, Nissan Qashqai and Ford Kuga.

Boot space is fair at 438 litres, and the fold-down rear seats let you extend that to a useful 1693 litres with the car temporarily in two-seater configuration. Like other cars of this type, the rear seat-backs have a 60/40 split-fold facility. Unlike some others, this is a standard feature on every version, including the most basic one.

Some rival models are only available with two-wheel drive. The Compass usefully comes in 4x4 versions with Jeep’s capable Selec-Terrain system. This gives a choice of four settings (Auto/Snow/Mud/Rock) for added all-surface capability.

**Details and verdict**

| Price:       | £34,295     |
| Performance: | 0-62 in 10.1 secs |
| Economy:     | 49.5 mpg    |
| Insurance:   | TBA         |
| Tax:         | £200/£140   |

**Our verdict:** ★★★★★

*We say: The Compass has a great image... but a few mild flaws.*

Rugged looking with a capability to match.

Not as polished a driving experience as some rivals.

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**Figures for the Jeep Compass 2.0 170 4x4 Limited Auto**
Introduction

The most numerous hybrid is the Toyota Prius, which has been refining its petrol-electric drivetrain for 20 years. Look for a third generation Prius built between 2009 and 2016 and you’ll enjoy combined economy of 72.4mpg and CO₂ emissions of 89g/km.

All of that means running costs for the Prius are comparable to the best contemporary diesel models. However, the Toyota avoids the problems of diesels when it comes to particulate emissions and clogged filters.

With its larger 1.8-litre engine compared to the previous model, this third incarnation of the Prius is better suited to long distance driving. It’s certainly more refined and can drive for short distances solely on electric power. Together, these two motors deliver 134bhp.

A plug-in hybrid model arrived in 2012 that could be charged from a domestic socket in 90 minutes to give a 15.5-mile EV range and 134.5mpg combined economy. It also emits just 49g/km of CO₂. At the same time Toyota made revisions to the standard Prius, which most notably included more supple suspension for a smoother drive.

What to look for

The Prius has proved remarkably reliable, which is why it’s so popular among minicab drivers. However, make sure any car’s advertised mileage tallies with the condition of the interior. Is the steering wheel polished smooth or the pedals worn out through constant use? If so, be wary and always carry out a full vehicle history check.

Any worries about the battery are unfounded. Provided the car has what Toyota calls a ‘Hybrid Health Check’ every year the battery warranty will last until the car is 11 years old. The other hybrid components came with a five-year/60,000-mile warranty from new, and the 1.8-litre petrol engine and CVT (continuously variable transmission) only need routine servicing to remain healthy.

Make sure the car has been treated to its scheduled Intermediate, Full and Full Plus dealer visits. It’s also worth checking the air conditioning blows ice cold when turned to seven. This is because the battery and electric motor live under the boot floor, preventing a third row of folding chairs.

Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV (2013-present)

Mitsubishi’s Outlander PHEV was the world’s first plug-in hybrid SUV and proved a huge hit with buyers, thanks to its superb economy and emissions figures.

Introduction

Even if the fuel consumption doesn’t quite match up in real-world conditions, it remains a very sound used buy for anyone looking for the ability of an off-roader with the running costs of a city car.

When it was launched in 2013, the Outlander PHEV came with official figures of 156.9mpg and 42g/km, which still make it very cheap to run. It has a 2.0-litre petrol engine and an electric motor, with a combined output of 200bhp. That’s enough to deal with 0-62mph in 10.0 seconds, so the Outlander isn’t sluggish.

In electric mode, it still feels brisk off the line, but you have to drive gently to eke out the battery-only range to 32.5 miles. If you can charge the car at home and work, though, it does open up the possibility of emissions-free commuting for many drivers.

The most obvious downside of the PHEV compared to its diesel sibling is the hybrid model has five seats rather than
There’s been one recall for a potentially leaking fuel pipe, so make sure this has been resolved by a dealer visit for cars affected that were built between July and September 2015.

Which one to buy
As there’s only one engine and electric motor combination, as well as a single CVT (continuously variable transmission), your options come down to trim levels. The PHEV was offered initially in high grade GX4h and GX5h specs. These were then added to with the GX4hs and GX5hs that have sportier styling thanks to a deeper front bumper and side sills.

Our money would go on the GX4h as it comes with leather upholstery, a seven-inch colour touchscreen display, heated front seats and rear privacy glass. You also get a DAB digital radio, keyless entry and powered tailgate. The GX5 models add metallic paint, sunroof, side steps, satnav, cruise control and heated rear seats.

This higher spec model also comes with 18-inch alloys, though they bring unwelcome firmness to the ride quality.

How much to pay
Reckon on paying from £5500 for an early Prius with around 100,000 miles. There are cheaper ones on offer but they tend to be ex-minicabs with far more miles under their wheels.

Overall rating
★★★★☆

We say:
Easy to live with and cheap to run.

 Others to consider
Honda Insight
Good on economy and emissions and affordable to buy, but interior quality and driving experience trails behind the Prius’.

Vauxhall Ampera
The short-lived Ampera uses a range-extender petrol engine to charge its battery for 40 miles on electricity and a 300-miles range. Intriguing but rare.
The Stelvio is an Alfa Romeo, but not like any others before it. Big, chunky and pumped up, rather than sleek and low-slung, but just as sporty.

What is it?
The Stelvio is an Alfa Romeo, but not like any others before it. Big, chunky and pumped up, rather than sleek and low-slung, but just as sporty.

How green is it?
By SUV standards, and considering its lively performance, its 127g/km CO₂ output and upper-50s mpg is pretty fair and rather better than many others.

Who should buy it?
Keen drivers who care more about the way a car feels than the way it looks. Alfa lovers who can now buy an SUV wearing their favourite badge.

Alfa Romeo Stelvio

Driving and performance

It’s an Alfa, and so comes with the expectation of being sporty. It is, and the Stelvio is very entertaining to drive, although it does have a few flaws. Some of the controls are a bit clunky, and the indicators won’t easily self-cancel so you have to flick them the other way to turn them off. There’s also a bit of body lean going into tight corners.

Those criticisms apart, the Stelvio is a driver-pleaser for its sheer tactile engagement and grippy precision on the bends. Unlike some other biggish 4x4 SUVs, its all-wheel-drive system is about road-going surefootedness and security, rather than any desire to be capable across rugged terrain. The Stelvio feels securely planted and clings on tightly with poise and grip when you take it galloping on a cross-country road route.

The steering is sensitive to the point of feeling almost alive. That can be a bit disconcerting at first, but it quickly becomes an endearing feature of the car. It has a thoroughbred feel that makes you relish a long trip.

The 2.2 litre diesel engine has plenty of punch for what Alfa says is one of the lightest all-up weights of any similarly sized SUV. Its power output is a very respectable 207bhp, and 347lb ft of torque is a meaty amount in a car that weighs just over one-and-a-half tonnes, while other comparable models are closer to two tonnes. The 0-62mph acceleration time in under seven seconds shows it’s no slouch, and considering its performance the Stelvio’s fuel consumption is good, with 50-ish mpg real-life attainable.

Other engine options include a 178bhp diesel (available with rear and four-wheel drive) a 178bhp petrol AWD and a 2.0-litre 276bhp petrol AWD. All are matched to the same eight-speed automatic gearbox.

It’s disappointing that the Stelvio isn’t as refined as some others, and as well as engine noise there’s some wind rustle past the mirrors on a motorway. So it is by no means perfect, but it’s more fun to drive than most.
Safety
★★★★★

The Stelvio achieved a five star Euro NCAP rating. It did reasonably on the child passenger and pedestrian protection scores, but not quite as well for provision of safety assistance. It does have standard automatic braking with pedestrian detection and lane departure warning though. NCAP testers criticised the Alfa’s speed-limiter as being too complicated.

Equipment
★★★★★

Every version comes with smart alloy wheels, dual-zone climate control, a colour infotainment touchscreen, eight-speaker audio, multi-function leather steering wheel, active cruise control, LED rear lights and rear parking sensors. All but the base version have front parking sensors, leather trim and satnav. Up-scale Milano models have 20-inch wheels, keyless entry, heated front seats, rear camera and privacy glass. Some versions have sporty red brake calipers.

Costs
★★★★★

By the standards of other posh-badged SUVs, the Stelvio is priced quite competitively, starting from £33,990. That is for a rear-wheel-drive 2.2 litre diesel in base level trim. Move up to a smarter trim level though, and the price jumps accordingly, to almost £44,000 for our top-spec test car. Petrol models start from £34,690 with all-wheel-drive, with which all but two out of 11 models in the range come equipped.

Space/practicality
★★★1/2

The Stelvio is roomy enough in the front. Seat comfort is high, with a seat structure that snugly wraps you like a big bear hug and feels very cosseting, even if a bit nannying.

But considering the Alfa’s overall size at almost 4.7 metres, it is not especially generous in the back for tall adults on a longer trip.

The boot is about average at 525 litres, some way behind a Jaguar F-Pace’s 650 litres. The boot edge is slightly lower than some, and the space inside is nicely square and uncluttered, but could do with more places to strap down a load. Levers to release the rear seat backs and fold them forward are unusually located under the outer edges of the seat bases.

There are some odd features to the car. It has the biggest steering column paddle-shifts to manually control the auto gearbox that you will see in just about any car. They seem rather intrusive, and tend to get in the way of other controls.

Details and verdict

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Price:</th>
<th>£43,990</th>
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<tr>
<td>Performance:</td>
<td>0-62 in 6.6 secs</td>
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<td>Economy:</td>
<td>58.9 mpg</td>
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<td>Insurance:</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax:</td>
<td>£160/£450</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Our verdict: ★★★★★☆

Figures for the Stelvio 2.2 Diesel Q4 AWD Milano.

We say: The Stelvio is a chunky beast that drives a lot better than it looks.

Review: Sue Baker

Really engaging to drive and more so than most SUVs.

Bloated looks and some rather clunky controls.
What is it?
Welcome to the big brother of the UK’s cheapest motor car. In an attempt (we assume) to persuade buyers it’s a worthy alternative to a more expensive crossover, the Stepway rides 40mm higher than its bargain basement relative and throws in a few (a very few) style modifications, too.

How green is it?
The 898cc five-speed petrol engine produces 115g/km of CO₂, which is more than a Honda Jazz 1.3, a VW Polo 1.4 TSI and a MINI Cooper 1.5 automatic. So the short answer is: not very.

Who should buy it?
If you need to lug large loads around town and don’t expect much in the way of comfort and performance, then the Stepway may be worth a look. But a word of warning: just don’t have high expectations.

Driving and performance
At first sight, the Stepway presents itself as a neat, tidy and unspectacular model. Confidence is not inspired when it’s time to open the doors, as they immediately feel flimsy and tinny.

Getting into the boot requires insertion of a key – something most of us are unlikely to have experienced for some years. Inside shouts cheap, grey and hard. The steering wheel boasts nothing more than horn and airbag (no radio controls, no system information buttons). There are stalks on each side, with a basic little box on the right that assists with hands-free connectivity (we did not use this).

On the dashboard there are three simple dials. Four circular air vents deliver the heating and ventilation. Each can be closed, open or angled to give directional airflow. Three cheap-feeling buttons on the central console control temperature, power and direction. Below these are four recesses where more buttons could have gone.

Driving the Stepway is predictably unrewarding. It’s fine in busy areas where everyone else is at a crawl, but as soon as roads open up and there’s an opportunity to enjoy the journey, the Stepway fails to deliver. The enormous gearstick is the gateway to a 900cc petrol engine that offers little in the way of driver satisfaction. In low gears the car feels coarse and jumpy, but this settles down once you reach a decent cruising speed. However, the ride can be rough, noisy and intrusive. There was a stretch of the M25 near Heathrow with regular bumps, brought about by joins to the concrete surface. Such was the vibration and protest from the Stepway as we travelled along
here at around 50mph that we thought something was wrong.

Look, folks, it’s a cheap car and we don’t imagine you would buy it and expect a ride that’s thrilling or luxurious. We appreciate that. But unless you restrict its use to busy town driving, then we think you are likely to find the Stepway too much like hard work, and therefore not the bargain it might have first appeared.

Space and practicality ★★★★★

For a car at this price, you do get lots of space. It’s just a shame that it’s not as practical as it could easily be. There’s enough room up front, but precious little in the form of useful storage areas and cubby holes. Each front door has a low, shallow pocket that might be useful for small items. Anything larger than a wallet would likely just topple out during a journey. There are two (again shallow) cup holders located in front of the gearstick, with a third (this one thankfully deeper and more likely to retain a cup) behind the handbrake, where there is also a 12v socket. Rear seat space is restricted, and it would be something of a penance for an average-size adult to travel any great distance in the back. The boot is big - impressively so - but spoilt by a high lip that would render loading and unloading of suitcases, prams and heavy items particularly troublesome.

Safety ★★★★☆

Euro NCAP gave the Stepway’s little sister the Sandero a four-star rating. As would be expected, there’s ABS, Emergency Braking Assist and ESC with traction control on board the Stepway, but no sign of any modern safety technology aids.

Equipment ★★★★★

Our Ambiance model came basically kitted out. The DAB/FM/AM radio required constant manual re-tuning. Go for Laureate spec and you get a touchscreen infotainment system and a few other toys. With top-level Summit spec, there’s cruise control.

Costs ★★★★★

The petrol Ambiance costs £8995. Choose Laureate and you’ll pay £10,195, while for Summit spec it’s £10,995. Diesel versions start at £10,595 for the Ambiance.
Sharing the fun of safer group riding

If you crave a bit of company on your motorcycle journeys, let Ian Kerr help with some sound advice for reducing the risks.

RIDING IN a group is fraught with danger and most of us prefer riding on our own, because we are in total control of all aspects of the ride. Sometimes, though, it is fun to be part of a group of riders and to share the experience and the destination.

When in a group ride you are still responsible for your own actions and riding standard. Even though there are faster or slower riders, even though somebody takes chances, it is up to you and you alone to ignore the other people and ride safely within your own limits and level of ability.

You also have to take into account that some other road users are not used to having groups of riders in front or overtaking. Some even see large groups of motorcyclists as threatening. So unless you are involved in an escorted charity event, you should keep the riding group as small as possible. If there are large numbers, break it down into smaller groups, and stagger the start times by five or more minutes.

With proper planning you can reduce the risks. Obviously beforehand everybody needs to know the destination and any planned fuel or coffee stops. Making sure that everybody has swapped mobile phone numbers is a big help in the event of any problems along the route.

Communication whilst riding is something of a challenge, therefore it is important that the riders in a group have a set of basic hand signals for effective communication on the road. This needs to be a set of signals that can easily convey issues ranging from the need to stop for fuel, coffee, bike problems, to warnings about road hazards, and maybe direction changes. Everybody should over-signal, especially any leader, to give everybody plenty of time to react.

There are several ways in which to run a group ride, the first being a route card. Somebody will have to produce either a paper route sheet issued to all riders, or a programme for everybody’s satnav if appropriate. As result this is probably the least favourite way of doing things, even though it allows everybody to ride at their own pace and stop for a comfort break whenever the urge takes.

Next up is the ‘Dispatch Rider’ or ‘Drop Off’ system which again allows participants to ride at their own speed. In this case, a ‘run leader’ is appointed. He or she leads the way and cannot be overtaken. A ‘tail-end Charlie’, or sweeper remains at the rear at all times. As the leader reaches a turn or deviation off the route he leaves the person immediately behind him at the junction to point the way to the other riders and they remain there until tail-end Charlie arrives.

In this method all take turns in route marking, while gradually working their way forward.
Motorcyclist safety

is a good system, but it does pose risks of where to stop safely, and cannot be used on motorways.

A variation on this involves each rider being responsible for the person behind. You still have a leader and tail-end Charlie, but those in between have to make sure the rider behind is making the turn. If not, you should slow down and wait for them to come along. In this scenario riders have to agree to remain in the same order for the entire journey.

The last version dispenses with any structure or formality. Police riders are trained in groups of four as this takes up minimal space and allows the group to stay together easily, even with traffic flow that can break up the unit, such as when overtaking or at traffic lights.

On long straights, it works best to ride in a so-called ‘staggered formation’. The leader occupies the right side of the lane; the one behind rides on the left, number three is on the right, number four on the left... and so on. In that way everybody can see ahead, and can use the ‘two second rule’ to give time and space to react.

On bends everybody should drop into single file to give everyone a chance at using the safest line through the bend. Try to avoid side-by-side formations, as they reduce the space cushion. After all, if you suddenly need to swerve to avoid a hazard, you may not have enough room and you would not want to get tangled up with another rider, potentially bringing you both to grief.

Always check the riders following you. If you see a rider falling behind, slow down so that he or she can catch up. If everyone uses this procedure, the group should be able to maintain a fairly steady speed without pressure to ride too fast to catch up. The last thing you want is a rider breaking the law or riding beyond their skill level to catch up.

If the initial planning and briefing has been done properly, there should be a pre-planned procedure in place to regroup, avoiding any panic if somebody gets lost. Such action will take the pressure off everyone on the group - especially those who might need a little assistance (whether they’re willing to admit it or not).

Last of all, when reaching any destination or tea stop, park responsibly and have consideration for others who may be intimidated by large groups of riders! Above all, as with any riding, do be honest with yourself and don’t be dictated to by other riders, and ride according to the level of risk involved.

Riding in a group is not about competing, it’s about teamwork, thinking not only for yourself but for the rest of the group - and others using the road. If you’re looking for competition, find a race track. GM
Selwyn Kendrick, off-road driving guru, tells of how he came to realise a
difficult and gruelling rally in the world, without doubt. Being in
a car was tough enough, but my hat goes off to Simon and all the
motorcycle competitors.

One night I remember we decided to stop the truck and put
up our tent, just by a massive sand dune. It would have been
injudicious to try to cross it during dark, simply because you
have powerful lights; and because you can’t see any trees or
houses or any objects passing by, it feels as though you’re
staring down a white tube. We decided to camp, only to find a
lorry coming alongside asking if were we alright. We said we
were fine, thank you and we urged them to stop next to us for the
night, then we could go on together in the morning.

No chance, they said. They were carrying urgently-needed
spares for another competitor, and had to travel overnight to
reach his location.

We watched their lorry go up the hill through all the sand. We
heard the engine note getting slower and slow. We saw the lorry
slip over to its right and roll over on its side. It almost completed
a full 360-degree roll, but not quite. It was stuck. We rushed up
to check that they were all in good shape, but they could only
think of digging themselves out and moving on. Next morning
there was no sign of them.

People used to be a bit impressed if they heard I was driving as
far as Hereford. I won’t forget the look on one old gentleman’s
face when I told him that the following day I would be heading
slightly further afield. “What, Gloucester?” he asked.

“No, sir, Timbuktu in Mali and Dakar in Senegal,” I replied.
“Well, just take it easy past Ledbury, boy. Truck went in a
ditch there Thursdee…”

Sound advice, and I did take it easy. But I missed a one-way
sign some weeks later as I drove Simon’s team into Dakar
airport. I had my licence taken away, but then it turned out the
policeman had once trained with an instructor friend of mine in
Wiltshire, so we had a little chat about the varying challenges of
Swindon’s roundabouts compared with the sand dunes of the
Sahara. Then he handed my licence back and let me go. GM
Membership
What it means for you

Specially negotiated benefits available to GEM members. More information is available at www.motoringassist.com/memberbenefits