



**THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
DECEMBER 2015**

**President
The Rt. Hon Viscount Simon**

**Chairman
Miss M E Emms**

**Chief Executive
Mr D C Williams MBE**

**Treasurer
Mrs S Poulton**

**Executive Council
Mrs P Williams
Mrs V Brindley
Mrs L Ward
Mr M Cooke
Mr D Mowl
Mr D Swain**

**Independent Charity Trustee
Mr C Clarke**

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this, the Annual General Meeting of 2016 and to present the reports and accounts for the year ended 31st December 2015.

I am delighted to report that from a trading point of view 2015 has been successful for GEM and once again the small number of dedicated staff have worked extremely hard to maintain and develop our 'club' in what continues to be a very competitive market place.

I would like to record my personal thanks, together with those of the Executive Council, to CEO David Williams and all the GEM team for their efficiency and dedication in continuing to promote and develop an organisation in which I and all members can be immensely proud. I will return to this theme later in my report with further news.

Recommended by Others

A significant part of our success in 2015 was the outstanding achievement of, once again, being voted UK's 'Best Buy in Breakdown' in the Auto Express Driver Power Survey. We have now achieved this wonderful accolade six times in the past eight years (we were runners up in the other two years).

In addition during 2015 we were delighted to be given 'Recommended Provider' status by WHICH? and a 5 Star Rating by 'defaqt0'. These prestigious awards clearly show that, not only are our members delighted with the overall service we provide, but that independent assessors have confirmed we conduct our business in a first class manner.

The awards also put us ahead of a string of 'big named' national breakdown companies which although backed by huge international financial groups, have failed to offer the level of personal and efficient service that GEM has achieved over the past eight decades. It goes without saying that we will continue to place the needs of our members as a first priority in the months and years ahead.

Membership

I stated in my introduction that 2015 had been a successful year. Our recruitment of new members has again been a major part of this success and despite very modest marketing funds we managed to welcome 17,546 new individuals from 10,236 memberships during 2015. These encouraging figures are very similar to 2014 results and we hope that this trend will continue in 2016 and beyond.

It is also good to report that our retention rate of existing members remains at a high level, again proving that once motorists experience our services they tend to stay. Sadly, we continue to see a high resignation of our senior members who have supported us for many decades. These older drivers continue to struggle with the increasing cost of motoring and often their resignation is due to poor health, a need to save money or both. However, we can still boast over 2,000 members who have supported us for more than 40 years, a truly remarkable record of loyalty.

Our rivals in the field of breakdown provision have huge marketing resources to assist them in attracting new members and we are continually dismayed at the discounts and special offers that they can announce. However, we are grateful to the large number of GEM members who take time to recommend our services to friends and family. This word of mouth recommendation is vital to our success and I hope such activity can be doubled in the year ahead.

New Emergency Control Centre

I made reference in my 2014 report that during 2015 we would be moving our Emergency Control Centre away from the previous provider in Swansea to a new state of the art centre in Essex. This change, provided by the experienced specialist company Call Assist, has now been in operation for over a year and has proved to be a most successful transfer.

Call Assist has a dedicated team of specialist call handlers and an excellent working relationship with hundreds of independent breakdown providers throughout the UK and are able to get help to members swiftly and effectively. We know from feedback from our members, who have used the service, that the assistance arranged by Call Assist has been outstandingly good.

Road Safety

The news on road safety is not very encouraging. In 2014 the number of people killed on our roads increased by 4% over 2013 figures to 1,775 while those seriously injured increased by 5% up to 22,807. These increases change the trend of declining figures that we have enjoyed for several years.

It is of course difficult to place a specific blame for this unwelcome change but many point to a decline in Government spending on Road Safety as being a prime reason. Many Road Safety departments, within local authorities, have been reduced both in manpower and resource, while expenditure on national safety campaigns has also reduced. Most worrying of all is the significant reduction in the number of dedicated traffic police officers throughout the UK and we know from correspondence from our members that there is growing concern about the number of bad driving incidents which are going undetected and unpunished.

GEM has also joined with others to try and persuade the Government to follow the lead of Scotland and reduce the legal limit for drinking and driving. England and Wales now have the doubtful distinction of joining just Malta with a limit of 80 mg. Throughout the rest of Europe the limit has been lowered to 50mg or below and in Scotland early indication is that drink drive incidents are declining. The 11 year delay by the Home office to type approve evidential road side breath testing equipment is also a major concern. The legislation to allow such testing and thus save many hours of Police time was championed by our own President Viscount Simon in 2005 and it is a terrible indictment on Government that this measure is still not in place.

Likewise GEM has been dismayed by the Government's refusal to take meaningful action on young drivers. A much reported discussion paper on ways to remedy the problem of crash rates amongst younger drivers has been shelved and it seems likely that the problem will remain unresolved for the foreseeable future.

GEM remains an active member of PACTS (Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety) and has fully supported their recent report relating to fitness to drive. With the number of older drivers on our roads set to increase substantially in the next two decades GEM firmly believes that the subject of fitness to drive should take greater priority and hopefully stem the regular unjustified, simplistic and unworkable calls for the retesting of drivers at various ages.

The GEM Road Safety Charity continues to offer financial assistance to approved schemes and during 2015 it supported the following initiatives:

- Production of an information film on the subject of drugs & driving
- Production of an information film in conjunction with Westminster City Council on the subject of carrying old or disabled passengers in cars
- Sponsorship of child cyclist safety, website pages in conjunction with The Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust

The GEM Charity is keen to do more for the cause of road safety and we are extremely grateful for the generous donations that we receive from members. The entire operation of the Charity is funded by GEM and so any donations are given in full, directly to the trustees, to be spent on road safety projects. If you feel you can assist by making a small donation please use the form that appears in every edition of Good Motoring.

[Keeping in Touch with Members](#)

Our much respected members' magazine Good Motoring achieved a significant milestone in 2015 when it celebrated 80 years of publication. We took the opportunity to mark this special occasion with a minor re-design of the pages which appears to have been a popular move. Editor James Luckhurst deserves much credit for the high quality of the articles and for his innovation of gaining special features and member offers and events. I had the privilege of attending one of these events with around 20 other GEM members in October when we were guests of the Morgan Car Company at their amazing factory in Malvern. It was a most enjoyable day and it was a great pleasure to chat to GEM members from all over the country. Several other such member events are planned and I strongly recommend attendance.

We are keen to gain feedback from members on motoring and safety matters and have, therefore, increased the number of member surveys that we e-mail to all of our members with noted e-mail addresses. The information we gain from these surveys is incredibly useful in directing comments to Government, media and researchers on a wide variety of motoring issues and I do thank all who take part. If you are not already receiving these surveys please contact the GEM office to ensure your e-mail address is noted.

Social media is now a major part of communication to both young and old and we regularly use Facebook, Twitter and Blogs to pass on information from GEM to members, interested groups and individuals.

Finances

Our annual accounts although showing a small loss due to a temporary change in the method of paying our underwriters still indicate a healthy and stable financial situation for GEM and I would like to thank our long serving treasurer, Sue Poulton, for once again guiding our financial affairs in an exemplary way.

Copies of the accounts, apart from being available today, can be obtained by sending an A4 stamped addressed envelope marked 'Accounts' to our offices in Forest Row.

Executive Council

I am grateful to my colleagues on the Executive Council who have provided such excellent support to me and to the organisation as a whole. Our President Viscount Simon, despite his many duties in the House of Lords, continues to provide invaluable help and guidance to GEM in so many ways and on behalf of all members, I wish to thank him for agreeing to continue to serve in this capacity for a further three years. It is most reassuring to have his loyal support at least until 2019.

And Finally

David Williams has served GEM continuously since 1987 when he joined us to guide our road safety operations. Since 1998 he has also led the entire operation of our association as Chief Executive and has carried out his duties with immense enthusiasm, dedication and efficiency. It is therefore, with regret that I inform you that David has announced his retirement and will be leaving his post in August. On behalf of the Executive Council and all GEM members I would like to thank David for his outstanding contribution and wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement.

I am delighted to announce that David's replacement as CEO is Paula Williams who has been continuously employed by GEM since 1979. Since then she has fulfilled almost every duty associated with GEM and therefore, carries an unrivalled knowledge of every aspect of the work involved in promoting and operating an independent national motoring organisation.

On behalf of the Executive Council, I wish Paula every success and I look forward to working with her in the years ahead, in continuing to develop our very special 'club'.

I am also pleased to report the appointment of Neil Worth as our new road safety and motoring information officer. Neil brings extensive knowledge of road safety matters and I wish him a long and happy career with GEM.

Maureen Emms
Chairman, GEM Motoring Assist