



# Wigan Advanced Motorists

Registered Charity No. 518387  
Newsletter 307

Welcome to the August / September 2007 edition of the group newsletter.

Since the last newsletter I've been involved in writing an article for the Wigan Courier.

I was invited to take part in an initiative to raise awareness of group activities throughout the borough, this being done via a day and a half of training at the Standish Centre, Standish, and the submission of a 'good news' article to Mr Mark Ashley, Managing Director of Courier Newspapers. It's with Mark's expert tuition and recommendations that I was able to submit an article that appeared in the Courier and is included further on in this newsletter. I would like to express my appreciation to Mark for providing the training and the opportunity to raise awareness of our driving group to a wide reading audience.

Other news items contained in this edition reflect mainly road safety and the 'green agenda' – I must mention that some of the articles reflect issues that have been raised in conversations that I've had with other group members, and with work colleagues. I'm not anti-Europe, but I do believe that our roads are becoming more dangerous due to increasing numbers of foreign drivers, and I can only see this situation getting worse.

Any comments that you may have will be gratefully received - contact details can be found on the back page.

Simon.

## Motorists in for a rough ride

As the three main political parties prepare for the next election it appears that the 'green' agenda will be high on each of their priorities – all three intend to tackle the issue of pollution by curbing vehicle use.

Recent headlines have softened up the motoring nation to expect the introduction and wide use of road pricing, however, the trend is shifting to increasing the cost of buying and then running vehicles. The emphasis also seems to be focusing not only on the gas guzzlers via heavy taxes, but anything that has wheels. Leading the initiative is New Labour.

Since New Labour came to power over a decade ago, none of us can have failed to notice that this Government has hardly been the favourite of the motorist, and if recently leaked recommendations of a Treasury taxation paper are anything to go by, further costs to motorists will be incurred via a new purchase tax - £2000 on the most polluting vehicles – along with substantial increases in vehicle excise duty.

The Conservatives also appear to be prepared to hit the motorist hard via their 547-page report from their 'quality of life' policy revue which details escalating environmental taxes which they say will be offset by lower taxes elsewhere.

As for the LibDems, their policy appears to be aimed at replacing fossil fuel burning vehicles via the use of electric vehicles, the petrol vehicle to be completely banned, but not until 2040.

As a personal view, I don't see how taxing the larger type vehicle such as gas guzzling 4x4s is going to have any effect on reducing emissions. For me, these people can often afford to run the vehicle in the first place and will soak up the extra cost of further taxes. What it will do however, is further increase the tax profits the Government makes from the easily targeted motorist, what it isn't likely to do is to see extra money pumped back into repairing the crumbling and overloaded road structure of the UK. I understand that new roads are unpopular, especially if you live near to a proposed new by-pass etc, but something has to be done now. I personally don't think the answer is to tax the motorist off the road.

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## Committee Meeting

The next Committee Meeting will take place on Tuesday 06<sup>th</sup> November 2007 at the Plough and Harrow, Shevington, commencing at 7:30pm.

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## Migrant drivers put lives at risk

Drivers from former Eastern bloc countries are putting lives at risk in soaring numbers of accidents. Crashes involving vehicles from the eight countries which joined the EU in 2004 are expected to be up by 16 per cent this year.

Polish vehicles are expected to be involved in 3,828 accidents – more than ten times as many as the 2001 figure of 361 – when Poland was outside the EU.

The projected figures were released by the Motor Insurers' Bureau amid fears about the

huge influx of Eastern European drivers on our roads. In the past three years, about 900,000 have poured into Britain from new EU states including Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Dorset traffic police have warned that such drivers were making our roads more dangerous because of a cavalier attitude to drink-driving and speeding. The MIB has predicted a 22 per cent rise in collisions involving Polish drivers this year, and a 23 per cent increase for Slovaks.

(Article taken from the Daily Express - 08 Oct 2007)

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## 75 per cent 'could not pass L-Test now'

Three-quarters of motorists would fail their driving test if they were forced to take it again, recent research has revealed.

What Car? magazine asked 20 people with 418 years' experience on the roads between them to take the current driving test. Fifteen of them failed. One candidate headed the wrong way down a one-way street and another failed the eye test before even starting the car.

A survey also revealed that although nearly 80 per cent of drivers reckon standards are getting worse, however, only 31 per cent admit their own performance is below par.

Matthew Henson, 38, who has driven for 20 years and covers about 40,000 miles each year, was among the 'guinea pigs' who took the test. Although he has a clean driving licence and has never been at fault in an accident, he still failed. He had poor observation when reversing and did not heed road markings or other road users.

What Car? Editor Steve Fowler said: 'We believe drivers should be made to take regular

refresher courses with a qualified instructor. 'It would remind people what is required'.

(Article taken from the Daily Mail - 03 Aug 2007)

Further to the above article, Wigan Advanced Motorists Group can offer a Drive Check for anyone who passed their advanced driving test some time back and who feels that their own standard of driving may have slipped over the years – contact details can be found on the back page.

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## Over paying loyal customers

British motorists could save up to £2.7 billion a year on vehicle servicing and repair costs by placing less reliance on franchised garages, according to Nationwide Autocentres. The independent network, which has AA endorsement, bases its claim on its own research, coupled with a survey carried out by Castrol together with comparison studies carried out by consumer organization Which?

A survey of 18,000 motorists found that almost 54 per cent of UK car owners favour franchised dealers compared to independent garages.

According to a recent Which? report, the annual franchised service cost for a Nissan Micra 1.5Ci Sport is £217, compared to £130 for an independent. For a Citroen C4 2.0 Diesel, the cost saving is just over £80. Nationwide Autocentres points out that since 2004 owners of new vehicles have the freedom to choose whether to have servicing and repairs carried out by franchised or independent garages. This followed a move by the Office of Fair Trading to remove restrictions imposed by manufacturers on their dealer extended warranties.

Having been a Service Manager for a large main dealership (many years ago) I can see both sides of where benefits lie with each

option. Firstly, the main dealer will have invested in trained technicians specific to the make of vehicle, and will also have spent a lot of money in resourcing the workshops with diagnostic test equipment and specialist tools – these not being available to the independent garage. This can mean that you pay extra for their services and you may therefore expect a top class service or repair – not always the case.

On the other hand, taking your vehicle to an independent may be much cheaper, however, their technicians may be well qualified, but they won't be trained specifically on your particular vehicle. You may also not have original equipment replacement parts fitted as would hopefully happen at the dealership, this being an area where the independent may take the opportunity of fitting less expensive components in order to increase their profits. It's a matter of personal choice.

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## 'LUDICROUS COST'

Environmental groups are furious that the cost of adding a fourth lane to the M6 will work out at £1,000 per inch.

Transport 2000 said the £2.9 billion extension to the 51-mile stretch of motorway between Birmingham and Manchester was "the most expensive roadworks in history", while Friends of the Earth called the scheme "ludicrous".

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## Over 5m empty seats on school run

Rush hour traffic could be cut by more than a million vehicles if parents can be encouraged to take on another passenger when they drop their own children off at school. A study carried out by Honda UK states that nearly half of all parents who drive their children to school take only one child – that's the equivalent of over five million empty seats. Also, the same study has

identified that 60 percent of parents know another child living within 500 metres of their own address that also attends the same school.

I understand a parent's reluctance to allow their child to walk to school considering society today and the threat to a walking child, not only from strangers, but also from what appears to be an escalating and serious problem, and that is the threat of violence from other school children.

This issue will not be resolved in the near future as parent's continue to deliver their children to the front door of the school, however, maybe these parents could respond to a strong case for car sharing identified within the Honda report – and high on everyone's agenda is the green issue, this surely has to be an easy way of reducing the harmful effect of so many unnecessary vehicle journeys.

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## Lost Brits waste millions

Drivers who get lost waste more than 812,500 gallons of fuel every year, according to a study by Sat-nav firm Becker. Its figures reveal two-thirds of UK motorists take a wrong turn, up to 10 times annually, clocking up 325 million miles unnecessarily.

Worst offenders are drivers in London, who do 26 million miles every year in the wrong direction, by contrast, motorists in England's north-east covered only 1.4 million miles by mistake.

Obviously the Sat-nav firm Becker is making the case for using their equipment, and these systems may well save the motorist many miles of wasted driving, however, even Global Positioning Systems (GPS) can get it wrong.

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## The key to vehicle theft

The key to vehicle thefts these days is quiet literally 'the key', for without it, thieves, many of them being joy riders who simply used to 'hot wire' the vehicle, are being beaten by the ever increasing complexity of manufacturer sophisticated security devices.

Having found it increasingly difficult to steal a modern vehicle, today's potential thief now relies on accessing the vehicle key by breaking into the owners house to remove the key, or by what appears to be a more worrying trends, and that is by hijacking the vehicle while stationary with the driver still inside, or by staging mock accidents on quieter roads and stopping the driver of a vehicle who tries to offer assistance.

Earlier this year police smashed a criminal network which roamed the residential streets of London targeting older Mercedes vehicles which were then taken to a scrapyards for dismantling. These parts were then shipped to Africa for use on taxis as part of a large operation which was stealing over 100 vehicles per month – this led to over £70,000 a month of illegal gains.

Throughout the UK, vehicle theft has increased in specialist markets and it is in some way due to the dismantling of border controls in the European Union which has made it easier for car thieves to operate. According to Europol, thefts of high value, prestige vehicles, have increased in the UK over the past five years. Cars are either cloned or ringed – cloning is the process whereby the vehicle documents are copied and used for a stolen vehicle (i.e. there are two identical cars on the road), ringing being less common is where the documents for a broken up vehicle are used for a stolen vehicle.

Top of the 'receiver' countries for stolen vehicles is Russia, but most cars stolen within the UK are likely to end up on the African continent.

Recommendations to keep your own vehicle safe include:

- Not leaving the keys near to the front or back door of your house
- Removing the keys and locking the vehicle when purchasing fuel or returning food trolleys to their collection points
- Basic theft safety regarding vehicle keys left in clothing or handbags etc.
- Not leaving registration and service documents in the glove box of the vehicle
- Locking the vehicle doors when you travel in the vehicle – some vehicles do this automatically these days

(the last recommendation needs to be considered carefully – in the event of a collision, access to the interior of the vehicle will obviously be hampered).

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## Illegal high performance tyres

Research by independent tyre retailer, ProTyre, has shown a massive increase in the number of unsafe high performance cars currently on Britain's roads.

An estimated 65% of these cars run on highly worn or illegal high performance tyres, putting the lives of their drivers and those of other road users at risk on a daily basis. This figure has doubled since last year.

“Driving high performance cars on badly worn tyres is irresponsible,” said ProTyre's regional area manager Marc Ainslie.

“Ultra low profile high performance tyres are being fitted to more and more vehicles on the UK's roads, offering drivers optimum performance and safe handling. But if these drivers are not ensuring that their tyres are safe, they are not only playing with their own lives, but those of other motorists and pedestrians.”

These latest findings identify a dramatic increase in worn tyres compared to 30% of cars when the company undertook a similar piece of research last year.

In addition to the risk of an accident, driving with defective tyres can also result in a £2,500 fine and three penalty points – four illegal tyres could result in a driving ban.

ProTyre conducted its research at its outlets over the past two months finding that on average 65% of cars fitted with high performance tyres were either illegal, with a tread depth below 1.6mm, or badly worn and in need of replacement.

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## Law tightened to catch speeding drivers

Motorists who fail to identify who was driving their car when a speeding offence was committed face a heavier penalty under changes to the law that come into force today.

Other measures introduced under the Road Safety Act 2006 today include a doubling of the maximum fine for careless driving to £5,000, with all seat belt wearing offences subject to a maximum £500 fine.

Those failing to provide information on the identity of a driver now face six penalty points rather than three.

The new punishment is targeted at motorists who attempt to evade penalties for offences detected by speed cameras, by claiming they did not know who was driving at the time.

In 2004, 2,319 people were found guilty of failing to disclose a driver's identity and received three penalty points and a fine of up to £1,000.

The government has introduced the changes to the law after consulting judges, police and road safety campaigners, amid growing public concern about loopholes in motoring law.

Many expressed concern that some drivers are exploiting the so-called "Hamilton defence", named after former Conservative MP Neil Hamilton and his wife, Christine, who avoided a speeding fine four years ago. They said they had been taking it in turns behind the wheel so could not say which of them had been flashed by the camera.

Vehicle owners are now obliged under the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 to tell police who was driving at the time of an alleged motoring offence.

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## Mature drivers leading safety campaign (Wigan Courier article)

The Wigan Advanced Motorists Group has been celebrating the success of their latest road safety campaign having recently featured on Granada Television, and BBC Radio Manchester.

Members of the group have been delivering presentations within the local community aimed at the more mature drivers amongst us, with a view to raising their awareness of safer driving skills, and also offering a free 'on-road driving assessment' that reflects their current driving ability with regards to technique and safety.

This is a short driving assessment aimed at the mature driver who is interested in getting reassurance about the safety of their driving; it takes about an hour and is carried out by a Group Observer who will arrange a mutually convenient meeting place. It's friendly and informal and isn't a pass or fail situation. It comprises of an initial introduction and documents check, followed by a 35 to 40 minute drive ending with a feedback session during which a written assessment report is completed. Drivers can choose to take the Gold, Silver, or Bronze assessment dependent upon the level of ability they wish to be checked.

To date, 78 mature drivers have attended the first 2 seminars, of these, having taken the

assessment, 60 have been awarded the Gold standard and 8 the Silver standard. Having completed their driving assessment, a further 7 drivers have since joined the Wigan Group's 'Skills for Life' advanced driving programme and 2 of these have since passed the Institute of Advanced Motorists Driving Test.

Anyone interested in attending the next mature driver's seminar, and maybe taking part in an on-road assessment, should come along to Leigh Library on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007, it starts at 10:00am. You are assured of a warm welcome and you will have the opportunity to meet other like minded mature drivers who also have an interest in safer driving.



The rain didn't stop some of the latest associates meeting recently at the Plough and Harrow, Shevington

For further information concerning Wigan Advanced Motorists, they can be contacted by telephone on: 07071 226693.

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## Hybrids fail in clean car study

(*carmagazine.co.uk* – 28 Sep 2007)

Hybrid cars, so often lauded as the future of eco friendly motoring, fail to make the top 10 of the cleanest vehicles on the market in a new academic survey.

Researchers at Cardiff University found that conventional superminis are the greenest cars on the market, with smart, Peugeot and Citroen dominating the top five.

Scientists gave half their score based on each cars' emissions of CO2, NOx and other pollutants; the other half of the score was calculated from vehicles' construction, energy costs, recyclability and size. The higher the score, the cleaner the car:

- 1st Smart Roadster - 66.2 points
- 2nd Smart Fortwo Cabriolet - 59.8
- 3rd Citroen C1 1.0 - 40.1
- 4th Peugeot 107 1.0 - 38.6
- 5th Citroen C1 1.4 HDI - 31.3
- 6th Fiat Panda 1.2 Dualogic - 28.4
- 7th Ford Ka 1.3 - 27.5
- 8th Toyota Yaris 1.0 - 27.2
- 9th Fiat Panda 100hp - 23.6
- 10th Peugeot 206 1.4 - 23.5
- 11th MINI Cooper D - 23.3
- 12th Toyota Prius 1.5 - 23.2

The report authors at research agency Clifford Thames and Cardiff University acknowledge that it's difficult to compare differently sized cars, but it applied the same methodology to all models in its survey.

Some of the models have since been discontinued, including the cleanest, Smart's defunct Roadster.

Although the petrol-electric Prius appeared in twelfth position, it was held back by its wholelife environmental impact, researchers said. Small and lightweight is the best way to reduce environmental impact.

Dr Paul Nieuwenhuis from Cardiff Business School predicts that hybrid technology and clean-fuels are not enough for the industry to hit Europe's proposed 130g/km CO2 targets, that will be debated at the European Parliament in Brussels on October 16.

Weight loss is crucial if the industry is to hit these ambitious fleet averages.

Dr Nieuwenhuis claims there will be numerous hidden benefits from a gradual greening of all cars large and small.

"Large luxury cars tend to lose value quickly compared with small hatchbacks," he said. "This is due to the fact that used car buyers tend to be less affluent, thus less able to afford the high running costs of heavy cars.

"If luxury cars were smaller and lighter, their appeal to the used market would rise, thus boosting residual values. This would impact on the overall lifecycle costs of luxury cars, making them generally more economically competitive. Not only would customers benefit, but so would manufacturers as higher residual values would boost their brand image."

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## Children prove to be biggest distraction

Noisy, disruptive children make the most distracting car passengers, according to new research.

Screaming children have been named the top "perilous passengers" in a Norwich Union road survey, followed by backseat drivers and barking dogs.

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## Speeding men claim to be best drivers

Research published last August indicates that 80% of UK drivers break motorway speed limits when driving their car, with men worst culprits than women.

The research, which was conducted among 4,000 UK motorists on behalf of online car insurance provider yesinsurance.co.uk, shows that 90% of men admit to exceeding the 70mph speed limit, with nearly two-thirds (63%) saying they have driven over 100 miles per hour.

Female drivers are safer when compared with men, but still display a level of disregard for

safety and the law. Just over three quarters (77%) of women admit to breaking the speed limit, whilst a third (36%) say they have driven over 100 miles per hour.

Ironically, whilst men are far more likely to speed than women, the research indicates that a third of men (31%) think they are better drivers than women.

However, road accident statistics show the opposite. There are 30% more male drivers than female, but they are involved in almost twice as many car accidents as women. Road accident statistics - which are due to be published next month by the Office for National Statistics - show that in 2006 almost 162,000 male car drivers were involved in car accidents in which someone was injured, compared with just over 90,000 female drivers.

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## Police to review pursuits policy

UK police forces are to review the way their drivers deal with high-speed pursuits after a report said officers were taking “unnecessary risks” when chasing suspects.

The report by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) comes as five people were killed last week in a head-on crash on the M4 following a police pursuit.

Andy Holt, of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), said: “Any research that is undertaken that helps to make our roads safer is to be commended.

“ACPO has initiated a review of its current guidelines on the management of police pursuits and the IPCC will be working closely with ACPO in order to conduct this thorough review.”

The report “Police Road Traffic Incidents: A Study of Cases Involving Serious and Fatal

Injuries” analysed data from road traffic incidents (RTI).

It showed up to 40 people die annually in RTIs involving the police with the number increasing year-on-year.

In 2005 the number of incidents was 109 compared with 101 in 2004. This latest report studied 275 incidents.

It recommended that all police vehicles be fitted with data recorders and police should not pursue motorcycles, except when a serious crime had been committed.

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## Wigan Advanced Motorists

We meet at the Plough and Harrow, Shevington each Sunday morning. Congregate in the car park at around 09:30am for Motorcycles and 09:45am for cars.

**From the South:** Leave the M6 at Junction 26 (M58) and at the Orrell exit, turn left. At the traffic lights, turn right for Shevington, the pub is a couple of miles on the left.

**From the North:** Leave the M6 at Junction 27 (Standish, Wigan) and turn left up the dual carriageway towards Standish. At the end, turn right for Shevington, the pub is a couple of miles on the right.

**Car parking** is available at the rear of the building and there is also a public car park on the other side of the road opposite the pub.

### Contact details:

Tel: 07071 226693

[www.wiganadvancedmotorists.org.uk](http://www.wiganadvancedmotorists.org.uk)

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