

July / August 2025

SPOTLIGHT



Newsletter of the Sporting Car Club of Norfolk



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Chairman's Introduction

Yes, another reminder to renew your membership for the club year 2025-2026 if you haven't yet done so. Go to the club's website at <https://www.scccon.co.uk/> then click on 'Membership' near the top left of the home-page.

The Autodsolo scheduled for 27th April had to be cancelled due to the situation at Lotus at that time but it's good to be able to report that the one originally scheduled for 18th May eventually ran very successfully on 8th June - see the report in this issue. It was good to see the winners of the 2025 MSUK Disabled Drivers Scholarship taking part and 2024 winner Dom Pearson competed too - he has bought a Toyota Yaris of his own, just like MSUK's loan car. And I'm pleased to tell you that SCCON has now purchased another Nissan K11 Micra for use in Autotest and Autosolos by disabled drivers who didn't win the MSUK's Scholarship scheme. A sub-committee has been set up to manage the running of this car.

If you think you can help SCCON in any way please contact me at cjnewson32@yahoo.co.uk or 07717 - 109472

Martin Newson, Chairman

LOTUS MOTOR CLUB / SCCON Co-Promoted Autotest on 8th JUNE 2025

No-one has provided a report on this event so here are some of the comments that were posted on SCCON's Facebook page plus photos of the event by Peter Riddle.

First a couple of cars that were built by Lotus on the Hethel factory site.



Mark Banham waiting to start test 1 in his 1999 Lotus Elise Series 1. He came 5th in class B



Matthew Mantle waiting to start test 1 in his 1971 Lotus Elan S4 SE. He came 3rd in class B



Dave Saint at the start of test 1 with Anna Baker on her Autotest debut in his Skoda Fabia 1.4



MSUK 2025 Disabled Scholarship winner Callum McCormick at the start of test 2. Toyota Yaris 1.3

Sam Carter

Thanks to all marshals and competitors for making it a fantastic event!
Every single marshal was needed and vital, so thank you!

Mathias Hansen took FTD in the Autosolo from class B with a blistering total time of 669.7 seconds in his MR2. Robin Lines was victorious in class A1

Jordan Weavers

Thank you to everyone involved in the organising and running of yesterday's event. Especially Sam Carter, Jon Fry and Howard Joynt for securing the venue, and all the catering teams and marshals also. It was a great event with well laid out tests and I was very happy to come away with a 🏆

Mike Lacey

Many thanks to the organisers and marshals. A great event, well run, with nicely laid out tests without gotchas.

James McCormick

A great day, really impressed that so few cones 'died'.



Dom Pearson (MSUK Disabled-Scholarship winner of 2024) his Toyota Yaris 1.3. He came 2nd in class A1



Callum McCormick (Disabled Scholarship winner in 2025) in MSUK's Toyota Yaris 1.3



Jack Stanton (2025 MSUK Disabled-Scholarship winner) in MSUK's Toyota Yaris 1.3 loan car



Christine Newson serving bacon rolls at lunchtime She and Mary Carter are now the 'SCCON Angels'

Angela Woolridge

A brilliant day out on the track. A privilege and honour to have been an outsider to the motor sport world and to be a part of this event. Loved every minute of it! Super talented drivers.

Thank you for the opportunity, we would certainly like to do it again. 😊

Liz Jordan

Angela - good to meet you all and thanks for your help. You are now a TimingAppLive timekeeper!

Jonathan Sharp

Thanks for a great day. Very well organised. Thanks too for the use of one of your fine fleet of Nissan Micras; much appreciated.

Dave 'Shaggy' Saint

Thanks Sam, Howard and all officials and marshals. An excellent day's motor sport and very fortunate with the weather too. 😎

Ben Cutting

Thanks to SCCoN and LMC for running the Autosolo today, and especially to Christine Newson and to Mary Carter (Sam's Mum) for the marshals' lunches. Well done all.

Stanley Graham

Liz and I second Ben's thoughts.

Helen Reed

A great day. Lovely bacon roll and a nice cup of tea (*from Christine*). Thank you to all the organisers and marshals as well.

UK DRIVING LICENCE CHANGES

Electric cars are heavier than petrol or diesel cars of similar size due to the weight of their battery packs. This has little impact on the day-to-day use of electric cars, however, for Transit-type vans of 3500kg MAM (Maximum Authorised Mass) every extra kilogram of battery weight reduces the vehicle's payload by the same amount. And Transit-type vans have already seen their payloads reduced over recent decades because of their extra size, stricter crash test requirements and extra equipment that customers want, such as better noise suppression, power steering and air conditioning.

So the time had come for vehicle legislators to address this and from 10th June 2025, changes have been introduced affecting driving licence weight limits for certain zero emission vehicles.

Until then:-

1/ Drivers with a category B licence **who passed their driving test before 1st January 1997** were allowed to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8,250kg MAM. They could also drive a minibus with up to 16 passenger seats and they could tow trailers over 750kg MAM.

2/ Drivers with a category B licence **who passed their practical driving test after 1st January 1997** were allowed to drive a vehicle up to 3,500kg MAM, a minibus with up to eight passenger seats and they could tow trailers with a MAM up to 3,500kg. The combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer could not exceed 7,000kg.

From 10th June 2025 new rules apply to electric vehicles

1/ Drivers with a category B licence **who passed their driving test before 1st January 1997** can still drive a vehicle and trailer combination of up to 8,250kg.

2/ Drivers with a category B licence **who passed their practical driving test after 1st January 1967** can drive an electric (or hydrogen-powered) car, SUV, van or small truck with a maximum authorised mass of up to 4,250kg.

If the vehicle has additional specialist equipment to support disabled passengers, they can have a MAM of up to 5,000kg, although the extra 750kg must be attributable to the specialist equipment. This extra weight allowance doesn't apply to petrol or diesel vehicles.

They can also drive an electric (or hydrogen-powered) minibus up to 4,250kg MAM, or 5,000kg if it has additional specialist equipment for disabled passengers.

With these new allowances, drivers with a category B licence will still be able to tow a trailer provided the combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer does not exceed 7,000kg. If a vehicle has a MAM of 4,250kg, the MAM of the trailer will be limited to 2,750kg. If a vehicle has a MAM of 5,000kg, the MAM of the trailer will be limited to 2,000kg.

Drivers who passed their test after 1st January 1967 will be able to drive a minibus with up to 16 passenger seats providing the vehicle usage is not for 'hire or reward' (i.e. there is no payment from the passengers or payment on their behalf) and the following conditions must also be met:

Conditions for driving a Minibus with up to 16 passenger seats

- You must be 21 or older.
- You must have had your category B driving licence for at least 2 years.
- If you're over 70 years old, you must meet the ['Group 2' medical standards](#)
- You must be driving on a voluntary basis and the minibus must be used for social purposes by a non-commercial organisation.
- You must not tow a trailer.
- [The Maximum Authorised Mass](#) of the minibus including passengers is not more than 3,500kg or 4,250kg for electric (or hydrogen-powered) vehicles. If your electric (or hydrogen-powered) vehicle has extra equipment for disabled passengers, for example a wheelchair ramp, it can have an additional 750kg of MAM.

With these new changes, drivers must still ensure they are comfortable with, and have full capability to drive, the heavier vehicles now permitted.

There will not be any changes to drivers' photo-card licences.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR NOISE TESTING

SCCON has our own noise meter for measuring exhaust tail-pipe noise at the start of Autotest and Autosolo events. Is any club member willing to take 'ownership' of this meter and to carry out noise testing at the start of events where noise testing is required? If so please e-mail your interest to info@sccon.co.uk

Full training in the operation of the meter and the required test procedure will be given.

SCCON 12-car Statistics

I competed in my first SCCON 12-car in 1992 and I've been keeping a record of the winners for more than 25 years. Would anyone else like to take on the job of updating my Excel spreadsheet after every SCCON 12-car? You don't need to do it for 25 years!

In the 1990s the majority of our 12-cars were organised by Ordnance Survey employee Simon Tebbutt. His navigation was the same for everyone but it was often quite difficult. This led to every 12-car event being won by one of the top two or three navigators in the club. And many newcomers would tackle their first 12-car, find the navigation very challenging and they wouldn't enter another one.

But about 25 years ago, SCCON introduced different levels of difficulty for the three classes of Novice, Intermediate and Expert. Soon after that, marked maps were introduced for a new Beginners Class. These changes brought (mostly) full entry lists and keen competition in SCCON's 12-car championship. And the wins were shared among a wide range of different crews. Over the last 144 events, wins have been achieved by no less than 85 different crews competing in 65 different types of car.

However, SCCON 12-cars have been less popular over the last three years and 30% of recent events have had to be cancelled due to insufficient entries. The future of 12-cars was debated at the club's AGM in February and the committee will be having more discussions over the next few months. In the meantime I thought I'd give you some statistics.

Firstly the drivers and navigators who have won the most SCCON 12-cars

Winning drivers (1998 to 2025)

Chris More	13	Driving 5 different cars and with 4 different navigators.
Peter Riddle	13	All in Vauxhall Novas except for one in an Astra MkII and with 5 different navigators.
Alan Shrimpton	10	All in his Peugeot 106 Rallye with Dave Bell navigating.
Jonathan Stimpson	8	With 5 different navigators in 4 different cars.
David Leckie	7	With Dave Bell or Katie Leckie navigating.
John Peterson	7	With 4 different navigators.
Robert Aldous	7	All with David Mann navigating.
Andrew Scott	6	With 3 different navigators.
Several drivers	4	

Winning Navigators (1998 to 2025)

Dave Bell	23	Navigating for 5 different drivers.
Dave Smalley	8	Navigating for 3 different drivers.
Mike Riddle	8	All navigating for his Dad.
David Mann	7	All navigating for Robert Aldous.
Ian Doble	7	Navigating for 3 different drivers.
Peter Riddle	6	Navigating for 5 different drivers.
Several navigators	4	

Dave Bell won several more prior to 1998 driving his RS2000 MkII. That included the last hat trick on SCCON 12-cars way back in 1994 with yours truly navigating for him.

The most successful cars have been:

Vauxhall Novas	19 wins	Peter Riddle and David Leckie
Peugeot 106	13 wins	Alan Shrimpton, Jonathan Stimpson & Matthew Mantle
Peugeot 205 GTi	11 wins	Chris More, Simon Banham, Peter Skillen, Jonathan Stimpson, John Peterson and Geoff Bateman

Ford Escorts, Ford Fiestas, Vauxhall Astras and Renault Clios have all won eight 12-cars.

Peter Riddle

The FIRC.be Flanders International Rally Challenge

Started in 2010, this Belgium Championship is for UK Drivers and Co-Drivers. The following year I managed to get Vic Lee, the MD of Corbeau Seats UK, to sponsor the Championship including giving special prices to all competitors.

I first started this championship in 2010 driving a Ford Escort Mk1 and I continued competing both driving and co-driving. My best result was winning the 2019 FIRC Sprint Stage Championship aged 79, with Dick Athow in my current car a Ford Cortina Mk1 GT.

Covid came along and that changed everything and also losing my co-driver as he was unable to sustain long trips anymore. After Covid had cleared up, both in the UK and Belgium, I set about looking for another co-driver. It was not until 2024 that I teamed up with Will Brown and we did the very wet ORC Canal rally on which we unfortunately retired. I then managed to get a co-drive on the 2024 Rixy Stages with namesake Mike Webb in a Fiesta ST 2Litre. We achieved a good finish, and an award.

2025

Still looking for a co-driver, I talked to fellow FIRC contender Allan Smith who'd had a bad accident on the Corbeau Seats Clacton Rally in his Fiesta R2 in 2023 which resulted in him breaking his back, but he has now recovered and he was also looking for a co-driver as his co-driver Teresa Butler had moved on. After a couple of meetings we decided I would co-drive on the 1st round, the Salamandre on 21st and 22nd April in South East Belgium, which consisted of 4 Stages run three times. After SS6 our car, a 2003 Subaru (which Allan had rallied before his Fiesta R2 car build) developed intermittent power steering failure, a temporary fix at Service allowed us to do SS7 but it was still a problem causing us to nearly go off a few times but on the stage SS8 it got much worse so, at the end of the stage, Allan retired the car due to safety reasons. It wasn't my best event as various things caught me out, also I was used to a car with a trip-meter and a 24 hour clock which does help finding difficult slots when pace notes are being made.

ORC Canal Rally

We both sort of got on OK in the car, with no major dramas and our next event would be the ORC Canal Rally on 23rd/24th May, I would co-drive for Allan and just like last year the rain was back and it was a bit miserable. This time it was 3 stages run 4 times.



SS1 De Ginste 9.58km - from the start 2 loops round the roundabout it was fast and slippery which also included a gravel section which was quite rough and wet but Allan kept us on the road.

SS2 Hulste 8km - was shortened by 1.5km. From the start it had a 2km straight running down the side of a canal; very fast with chicanes to catch out any risk takers. Safely through that one, next up was Wielsbeke



SS3 Wielsbeke a short blast of 4.23Km - with several hairpins, again very damp but the stages were starting to dry out and our times were getting faster.

With De Ginste cancelled due to a car hitting a telegraph pole it was a drive through using the alternative route system. After checking with a marshal my Road Book didn't have this so we had to follow the next car. The stage was later reinstated in late afternoon.

The further three loops were completed with no major problems, although by the end of the last SS13 there was a hint of the steering pump belt crying enough! We made it back to the podium. It was a well run event with an excellent road book and easy time-cards. We had started at 08:00am queuing for the start ramp, and we didn't finish until 20:02pm back at the start ramp. It had been a very long but enjoyable day.



Thanks to Allan for keeping us on the road, Liz for keeping us fed and watered and a huge thanks to Dave Saint for all his help servicing for us on both events. EWRC Results showed us 54th overall out of a field of 103, and 2nd in the FIRC 4WD class. Then we all headed off for a very well deserved Chinese.



After the event Allan said he would be retiring the Subaru for the rest of the season, and he would concentrate on getting his Fiesta R2 finished.

Next time Allan will be co-driving for me in the Cortina GT on the Wervic Rally on 13th /14th June and this time Dave and Huey Saint will be servicing.

Derek Webb June 2025

SCCON Natter 'n Noggin Evenings - every 3rd Thursday of the month

For a chat about SCCON and where you'd like our club to be going, grass-roots motorsport and anything to do with cars and motoring in general, come along to one of SCCON's monthly get-togethers at the White Horse, Trowse, NR14 8ST. We gather around 8pm and if you haven't been before you'll be especially welcome.



Here is a super preview photo of Derek Webb's 1967 Cortina GT on the Wervic Rally in Belgium. Full report and more photos in the next issue.

SCCON's Midsummer Vintage, Classic & Sports Car Run

Sunday 6th July 2025

For details visit the SCCON web-site at www.scon.co.uk/html/classic/classic.html



Gordon / Lynne Wellbelove's Lotus Excel and Martin Jones Model A Ford at the end of the 2024 run



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ASTON HILL CLIMB 100 CELEBRATION EVENT ON 17th MAY 2025

One of the questions in the quiz I set for the 2024 SCON AGM was about the fastest pit stop during the 1922 French Grand Prix held at Strasbourg (see the March 2024 issue of Spotlight). Aston Martin made their Grand Prix debut at that race and the quiz included this picture of Aston Martin's first GP cars.



The first Aston Martin GP race cars. Col. Gallop is in 'TT2' number 8 while Zborowski is in 'TT1' number 15. The number plates were removed before the start of the Grand Prix.

When I compiled the quiz, I didn't know that Sebastian Vettel, had driven one of these cars round one lap of the Paul Ricard circuit during the 2022 French Grand Prix meeting (with Johnny Herbert as his passenger) to celebrate 100 years since Aston Martin's first GP race. See photo below.



I also didn't know that the Herts County Auto and Aero Club would be holding an event to commemorate 100 years since the last competitive event was held at the Aston Hill Climb, near the village of Aston Clinton in Buckinghamshire. One of the organisers of the 100th anniversary event was Pete Walters, who was a member of SCCON in the 1970s and has recently re-joined. Speed hill climbs were held up Aston Hill from 1904 to 1925 (when the government banned racing on public roads) and the hill gave its name to Aston Martin cars after Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford had achieved successes at several events held there. Some of those hill-climbs had been run by the Herts County Automobile and Aero Club. The first Aston-Martin (with a hyphen) was registered in 1915. In earlier times Lionel Martin had been a competitive cyclist. In 1902 he rode his single gear Imperial Rover Road Racer bike from Lands End to Hyde Park Corner in London at an average speed, including all stops, of 13.5 mph. The following year he broke the record for tandem cycling from Edinburgh to York by 43 minutes accompanied by Thomas Vade-Walpole.

Before the Aston 100 event, I suggested to Pete Walters that it would be great if he could get the 1922 Aston Martin that Sebastian Vettel drove at Paul Ricard for the Aston Hill 100 Celebration event "Well", he said "the owner is on the organising committee!"

On the Saturday of Aston 100, I set off in my Austin Healey, and initially it was fine running at 70 mph on the A11 with the temperature gauge steady at 190 degrees F. But then it started to overheat. Luckily I had some coolant with me so, after letting Healey cool down at Roudham Heath and topping it up, I turned round, went home, put the Healey back in the garage and set off again in my Alfa Giulietta. This delay meant that I arrived too late to see the parade of 64 period cars and 15 motorcycles ascending Aston Hill. Nevertheless it was still a great day out and I was able to sit in the Aston TT racer nicknamed 'Green Pea' that Vettel drove, and here's the proof.....



The owner Rob Murray very kindly took me through the controls, starting with the hand-operated pump on the left side of the dashboard. During races, this would be operated by the riding mechanic to pressurise the fuel tank which ensured fuel delivery to the engine.



Pulling and pushing the wooden handle pressurises the fuel tank. The mechanic could also adjust the two brass hand-wheels in front of his seat to tighten the brake cables as the brake linings wore down during a race. The 1922 French Grand Prix was more than two and a half times the distance of the 2025 French GP and lasted nearly three times as long! The horse-shoe-shaped pedal, that you can just see, is the central throttle with the brake pedal higher up to the right. Below the pedals is a heel recess set into the floor. There's an ignition advance-retard control on the steering wheel, while the handbrake and gear lever are out of shot (outside the cockpit) on the right side of the car. And this is the gear-change pattern - that would make you think when driving this car!



The hugely wealthy Count Louis Zborowski was born in London to American parents, and his father was of Polish descent. Zborowski invested more than £10,000 in Aston Martin which funded the design and build of the two 1922 Grand Prix racing cars and their technically advanced 16-valve twin overhead camshaft engines. Their chassis numbers were 1913/TT1 and 1914/TT2 because they were intended to race in the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy (TT) Race but they weren't finished in time. For the 1922 French GP, Zborowski drove TT1 where it ran with the registration number XL 2445 while the British Colonel Clive Gallop ran TT2 that was registered XL 3125. Incidentally the James Bond author Ian Fleming was a good friend of Zborowski and often visited him, making the journey to Louis' home near Canterbury on a number 007 bus!

In 1923 TT1 was sold to Miss Marion Agnew (later Mrs. Marion Morgan) who named it 'Green Pea' and she and her husband competed in it across Europe, winning a gold medal in the 1923 Lands End Trial and lapping Brooklands at 86.6 mph. But while the sale of TT1 was proceeding, it is believed that someone else wanted to buy "Zborowski's French GP car", so the number plates were interchanged and TT2 was sold with XL 2445 plates, purporting to be Zborowski's car. TT2 was re-built (possibly after an accident) with later-style Aston Martin bodywork and it was re-registered in 1925. Rather weirdly, XL 2445 is still on the DVLA database as a 1924 Aston Martin, even though that number had been issued in 1922.

So, if you thought that number plate changes from one car to another started with rally teams in the 1960s and 70s, think again.

TT2 was also at Aston 100 on 17th May and I was able to speak with its owner.



Aston Martin chassis no. 1913 / TT1



Aston Martin chassis no. 1914 / TT2

The event obviously had a strong Aston Martin theme and here is a row of fifteen immaculate pre-war Astons. And Aston Martin Heritage had brought the very oldest surviving Aston Martin,



Photo by Nick Salmon



A3 the third Aston Martin prototype made (in 1921), was owned by Lionel Martin's wife Kate and it still has its original registration. Recently restored by Aston Martin Heritage, it looks almost too new.

A1, the first Aston Martin was very similar to A3 and it was nicknamed 'Coal Scuttle' because of the shape of its frontal bodywork, but there is no record of what happened to it after it was sold by the Aston Martin factory in 1924.

Another Aston Martin product on display was a just-restored Lagonda Rapide, essentially a 4-door Aston Martin DB4 of which only 55 were made between 1961 and 1964.



Lagonda Rapide with the rather hefty price tag of £175,000. It is over 16 feet long!

The local Aston Clinton school got involved and this part of local history inspired many projects for the school. A papier mâché recreation of the hill was designed and built by the school and was a feature of an exhibition in the town's Red Kite Pavilion.



Some local children at the start of the hill climb. Photo Nick Salmon

The Aston 100 Centenary was described as a 'fabulous event' by many participants and spectators. It was a real community event with local people, businesses, schools and the Aston Clinton Parish Council all supporting the organising team.

It was a sell-out and only ticket holders were allowed into the field at the top of Aston Hill. Over 500 classic cars were displayed and there were another 1300 in the visitors' car park. It was estimated that around 4,000 people attended during that Saturday.



Russ Barringer's 1923 DOT motorcycle
Photos by Nick Salmon



Julian Wade's 1914 BSA Model H

A good variety of mainly British vintage cars climbed the hill including seven Aston Martins and thirteen Bentleys which included the world's oldest existing Bentley. Some of the cars taking part had competed in the original series of hill-climbs at Aston. This included Richard Frankel's 1921 Bentley TT which competed at Aston Hill in 1922 driven by W.G. Barlow, finishing second behind Lionel Martin's winning Aston Martin. Sixteen of the motorcycles were of the same year and model as had competed on the hill between 1904 and 1925. These included a 1912 BAT 8 hp, a 1914 BSA, three AJSs, an Indian, a Rudge, a Sunbeam Sport and a Douglas.



Nigel and Cindy Parrott's superb 1913 Prince Henry Vauxhall (named in tribute to Prince Henry of Prussia who had given his name to the 1910 Motor Trials, the pre-cursor to the German Grand Prix). Photo by Nick Salmon

The Aston 100 event was brilliant with a super-friendly atmosphere, a tribute to everyone involved.

Peter Riddle

THE MYSTERY OBJECT FROM THE LAST SPOTLIGHT

New member Jack Stanton identified the mystery object.

It's a steering wheel holder. The disc rests on the seat and the long spring pushes the rubbers upwards against the bottom of the steering wheel to keep it in the straight ahead position. It's used while the steering and front suspension are being worked on.



How hard is it to adjust a hard hat?

This newsletter doesn't get involved in politics but it seems that many politicians across the parties can't perform the simple task of adjusting the headband of a hard hat before putting it on. The hat then performs a wibbly-wobbly balancing act too high up on the wearer's head.



Kier Starmer



Gordon Brown



Boris Johnson



Ed Davey



Teresa May

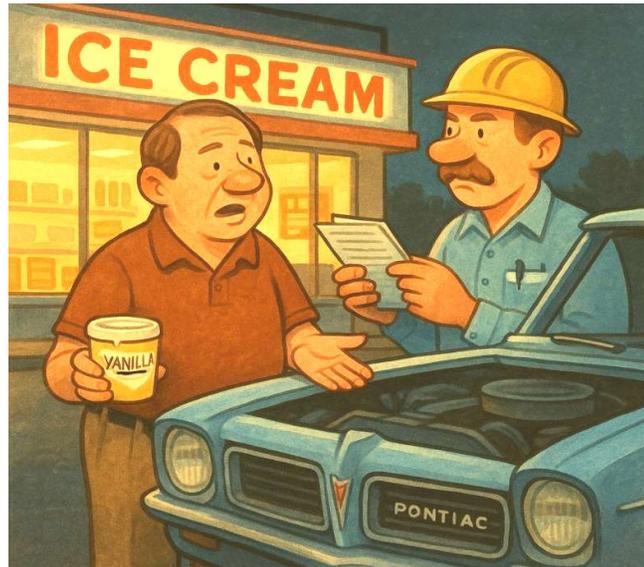


Rachel Reeves



Ed Milliband - the clear champion of the wibbly-wobbly hard hat!

The following politicians (in alphabetical order) have all been photographed wearing hard hats correctly - Tony Blair, David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn, Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin, Rishi Sunak, Margaret Thatcher, Donald Trump and Liz Truss. An internet search didn't show Volodymyr Zelensky ever wearing a hard hat.



Summer is the Time for Ice Cream

A man wrote a letter to the Pontiac division of General Motors with a complaint that sounded more like a joke than a real problem. He said that every night when he drove to the store to buy vanilla ice cream, his brand new Pontiac wouldn't start.

But - and here's the twist - if he bought any other flavour, like chocolate, strawberry, or pistachio, the car started just fine. He admitted the whole thing sounded ridiculous but insisted it was a real issue and it happened every single time.

Pontiac's customer service team was sceptical but they wanted to keep their customer happy so they decided to send an engineer to investigate.

The engineer arrived to a perfectly normal family living in a quiet suburban neighbourhood. He was just a guy trying to understand why his car hated vanilla ice cream.

So, off they went to the local store in the Pontiac. That first night, the family bought vanilla. And sure enough, back at the car, it wouldn't start.

Next evening they bought chocolate ice cream..... and the car started no problem.

Next evening was strawberry and it started on first turn of the key.

Then they tried vanilla again. Dead engine!

Now the engineer was intrigued. He looked at how long each trip took, the engine temperatures, the ambient air temperatures, and even how long they spent in the store.

And then he realised what was happening: Vanilla ice cream was stocked in a small freezer near the entrance to the store. Buying it took just a minute or two. The other flavours were further inside, meant more time spent in the store. It turned out that the issue had nothing to do with the flavour of the ice cream - it was all about timing.

When the man returned to his car quickly (with vanilla ice cream in hand), the engine hadn't cooled down enough. The engine heat got to the carburettor and caused a fuel vapour lock which prevented the engine from starting. With other flavours, the extra delay allowed the engine to cool down a bit more - just enough to ensure there was no starting problem.

Once the engineer figured this out, adding a small heat shield to the fuel system fixed the issue for good.

The man was relieved that he wasn't crazy - and his letter had helped to fix a real problem. The story of the "vanilla ice cream Pontiac" went on to become a legend in the automotive world. Sometimes, strange problems have perfectly logical explanations.