

FORMER PRESIDENT ALAN DOMVILLE CONTINUES HIS REMINISCENCES AS A MOTORING WRITER & LIFELONG GROUP FRIEND.....

Most members of the Institute of Advanced Motorists become involved simply because they want to improve the driving skills of themselves and others, thus making our roads safer. Collectively we can certainly claim to have played our part - the number of fatal accidents has fallen from 6,970 when I started driving in 1959-60 (three years after the formation of the IAM) to 1,720 in 2013 despite the number of vehicles on our roads shooting up from seven to 34 million.

Though, as IAM Chairman Alistair Cheyne has frequently observed, if that many were killed each year on the railways there would be a national outcry but I have to confess that my own entry into the world of advanced driving was somewhat stuttering. I was encouraged to attempt the test soon after I had started to drive by one of my newspaper contacts who was one of the first people to proudly display the IAM badge on the front of his car. Tragically, before I could make the time, he was killed in that car - he was hit head-on by a lorry travelling on the wrong side of the road. I covered the inquest here in Warrington.

For me, courtship, marriage and fatherhood followed and it wasn't until motoring became an important part of my working life that I became involved again - and how!

Bernard Smith, a tower of IAM strength in South Yorkshire and writer for the Sheffield Telegraph, wanted to establish an advanced motorists' group in Delamere and asked me to publicise an inaugural meeting. I happily did so and then went along to report the meeting but right from the start I found myself in the middle of an astonishing slanging match between the would-be founder members and those of another nearby group, aggrieved at losing potential new members. It would have made quite a story but I decided it wouldn't do any good to write it - in fact it would have done a lot of harm. Bernard was banished and I retired hurt.

He had already arranged for me to take the test at Widnes but there was no availability for any tuition and inevitably I failed miserably. Years later, Warrington Advanced Motorists were formed (I still have the original press release in my files) and I was invited to have another crack at the test as part of a publicity "drive" to boost interest in the group. Thanks to the patience of Veronica Oates and the late Peter Sunderland I was thoroughly prepared for the test though I must confess that it was preceded by the only sleepless night I have ever experienced. Somehow I reached the required standard on the day and my experience was turned into a series of articles for the Guardian newspapers.

While I have never been unable to assist at Sunday morning sessions because of my church commitments I was overwhelmed and very proud, when invited, to become a vice president and then president. And as the years rolled by I was further delighted to accept an accolade to mark 25 years' commitment to road safety and then, ultimately, honorary membership of the group, all of which I am so proud.