

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

Almost every week I welcome into my home a complete stranger, make sure he (and rarely, a her) is fed and watered and then I drive the person into Warrington, Manchester or wherever to set them on their way. It's not an act of Christian or altruistic charity but common courtesy for someone who may well have just driven more than 200 miles to drop off a car from a manufacturer for my appraisal. Sadly, I am so often told by these drivers that they accorded nothing remotely like a welcome when they visit other journalists. Sometimes, they tell me, they can deliver a car to a home in some remote area and then have to walk five miles or more to the nearest train or bus station - and without any refreshment. But kindness is always rewarded in some fashion.

When journalists were on strike for seven weeks during the Winter of Discontent in 1978-9 things were tough for people like me with a wife and four children to support. Freddie Pinner, BMW's driver of the day, delivered a car to me, realised how things were a few weeks before Christmas and handed me £5 for each of the children's stockings. I didn't want to accept but he insisted - it was a "thank you" for the help I had been to him over the years, he said.

Drivers do sometimes "pull a fast one" of course. Two guys who delivered an Austin Allegro to me around that time asked if I could run them "into Cheshire" to collect a car. "No problem" I said - and on the way discovered they were bound for Wrexham. Nowadays, few manufacturers allow their drivers to contact a journalist by phone for that reason - but obviously that causes problems should the driver become gridlocked on a motorway somewhere. I recently took delivery of a car at midnight and had to run the harassed driver to the nearest hotel. On another occasion a driver, frustrated by delays all day, arrived with a car during the evening and faced a journey back to Nuneaton - and I was able to take him right to his front door because I was travelling south for a car launch.

It is always as well to check a car for any damage before taking charge of it; should it have been delivered before the crack of dawn and the keys dropped through the letterbox this is especially important. You don't want to be blamed for something you haven't done. A scuff on an alloy can be corrected a couple of times but then it becomes a matter of a new wheel. A colleague at one of the Liverpool newspapers once hit a kerb during a test drive and was presented with a bill for £900. When a Volkswagen Golf was collected from me on one occasion, the driver took out a gauge and measured the tyre treads. Rather stunned, I said I had only borrowed the car for a week. "You would be surprised what some people can do to tyres in seven days" was his reply.

Some of the delivery drivers go out of their way to make sure you know everything about the car they have delivered. The best of them is Adrian who is with Suzuki - he can relate so much about the car he has delivered in less than 10 minutes that one really doesn't need to drive the car afterwards!

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