

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

Journalists may well be men of words (and women too - though the Guardian Series would never employ a female scribe when I started work and for many years afterwards) - but we are supposed to be questioners and listeners rather than speakers.

I have been an exception - not because I have a lot to say but through circumstances. At school from the age of eight I always seemed to be the person called upon to read (and I was delighted because there were prizes to be won and which I still possess!). When I was in my teens I frequently read one of the lessons in church - and still do.

All of which stood me in good stead on the occasions when I have been invited to talk to groups about my life in journalism. The grounding was useful also when I became chairman of the motoring writers' group in the north and was called upon to make various submissions to the industry.

On one occasion I was asked to slug it out with the United States Ambassador to the Court of St James; the issue was the requirement for work visas when myself and colleagues spent time in America appraising new cars. It was an expensive and time-consuming procedure that involved various interviews at the embassy in London at the crack of dawn.

Slugging is the wrong word to be honest; the man was especially courteous and we got on well - though naturally I didn't change the mind of Uncle Sam!

Public speaking experience was useful also when I would thank a company for their sponsorship of a particular event on behalf of their guests. The first lesson to remember is not to bang a glass with a spoon to call for order; my predecessor did this and she broke the glass!

I also learned from listening to "thank you" speeches made by Lord Strathcarron, when he was president of the Guild of Motoring Writers. He, of course, was accustomed to addressing members of "the other place" on important matters of state. David always ended his remarks with a joke (often the same as he had made last time, bless him!) Most of mine weren't as good but the conclusion became my trademark too. My big moment came towards the end of a superb dinner given by Kia at a hotel in St Moritz and attended by at least 200 people; it was suddenly realised that I was the only chair of a writers' group present and I was duly nominated to propose a vote of thanks. By this time I had enjoyed a couple of splendid glasses of wine but I was assured that I sounded OK after I sat down - and I also managed to conjure up an appropriate joke about Switzerland. My remarks were appreciated by our hosts not just on that night but during a subsequent event at which we were their guests. Nowadays it is not considered the form to say thank you to ones' hosts. It is a trend I deplore and have made representations on the issue - but to no avail. Most of the new wave of writers appear to take the view that it is the industry that should be thanking them for attending their car launch. How sad - and bad mannered!

CHAIRMANS CORNER: SOLUTION

The following pattern holds: The sum is equal to $n \times n$, when n is the number of consecutive odd numbers, starting with 1. For example, the sum of the first 3 odd numbers is equal to 3×3 , or 9; the sum of the first 4 odd numbers is equal to 4×4 , or 16; the sum of the first 5 odd numbers is equal to 5×5 , or 25; and so on.

