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# CSMA SOUTHEND-ON-SEA GROUP

Issue No 459  
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## SOUTHEND GROUP COMMITTEE 2009 -2010

As a result of the Group's recent AGM. held at the end of last month we still have a full working committee to plan and run the events for your enjoyment during the coming year.

So you know who to talk to if you have some suggestions for future events, or feel the need to compliment or criticise some aspect of the program or indeed to volunteer to organise an event for your fellow members. We list below the incoming Officers and Committee members for the coming year.

Chairman:	Eddie Lythgo	01268 772698
Secretary:	David Richards	01268 778144
Treasurer:	Don Dumenil	01702 512590
Committee:	Jean Dumenil	01702 512590
	Maureen Richards	01268 778144
	Jackie Terry	01268 751695
	Ron Grenfell	01702 231029
	Arthur Smith	01702 584134
	John Terry	01268 751695

You will probably notice that we have achieved equality in numbers of Ladies and Gentlemen among the Committee members, demonstrating that equal opportunity is alive and well in Southend Group. No glass ceilings here!

The Officers and Committee of CSMA Southend Group would like to remind readers that the opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Southend Committee or the CSMA.

DRAFT MINUTES SUBJECT TO CHECK BY GROUP COMMITTEE AND ACCEPTANCE AT 2010 AGM.

**Civil Service Motoring Association**  
**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009**

[southendgroup@csmaclub.org](mailto:southendgroup@csmaclub.org)

Minutes of the 47<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2009 in Rooms 1518/1519 Alexander House, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea at 8.00pm.

1. PRESENT.  
17 group members, 7 partners (including honorary members) as listed on the attendance sheet. 7 apologies had been received.
2. CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.  
The Chairman welcomed the members and guests present and expressed his pleasure at the good support given to the Group during what has been a very difficult past year.  
He had enjoyed the year as Chairman and thanked the other Officers, Committee members and others for their support and hard work during the past year.  
  
NB: The full text of the Chairman's Address can be read in the April edition of SIGNPOST.
3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM. HELD ON 25<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2008  
Were read and accepted as a true record, a vote of acceptance was proposed by Pat Gollin, seconded by Dorrie Maidment. All in favour. The Chairman then signed the 2008 minutes.
4. MATTERS ARISING.  
There were no matters arising that were not covered by the reports.
5. SECRETARY'S REPORT.  
The Secretary introduced his written report published in the Spring 2009 Signpost.  
The Group has had another very successful year. There is little to add to what is recorded in my report but I would be pleased to answer any questions.
6. TREASURER'S REPORT.  
The Treasurer introduced his report, previously published in the Spring 2009 Signpost, and explained the several incomes and expenditures. He noted that the Group kept within budget in the past year and for 2009 the budget appears to have been approved.
7. ELECTIONS.

7.1 Officers

At this point the Officers stood down.

It was proposed that the appointment of the Officers was 'en bloc', this proposal was proposed by Arthur Smith and seconded by Ron Grenfell and carried nem con.

The 'en bloc' proposal of the 'Officers as named' was by Arthur Smith seconded by Lesley Wallhead. The following officers were elected nem con.

**CSMA SOUTHEND-ON-SEA GROUP MINUTES****PAGE two****ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009**

Chairman: Eddie Lythgo  
Secretary: David Richards  
Treasurer: Don Dumenil

**7.2 Committee. (12 Members)**

The retiring Committee had indicated they were available for re-election except Terry Ryan who was thanked for his work on the Committee. Jean Dumenil was proposed to fill the vacancy.

Committee

Ron Grenfell	)	)
Maureen Richards	)proposed on bloc	)seconded on bloc
Jean Dumenil	)Pat Gollin	)Dorrie Maidment
Arthur Smith	)	)
John Terry	)	)
Jackie Terry	)	)

Carried nem con.

**8. MOTIONS.**

Fred Dowson gave a very warm and welcome vote of thanks for the efforts of the Officers and Committee of the Club, a view that was agreed by a unanimous show of hands.

No written motions had been received and following the Chairman's invitation, there were none from the floor.

**9. OPEN FORUM.**

This item was included again on the Agenda to allow discussion of any part of Group affairs and to stimulate discussion at the AGM. without the need to formulate agenda items.

This provoked a good discussion, with more of the same but adding to where possible. There was a keen level of support again to keep 'OUR' CLUB running.

**10. Any Other Business**

None

There being no further business the Chairman declared the AGM. closed at 8.55pm.

## ARTORIAL

We rounded off the last clubnight of the winter with our 47th AGM. It all passed off serenely with everyone being very complimentary about each other.

We said goodbye to Vice Chairman Terry Ryan who stood down from the Committee after a goodly span of years working for you, the ordinary member.

Not that you are all "*ordinary*" of course, its just a word used to differentiate the Committee from the members.

You will have seen from the front page, and the draft AGM. Minutes on the preceding pages, that the meeting elected Jean Dumenil to fill the vacancy.

You will also have noted we have become a PC Group with equality in numbers between the sexes of the Committee members.

While we are now politically correct there are sadly no "Second Home Allowances" available to us.

We moved into May and kicked off the month with a traditional Treasure Hunt Run organised by Maureen and David a duo who normally operate as Committee note taker and Secretary.

With half my team still being among the 'hobblers' we were sorry to miss this one.

We later learned that you were routed to South Woodham Ferrers, where you had a walkabout quiz.

Oh happy days; walking round a shopping centre peering into shop windows and doorways, scanning the footway boxes and manholes, lamp posts sign posts and notices, while unsuccessfully trying to understand the organiser's clues!

The joint winners were

Jean and Don Dumenil.	= 1st 15.5 points
Janet and Dave Claydon.	= 1st 15.5 points
Janet and David Groves	3rd 15.0 points

Janet and David are new members (to the Group) so made a notable entry to the ranks.

It was a good start to the season with 4 new teams adding to the total of 29 out for the event.

We hope you all made a good impression on the new members and that they will want to return for more,

both of your company and our program.

Everyone went on to the Butterfly Farm for afternoon tea and another opportunity for everyone to practice the groups second most enjoyable pastime - talking!

I hear that afterwards 6 members went on to "The Lodge" at Battlesbridge for dinner. My proxy reporter said "The Lodge" was not on his list for a return visit.

By the time you read this most of you will have visited the Toby Carvery at Runwell for the May Noggin.

Some might say that on re-reading the last few paragraphs, an unbiased observer might well think that Southend Group is an eating club with some driving mileage thrown in, in order to get to the next restaurant!

But if you hanker to enjoy some motorsport we do know the people whom you should get to know.

As always, if you need to know something about CSMA, or our Group, your first contact point is our Group Secretary David - see Page 1 for details.

I can already hear David thanking me as he gets snowed under with queries!

If you are an e-mail or Internet user you may also care to log in to the CSMA's web site.

It now boasts a contact point for all your queries, or glance through an edition of Motoring or Leisure which will point you in the right direction.

### .LOOKING AHEAD

9 June

NEL Group will be holding a Scalextric evening, their round of the North London Centre Championship, at the Beaufort Suite, Bishops College, Cheshunt. The evening starts at 7.45pm, admission is free and refreshments will be provided.

If you fancy the opportunity to meet fellow CSMA members and the chance to try out your hand at slot car racing, I'm sure you would get a warm welcome.

Advice of your attendance would be appreciated by NEL Secretary Ron Barnett on 01992 58100, or see Motoring & Leisure Club pages for contact details.

June 14th

We have another Sun Run, organised by Jean and Don Dumenil, this one will not strain the little grey cells there will be no walking treasure hunt. Instead the walking will be restricted to around "Walton Hall Museum".

The Museum is one of those Essex gems that hide away in a quiet corner of the Essex Countryside.

"Walton Hall" is based in Linford and is owned by an enthusiastic collector - Frank Wood.

The products of Frank's collection are housed in a restored 17th Century Essex Barn. Displays include farming implements, automobile memorabilia, items from both World Wars, children's toys, victorian nursery, including many perambulators, radios and many forgotten household goods.

Outside there is lots to see including farm machinery, vintage tractors, and vintage road rollers.

It also has an area for refreshments within the Barn where you can refresh the inner person (how's that for PC?) and rest your feet while you exercise your tongue.

Long standing members may remember the Group visited "Walton Hall" way back in April 2004, which is where I returned to in the Signpost Archive to borrow the how to get there/ where is it (line) map which may be found on Page 7, together with meet time and place.

Entry in 2004 was £3 for active youngsters and £1.50 for the more mature seniors.

Naturally there has been a price rise but only to £4 for the workers and £2 for seniors.

It's a small increase in the intervening 5 years, perhaps it is because it is in a quiet backwater in the countryside. See you there?

June 16th

The Noggin and Natter for this evening event has been advertised as being at "The White Horse", Ramsden Heath. BUT

Our 'Eating Out' taster group, that band of hardy souls who try out eating establishments on your behalf (well it's hard work but someone has to do it!) report back that the Inn has been nicely rebuilt and refurbished but the food was (in their opinion - the proviso to avoid to avoid being sued) not very good and overpriced.

Another venue taken off our list.

It was suggested that another pub nearby "The Fox and Hounds", also in Ramsden Heath, would make a sensible alternative. They advertise regularly in the local newspapers.

Our food tasters have visited the pub and have reported favourably on both the food and the prices.

**NB** "The Fox and Hounds" only has 26 seats in it's restaurant, they are happy to reserve space for us but have asked to be told how many will be coming a few days beforehand.

If you are attending **please** let Don Dumenil know by Friday 12th June to ensure you have somewhere to sit down, to eat your meal!

JULY 12th & JULY 29TH

Sorry to have to tell you that the SunRun on July 12th and the proposed coach trip on July 29th are not yet firmed up.

There is still time before those dates when we can confirm what is planned for these two events.

In the meantime if you have any suggestions or are itching to organise one, or both, tell David or another Committee member. Thank you.

July 21st

Noggin and Natter at the "Ferry Boat Inn", North Fambridge.

It's a little further out than most Noggin venues, but it is in the middle of the year when we have the nice long summer evenings.

That's guaranteed by the climate change mafia who forecast long hot dry summers caused by those terrible motorists who will insist on burning fossil fuels.

Me? I'm having an electricity generating wind farm fitted to the roof of my MPV.

July 25th

The date for the running of Quadruplex, the annual inter-group competition for North London Centre Groups, organised this year by West Middlesex Group.

Details, venue etc. will be found on a later page of this edition.

As far as I can recollect, Southend have never won, though in recent times we have finished in second place a couple of times.

Time for a win methinks, providing we can raise the necessary number of members willing and able to travel to the venue with sharpened pencils and brains.

Names to Secretary David, so he can forward them in good time to allow West Middlesex to lay on enough portions of food.

#### PEERING INTO THE FUTURE

That's enough of the forward program detail except to remind you that in August we have our annual Ten Pin Bowling competition at the Kursaal - well worth attending just to see if the Editor can keep his bowls out of the gutters!

We also hope to provide a SunRun in August . Watch out for more information soon.

And

On the 28th August we hold our round of the Centre Presidents Slot Car Championship at the Balmoral Centre in Westcliff-on-Sea. For the Noshers the evening will include free food! More detail later.

In September the Noggin and Natter on the 15th will be at Seabrights Barn, Great Baddow. A venue we abandoned when the food and service deteriorated.

But a recent visit by two of our "lost" members who started out intending to go to the Noggin at the 'Running Mare' in Galleywood and ended up at "Seabrights" resulted in a recommendation to add it to our eating list. Which we have duly done.

Whilst in October the Noggin and Natter has been changed to the "Castle", Hadleigh. A change of management has seen a return to good food at reasonable prices according to our intrepid advance 'taster section'

Enough of the future, it's back to present times.

Do you get that fed-up feeling when you call an 0800 number on your mobile and suddenly remember that it is going to cost you. Well here is a wheeze to get it at your cheapest mobile rate or as part of your included minutes if you are on a monthly price plan, though it does entail a small amount of advance preparation.

Get on the internet and go to [www.0800buster.co.uk](http://www.0800buster.co.uk) Follow the instructions on the page.....

In summary- you will find a telephone number on the top left corner of the page. Just dial this number on your mobile followed by the 0800, 0808 or 0500 number you wish to call; finally press #.

This will route to to the "free 0800" number at the usual no charge because it appears to originate from

a non-mobile land line.

The page also provides a guide to including the number in your mobile's contact list where you probably already have Britannia Rescue's number listed.

If you holiday abroad in the EU you will have an EHIC (European Health Insurance Card) card in your purse or wallet. They have been available for some years now and the early issues are now time expired.

Time to look at yours and check the expiry date. If it is expired it can be replaced on-line or by using the form available in any Post Office. Do it now. Don't wait to find it's expired when you are on holiday.

The expiry date is printed in the bottom right hand corner of the side showing your Name and DoB etc.

It's also important to back it up with travel insurance.

Recently in the expectation that I would be allowed to drive again soon, I thought it might be a good idea if I tried to start my 'Carens', it had been standing idle without being used for over seven weeks.

To my surprise it started at the first turn of the key. I allowed it to run for a while until it was nicely warmed up. Encouraged by this it seemed a good idea to just check it would actually move (gently) across our paved parking area.

Being an auto box the gear lever just moves fore and aft. Only this time it wouldn't move in either direction. Now the problem with an auto box is, if you can't move the lever the car is immobile, locked in park.

A call to Britannia Rescue, problem explained and told attendance within one hour. 12 minutes later 'BR' man knocked on the door.

Now it's not much of an exaggeration to say he was a large man, around 6'-6" ' and built like a barn door. Problem explained, he got into the Carens - just - tried the lever, then arm muscle bulging moved it back into neutral.

Let's try moving it says he, handbrake off, in gear, no movement. A bit of heavy right foot and with a loud crack from the rear brakes it surged forward. The shoes had stuck to the drums during it's seven week rest. The locked on brakes ensured that the sticky gear lever would not move. Paper work completed BR man departed, delighted it took so little time.

The moral is, if your vehicle faces a longish period of inactivity, ensure you run it (or get someone to run it) weekly to ensure you don't suffer sticking brakes and gear lever.

Out of space again. Mind how you go.

**ARTHUR**

**SUNRUN JUNE 14TH**

**ORGANISER'S NOTES**

See map below for how to get there.

Meet in Museum Car Park at say 1.30pm to sign in, chat to your friends, ready for 2.00pm entry to Museum.

SENIORS ENTRY FEE £2.00

Hope to see you there.

Jean and Don Dumenil

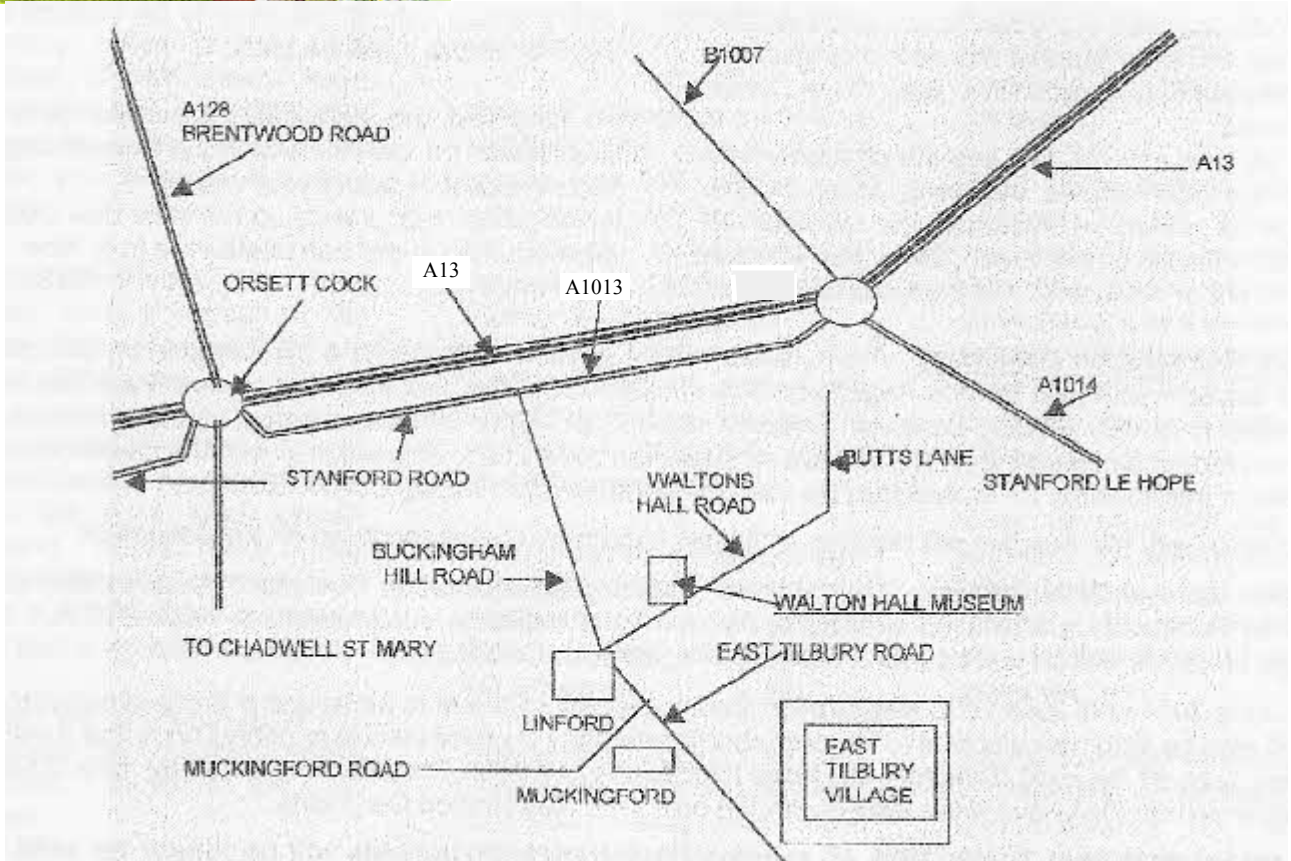
**BAKE AND TAKE**

Bring the children along, we will show them how to make Bread in the shape of various animals, we make the dough for them they then make it we bake it you take it.

A Freshly Baked Loaf Baked The Natural Way In Walton Halls Village Bakery Using Our Victorian Coal Fired Oven £1.50 For Person



Baking on occasions for 2009



# CSMA North London Centre

## 'QUADRUPLE X'

*Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2009*

*... presented by WEST MIDDLESEX GROUP.*

This will be an entertaining evening of light-hearted inter-Group competition but will NOT involve maps, navigation, Table Top Rally skills or, for that matter, exercise for any part of the anatomy other than the old Grey Matter!

The only 'equipment' you'll require will be a pen (or pencil if you're not allowed to play with pens yet...), your unstinting loyalty to CSMA Club activity (!), and, as always, a huge dollop of your Sense of Humour!

The exact details of the evening remain a closely guarded secret but it will have a Team type format with a bit of a twist, & the more people we get along the better! Teams of four representing each NLC CSMA Group will be ideal, but of course, Groups can be represented by any number of Teams, but a minimum of two is required for the Trophy!

At the evening's end the Groups will have earned a result – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc ...and the Quadruplex Trophy will be awarded to the two NLC Group Teams that have the lowest combined score.

A complimentary Supper / Buffet will be provided part-way through the evening and a reasonably priced bar will also be available to us.

**PLEASE NOTE: TO FACILITATE ACCURATE CATERING REQUIREMENTS CAN INDIVIDUAL GROUP SECRETARIES PLEASE ADVISE THE ORGANISER OF EXPECTED NUMBERS, ..... or there may not be enough chips !!!**

All CSMA members, friends & family will be welcomed and I hope that a Saturday date (and no work on Sunday?) will encourage many Group members to come along for the evening and join in the fun.

So, the details are :

- Date ? .... Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2009
- Time ?.... 5.30pm for a 6 o'clock start. (Anticipated finish 9.30pm....)
- Place?.... Windsor Liberal Club, Victoria St, Windsor, Berks SL4 1EN
- Further information can be sought from AG on the contacts below :

Hope to see you all there for a bumper turnout !

**Allan Goddard**

President : CSMA North London Centre.

Mob: 07785 903 000; Home: 01189 345726; e-mail: [allan.goddard@csmclub.org](mailto:allan.goddard@csmclub.org)

## BON VOYAGE

### A Memoir of a First Cruise

This true adventure story was sent us by a non-CSMA friend. We (the editorial 'we') enjoyed it so much we thought we should share the enjoyment with all the readers of SIGNPOST.

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All excited, full of expectation and anticipation, we fronted up to the London International Cruise Terminal (okay, still known by the less pretentious amongst us as Tilbury Docks, but nowadays with a much grander title) and were amazed at how professional and smooth a transition we made from drop-off by our friend Adam (heavy luggage out of the boot of the car by porters, whisked away, and not seen again till it arrived in our cabin ... how efficient is that!) through registration (alphabetically done, so no hold-ups), a 'Welcome Aboard' photo, through the entrance, to be assigned one of a smart queue of waitress-looking young ladies who took us straight to our cabin. It takes longer to recount than it did to occur. Very impressive. So far, so very good.

Cabin 480 was on Deck 7, an inside 'no-windows' job in the centre of the ship, decent size for two, with a dinky little en-suite that proved a marvel of engineering. No complaints there then. Rather, it *would* have been a decent size if we had been more experienced travellers ... knowing no better, we took our rigid Samsonite suitcases. Big mistake. Nowhere to store them. They wouldn't fit under the beds or in the wardrobe, so were obliged to remain stacked on top of each other next to one of the beds, like an exceptionally solid bedside table. Never mind, it wasn't a problem. It wasn't as if we were going to invite the neighbours in for a dance.

The MS Marco Polo appeared to be a very smart vessel, with positively hundreds of beaming staff, all tirelessly working with great energy and enthusiasm, and permanent smiles and happy greetings. Quite unnerving, really. From the lowliest Filipino cleaners to the grandest Russian/Ukrainian officers, and every level in between, a polite and smiling 'Good morning' 'Good afternoon' or 'Good evening' invariably followed eye contact. Surfaces gleamed, chrome shone, and even Peter couldn't find fault with the cleanliness anywhere. Amazing. To be honest, it was incredibly impressive. And also became increasingly irritating. I felt rather sorry for them, because I'm sure we would all have been complaining fast enough if we felt the standards weren't high enough, but I heard other people saying what I was thinking, so I know it wasn't just *me* being unreasonable ... but, truly, the incessant vacuuming, polishing, dusting etc was *very* intrusive, especially the Hoovering! I don't know about you, but it doesn't enhance my experience of anything to be constantly falling over a guy with a Hoover. No matter what time of day or night, or place in the ship, whether you were all dressed up in your finery to go for a posh dinner, you had to circumnavigate a guy beavering away with a Hoover. Constant reminder of housework doesn't do it for me, I'm afraid. Not relaxing one little bit. Neither do I find it enhances my relaxation to be sitting reading a book in a public area with a guy assiduously dusting the cracks between the chromed slatted surface of the ceiling above me with a long-handled mop ... I'm sure it was one particular guy's sole job, poor man ... but you had to admire their tenacity. No single dust particle went undiscovered. Very impressive. Just very annoying too.

The food appeared to be very good indeed. Peter and I only ever made it to the bistro, despite having reservations at first sitting in the posh Waldorf Restaurant ... because Peter had artfully not bothered to pack himself so much as a shirt, let alone a tie or a suit, having unilaterally decided that he wasn't going to participate in any of this 'dressing-up b\*\*\*\*\*s' (his phrase, needless to say) when all he wanted was his food, plain and simple, no messing about. Nouvelle cuisine in the posh restaurant with waiter service was never going to cut the mustard with *him*, I suppose, so that's how we found ourselves in the self-service bistro. Still, the bistro was run with the precision of a military operation, cleanliness spectacular, display of the food was very impressive, and I have to admit it looked appealing enough to keep him in a positive frenzy of self-restraint for the whole cruise. It wasn't so bad for me because I took protein bars and protein shakes enough for two meals every day, so was only faced with the heartache of denying myself the sweet yummy stuff once a day after a plateful of steamed veggies or a plate of plain boiled rice ... but he was desperately trying not to eat the goodies on offer three times a day. Nightmare. Some people were just plain gannets, and actually made me feel quite sick watching how much they stacked away, meal after meal, just because it was 'free' and they could help themselves. It's not difficult to see why cruises are credited with so much weight gain, that's for sure. People seem to lose all grasp of reality.

We slipped our mooring and headed seawards down the Thames, causing me personally much excitement as I've never seen Southend from the river despite having lived here so many years. It was a real thrill to see the

coastline from Benfleet to Shoeburyness in one view ... and I was incidentally impressed to see the length of the route of various of my training runs over the years. Yes, I've always known how long they are, but they looked really quite impressive when viewed in one go! I'll never be apologetic about only having run from home to the pier and back again. It looks a blooming long way.

Once out of the Thames, we turned left (no pretensions here, I'm afraid, it's all back/front, right/left to me) and headed up the East coast of England. It got a bit choppy. Still, I've nothing to judge it against, and it's May, for heaven's sake, not exactly the height of summer, and this is far from the Mediterranean or Caribbean, so not entirely unexpected. We chugged on through the night and the whole of the next day, till we reached Invergordon in Scotland. At night we were treated to a spectacular live show performed by the ship's resident company of Russian singers and dancers - every bit as good as a West End production, and a different one every night - truly another very impressive feature. The singers tackled many languages without any apparent lack of comprehension of what they were singing ... again, very impressive. Costumes were amazing ... no money spared there.

I wasn't too sure about the motion of the boat. I'd expected to be sick ... had dreaded it from the day Peter suggested the cruise ... but I had learned from my whale watching trip to Hervey Bay, and was equipped with enough ginger to pass muster for ballast for the ship itself. I set about consuming vast quantities of the stuff (starting, naturally, with the chocolate covered version, and moving on to the plain uninteresting stuff that I guessed had to be the one you were really meant to eat because it wasn't very nice -- well, it wouldn't be, would it, without chocolate?) But, despite my fears, doubtless because of the industrial quantities of ginger - chocolate covered or not - I refused to feel ill in any way, shape or form. The stomach remained stoic. So far, so very good indeed.

At Invergordon, we parked against a wooden pier -- shades of Southend (no, not really, it was comparatively tiny!) -- and went on a coach trip to Loch Ness. Our coach tour guide was an Italian called Cosimo. Huh? Sure was. We would have understood him better if he'd been a Scot. Oh, and our coach driver was an Estonian. Indeed he was. Estonian, no less. We thought it best not to inquire if he actually had the appropriate papers to drive a public service vehicle. We guessed it was unlikely as he didn't speak a word of English. We were only off the ship for two hours. I'd like you to remember that, as I continue my story. Two short hours. While ashore, the wind blew up, and the rain fell down ... and then some! Walking back down the pier to the ship, Peter and I got caught in a sudden freak hail storm of gobstopper-sized hailstones and freezing sleet. We were soaked, battered black and blue, and his right ear filled up with snow! An experience, to say the least. Trust me, those hailstones really *hurt!*

The wind had blown up so high that the metal gangway couldn't be stowed -- it was swinging wildly in the wind on a winch, and eventually had to be dunked in the sea to stop its movement (took ages to get it on board and required some very fancy footwork indeed by some intrepid crew members, one of whom lost his hard hat in the process and damn near his head with it) -- and the band of pipes and drums were obliged to shelter in the lee of a shed while they piped us off ... only we never went anywhere for ages because the tug couldn't pull us off the pier, as the wind was so strong it was blowing us back on! They had to go on playing and playing, and we all took great pity on them because they were bedraggled and frozen. I hope to goodness they had something very warm indeed on under those kilts, or they'll never be the same again. Manfully, they kept on piping and drumming, and the tug kept on tugging ... until the tug's towrope broke (an almost unheard-of occurrence, apparently) and we just stayed put. Sheer Scottish grit and determination got us moving, probably only just in time for the poor pipers and drummers to avoid hypothermia, and we set off round the top of Scotland intending to explore the Isle of Skye on the morrow.

Only the best laid plans of mice and men, and all that ...

Going round the top of Scotland was rough. By golly, was it rough! I thought it was rough going up the East coast, but I'm glad I only called it choppy. That was choppy. This was rough. They even warned us it was going to be rough. There was a storm, they said. They lied. It was a Force 10 gale. That wasn't the only time they lied. That wasn't the only Force 10 gale.

It was a long night. I lay on my bed and I read a good book. I also ate a lot of ginger.

All I heard all night was the sound of people in adjoining cabins throwing up. It was unremitting. The ship pitched and rolled like some demonic rollercoaster ... but you don't ride a rollercoaster for more than a couple of minutes, do you? This of course was permanent. Quite an experience. Sick bags appeared as if by magic dotted every metre (very precise!) along the handrails of every single corridor or open area of the ship. The sick bag fairy worked overtime on this trip. Also the carpet shampoo-ers. Every day. I was so glad I was on protein bars and shakes, and didn't have a stomach crammed full of sickly stuff. There were some very ill people that night. Very ill indeed. I continued to munch ginger as if my life depended on it. And I didn't get sick.

The Isle of Skye hove into view ... well, what we could see of it through the rain and the howling wind ... and preparations began to get us ashore by tender from the ship. Not for long did those preparations begin. It was obvious to a blind man that we were never going to get off, and so it proved. With everyone's heartfelt apologies, the weather defeated us, and so we waved goodbye to our planned stop and circumnavigated the island instead ... not much of a consolation, as it happened, as it looked exactly the same all the way round ... and we headed off to the Isle of Man, where our next stop was to be the following day at its capital Douglas.

It was another long night. Another Force 10 gale. Probably the same one, for all I know, following us around. The people in the cabin next to us spent the whole night throwing up. I read my book, and I ate ginger. (Trust me, I took enough to feed a ginger-dependent army!) I munched and I munched. And I didn't get sick. Then Peter threw open the cabin door, stood theatrically in the doorway like Heathcliff, all dark and broody, wailed 'Stephanie, I don't feel WELL!' threw himself on his bed and started moaning.

I lost the will to live.

Never mind, tomorrow's another day. We'd crossed the northern part of the Irish Sea ... always likely to be a bit rough, I thought, so the worst of it doubtless over by now ... and we approached the Isle of Man, anchoring just off Douglas. It looked very quaint. The rain abated, and they started preparations to get us ashore by tender. They lasted a little longer this time - the preparations, I mean - because they did actually get one tender across. Which proved it was insanely dangerous. It took the tender 45 minutes to make shore, even though we were only a mile offshore, and everyone on it was screaming and puking and terribly distressed. So that was that. Goodbye, Douglas, without even setting foot on the Isle of Man. We'd only had two hours on dry land since we set out on Day 1, and this was Day 4.

Captain Valentyn Zhukov then decided that it would be an excellent idea to make a run for it through the Irish Sea, heading as we were for Dublin, as -- surprise, surprise -- there was another Force 10 gale to be negotiated, and he thought we should make a run for it to get to Dublin as early as we could. Nice one, Captain. The logic may have been faultless (who am I to say?) but it made for another pretty interesting night. They had to curtail the live show because the dancers couldn't risk life and limb, and even the singers had to wear rubber-soled trainers under their costumes to get some grip on the stage under their feet. The sick bag fairy did her stuff again, and the lady in the next door cabin had another very bad night indeed. I thanked God for my inexhaustible supply of ginger (at least half a suitcase full). And I wasn't sick. But what a night! Truly horrific. Next morning several senior citizens, especially ladies, sported bandages ... especially one who had a spectacular dressing in the middle of her forehead that made her look like Cyclops.

Day 5 and we docked at Dublin. Actually docked. Yes, next to the quay. You know, where you can walk off? Fabulous. Peter and I had booked a trip in advance. Would you believe? On a boat. Oh yes, we had. On a boat. A trip down the River Liffey through the centre of Dublin. Our tour guide on the boat was an American. Huh? Sure was. A Yank. We enjoyed it though, despite everything, as we hadn't been on the Liffey when we went independently to Dublin before, and we were glad we went. Four precious hours on dry land. Magic.

Leaving Dublin, we then had to negotiate the southern part of the Irish Sea, into the Atlantic, and down to Guernsey in the Channel Islands. And there our problems *really* began! That leg of the journey was definitely not for the faint-hearted. More of the same. Much more. This time the show was actually cancelled, because even the singers couldn't keep their footing. Suffice to say, we approached Guernsey and once more the ship's tenders couldn't operate in the dangerous seas, so it was goodbye Guernsey, might have been nice to know you but we still haven't had the pleasure ... and Captain Zhukov had the brilliant idea of taking us to Cherbourg in France instead (not on the itinerary, so an extra treat, but I guess he was fearing a mutiny by this stage) and he made a run through the gale to get us there, where we would apparently be sheltered in the harbour. It was even rougher getting there, and achieved nothing, because our attempted entry to the harbour came to a big fat zero when the tugs trying to pull us in got into difficulties (French, what do you expect?) and one of them broke its towrope (two, in one voyage!) We spun somewhat crazily in the wind and the heaving seas, and the remaining tug heroically hauled us clear of the harbour walls again (by which time we were sideways on, and it was pretty hairy stuff -- heaven only knows how we didn't demolish the structure itself) and sent us on our way like a giant untouchable.

So we never got to see Guernsey either. By this time we had an impressive list of refunds appearing on our bill, which was an unexpected source of comfort for Peter amidst the wreckage of our plans. And we never got to see Cherbourg, though we hadn't expected to anyway, so I suppose we couldn't complain about that one. Next stop, Honfleur in France. Another rough passage to get there, the now obligatory Force 10 gale to be negotiated. Some wag had renamed the ship from Marco Polo to The Flying Dutchman on the map charting our progress in Reception. (Google it if you're not smiling.) We tried staying up later for once, to see if that would make the night shorter. Only we found our passage to our cabin politely but firmly barred by several efficient officers and other

officials when we tried to get to our beds. That doesn't look good, I thought. It wasn't. Not for the guy in the cabin opposite, anyway. He'd died. I *told* you it was rough.

We woke the next morning to find we had docked alongside the quay in Honfleur. Sounds romantic, doesn't it? Crap. It was as romantic as Tilbury. Not a quay. Docks. Working docks. Containers everywhere. A two-mile walk to the town, and no shuttle bus provided. And ... believe it or not ... the entire taxi fleet of Honfleur apparently numbers EIGHT. We're talking 800 passengers on this ship, by now practically all stir-crazy. What's more, it was CHUCKING it down. And I kid you not. Absolutely sheeting down. Bouncing off the pavement to a height of about six inches. Most of the people on the ship were card-carrying, hearing-aid wearing, walking-aid users of considerable maturity ... not about to leg it a couple of miles in belting rain reprising Gene Kelly's finest. At this point we knew for sure that Transocean Tours had completely lost the plot. Needless to say, we managed to resist the temptations of Honfleur, and I went back to munching ginger in preparation for the last leg of this most interesting trip.

From Honfleur it's apparently only a relatively few miles - whether nautical or the more easily understandable kind - back to Tilbury. Having shown impressive turn of speed to race with the fleetest of heels all around the coast of our fair United Kingdom, Captain Zhukov decided to drag those said heels over the last leg, and the night became interminable once more. I suspect it wasn't his fault, and all to do with berthing times and such like, but it didn't endear him to those left standing. The Russian dancers and singers put on a farewell show celebrating Russian music ... brilliant costumes. Peter wanted to top himself. He'd had to sit through more shows on consecutive nights than in the whole of the rest of his life. Bless him. He's all cultured-out.

So, apart from the foul weather and constant sickness, the brilliant shows, the friendly staff, the excellent food, the lack of shore time, the curtailment of our planned stops, the man dying ... oh yes, and I forgot to pack the books I'd saved to take with me, my prized reading material, and was reduced to mugging old ladies for cast-offs -- not my finest hour, but I was desperate ... are there other things that will stick in my memory? Well, there's the fact that I tore my thumb ligament on Day 2 and had to wear a splint for the entire holiday, and will probably now need surgery. I also had only one good workout in the gym before it became apparent that it wasn't going to be a good idea, with the machines bucking and rearing all over the place ... I ran for an hour on a treadmill doing somersaults, so it felt, and it's not an experience I care to repeat. So my plan to work out luxuriously every day came to nothing. Plan B had been to indulge myself in the ship's beauty spa, having all the massage and other indulgent treatments I spend my time giving others. Plan B went out the window when I saw the prices. Peter wouldn't care if I spent a fortune on myself, so long as I was enjoying it. But there was -- and will, I hope, always remain -- no chance that I will relax and enjoy being ripped off. The prices were extortionate. Talk about exploiting a captive audience. Shameful. But 8 days in close confinement on troubled seas proved to be great stuff as far as Peter and I were concerned ... our relationship continued to blossom and mature, moving to levels of ever deeper connection. Believe it or not, I am really glad we went.

You know I said it was rough? Peter reminds me that there were no less than two occasions when we got back to our cabin to discover that the cabin steward had been in, retrieved our life jackets from their stowage compartment and left them strategically placed on our beds. Not scary in the least.

Couldn't have done it without ginger though.

Adam duly collected us from Tilbury, and all but crashed the car on the way home, driving through his tears of laughter as Peter regaled him with tale after tale of our adventures. You really had to be there to appreciate it fully, but Peter tells it so well. You'll have to take it all from me, I'm afraid, as I forgot the camera ... that's another thing that will stick long in the memory, I suppose ... and there's no photographic evidence to back it up.

I walked indoors, discovered that Lily had savaged our next door neighbour who was feeding her in our absence (the little m\*\*\* does this every time we go away, and it's just getting plain embarrassing!) so I had to spend half an hour apologising profusely, and examining the scars, and then perhaps not surprisingly succumbed to a migraine. Slept for a couple of hours, unpacked, tackled a huge mountain of mail, phone messages and 48 emails, discovered I've lost my taste for the coffee I loved before I went away and am now demented because I don't know what to drink ... and I'm exhausted. Totally wiped out.

PS Great things, holidays, eh? Another cruise? Maybe. One day. But not - definitely not - around the British Isles! You can stop laughing now. Show's over.

As a footnote, I would just add that I'm the only person I've ever known who's managed to lose weight on a cruise .... I came back 4 lbs lighter. Silver lining to every cloud. On the other hand, Peter hasn't yet summoned the courage to step on the scales ...

**STEPHANIE**

**MARSHALLING and MOTORSPORT MATTERS***Can you help ?***Abingdon Motorsport CAR-nival, Dalton Barracks, Oxfordshire.**

Saturday 13 June - Sprint &amp; Autosolo.



Sunday 14 June - Stage Rally.

A great motorsport weekend with a barbecue, beer tent and marshals draw, with a lot of people staying on site from the Friday to the Monday. Tents, caravans, motorhomes, vans, cars welcome. Fresh water is available and lots of porta loos.

For marshalling call Graham on 020 8553 4700 (evenings and weekends) or email: [graham.mclean@bt.com](mailto:graham.mclean@bt.com)

**R U available on Sunday 5 July - same date, choice of two great motorsport events.**

**Essex Charity Stages, Bradwell on Sea, Essex.**

\*\*\*\* Why not combine this with the NE London Saturday run (4 July) to Mangapps Farm & Railway, Burnham on Crouch by staying the night in a hotel or guest house in the area. The weather is usually baking hot. \*\*\*\*

**CSMA North London Marshalling Team** have been asked to support this event and will need plenty of support to cover all the positions: marshalling, start and finish timekeeping, and safety radios. Sadly some of the usual stages will not be available this year but you will still get to be involved in the action working alongside experienced marshals. We will need to sign-on by 0800 and the event will run till about 1700 hours. Bring refreshments to sustain you and **sun protection**. Prize-giving will follow at Bradwell Marina.



I would appreciate your help, even if only for part of the day.  
Enjoy an action packed day of club rallying at its best on the Dengie peninsular.  
Be there or you will miss the excitement you could have had !!!

If you are available or require any further information then please call Graham on 020 8553 4700 (evenings and weekends) or e-mail [graham.mclean@bt.com](mailto:graham.mclean@bt.com)

**CSMA NW London Greenacres Autotest, Studd Farm, Stanbridge, Leighton Buzzard.**

The event is run on a smooth grass field and the tests are all forwards. This is suitable for any car, even autos, and is totally non damaging and very good fun. All you have to do is drive a set route around some cones against the clock and you even have the chance to drop scores. The design of the tests will be easy to remember and you will have time to watch others to see how it's done (bound to be wrongly in some cases).

For entries please call Mike on 01525 720299 or email: [mike.biss@btinternet.com](mailto:mike.biss@btinternet.com)  
For marshalling call Graham on 020 8553 4700 or email: [graham.mclean@bt.com](mailto:graham.mclean@bt.com)

**TELEVISION MOTORSPORT for the armchair enthusiast.**

**Sunday 7 June Formula 1 Turkish Grand Prix @ Istanbul Park** - Watch it on BBC1 (check press for details).

**12-14 June World Rally Championship Acropolis Rally of Greece** - Watch it on Dave or British Eurosport (check press for details).

**Sunday 21 June Formula 1 British Grand Prix, Silverstone** - Watch it on BBC1 (check press for details).

**26-28 June World Rally Championship Rally Poland** - Watch it on Dave or British Eurosport (check press).

THE BACK PAGE

These questions were posted on an Australian Tourism web site and the answers are the responses by the web site officials.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Does it ever get windy in Australia? I have never seen it rain on TV, how do the plants grow? (UK).

A: We import all plants fully grown and then just sit around watching them die.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Will I be able to see kangaroos in the street? (USA)

A: Depends how much you've been drinking.

\*\*\*\*\*

I want to walk from Perth to Sydney - can I follow the railroad tracks(Sweden)?

A: Sure, it's only three thousand miles, take lots of water.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Are there any ATM's (cash machines) in Australia? Can you send me a list of them in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Hervey Bay? (UK)

A: What did your last slave die of?

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Can you give me some information about hippo racing in Australia? (USA)

A: A-fri-ca is the big triangle shaped continent south of Europe.

Aus-tra-lia is that big island in the middle of the Pacific which does not ... oh forget it. Sure, the hippo racing is every Tuesday night in Kings Cross. Come naked.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Which direction is North in Australia? (USA)

A: Face south and then turn 180 degrees. Contact us when you get here and we'll send the rest of the directions.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Can I bring cutlery into Australia? (UK)

A: Why? Just use your fingers like we do.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Can you send me the Vienna Boys' Choir schedule? (USA)

A: Aus-tri-a is a quaint little country bordering Ger-man-y, which is ... oh forget it. Sure, the Vienna Boys Choir plays every Tuesday night in Kings Cross, straight after the hippo races. Come naked.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Can I wear high heels in Australia? ( UK)

A: You are a British politician, right?

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Are there supermarkets in Sydney and is milk available all year round? (Germany)

A: No, we are a peaceful civilization of vegan hunter/gatherers. Milk is illegal.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Please send a list of all doctors in Australia who can dispense rattlesnake serum. (USA)

A: Rattlesnakes live in A-meri-ca which is where YOU come from. All Australian snakes are perfectly harmless, can be safely handled and make good pets.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have a question about a famous animal in Australia, but I forget its name. It's a kind of bear and lives in trees. (USA)

A: It's called a 'drop bear'. They are so called because they drop out of gum trees and eat the brains of anyone walking underneath them. You can scare them off by spraying yourself with human urine before you go out walking.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: I have developed a new product that is the fountain of youth. Can you tell me where I can sell it in Australia? (USA)

A: Anywhere significant numbers of Americans gather.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Can you tell me the regions in Tasmania where the female population is smaller than the male population? (Italy)

A: Yes, gay night clubs.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Do you celebrate Christmas in Australia? (France)

A: Only at Christmas.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: I was in Australia in 1969 on R+R, and I want to contact the girl I dated while I was staying in Kings Cross. Can you help? (USA)

A: Yes, and you will still have to pay her by the hour.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q: Will I be able to speak English most places I go? (USA)

A: Yes, but you'll have to learn it first

\*\*\*\*\*

Finally words of wisdom from George W Bush

' The vast majority of our imports come from outside the country.'

' If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure.'

' The future will be better tomorrow.'

' I stand by all the misstatements that I've made.'

' A low voter turnout is an indication of fewer people going to the polls.'

' I have opinions of my own -- strong opinions -- but I don't always agree with them.'

' We are ready for any unforeseen event that may or may not occur.'

' It isn't pollution that's harming the environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it.'