

CLASSIC SCENE



January 2026



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Cover Picture

In this months cover array, we have
the picture of our secret Santa at the
Quiz night, an E-Type Jag setting the
scene at our new Cars and Coffee
venue. Bottom right represents the
wedge that we raised for Cash for
Kids—Mission Christmas, and bottom
left is a wedge, but not just any old
wedge.

Welcome to the January 2026 Newsletter

I just thought I'd add the year to the title above, to help us all with the transition. With all the doom mongering classic news I've read over the decades I can't quite believe we're still doing this thing in 2026 and classic motoring seems to be going from strength to strength. In many ways we have the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs to thank for keeping legislation on our side. And being in a club gives them the numbers to bargain with, so remember to pay your subscriptions.

I hope you all had a good Christmas, and remember you can bring all your unwanted motoring related gifts to the club auction night on Thursday 8th Jan 2026 at the Craigmonie Hotel. I'm currently trying to swing a deal at work so I can be there, but we do have some auctioneers lined up. It's always a good night.

I've been thinking about the Austin Princess a lot this week, the 1970's Harris Mann 'Wedge,' for reasons that will be plain once you've read page 13. I never liked these when I was young. They always seem staid, boring and a bit ugly to me. A friend's dad had one and it was also slow, a fact shown up by the Vauxhall Cavalier 1.6L that followed it. However, with the passing of time, I now think the Princess (but not the Ambassador yet) is a fine bit of car design that looks great now, as does the Triumph TR7, another Mann creation. I've always liked the Allegro, especially the estate version, but that's not helping my case here. The BL engines were pretty old fashioned and when you read some of the history, you can feel the compromises made by management committees (maybe perhaps the unions too—who knows?) that spoiled the car. Having visited the Leyland Princess and Ambassador Enthusiasts webpage www.leylandprincess.co.uk I can see that they were spacious comfortable cars with hydragas suspension that would have given a cossetting driving experience. I wonder if Harris Mann was a genius ahead of his time? I also like the inverse snobbery of these cars, remembering stories of some car shows that would turn these cars away. They are proper classics, unlike a Ford Focus Mk1.

I was involved in some chat about going to the Shetland Car Show in June 2026. It's now taking entries, www.shetlandclassicmotorshow.co.uk and you get a discounted ferry. Unfortunately and almost unbelievably my June is already full.

And finally, has anyone else noted the number of gigantic inflatable Santa's this year? Some of them are as big as a house. Or bigger. The look really deflated when they are deflated though.

As usual, apologies for any gaffes or omissions but I do my best, and I'm now on day two of editorial duties so I'm dying to be done with it. It's the AGM in February. Does anyone fancy taking over?

Your Editor, and proof read by Mrs Editor.



Ramblings from the Chair



A ghost story for Christmas

Still not much action in my garage this past month and, OK, I know by the time you read this, Christmas will be behind us, but this is a true story that happened to me and my family a long time ago (about 52 years I think) – I hope you find it amusing.

You will recall that we had an impromptu drive around Culloden for our July club night and in my report I mentioned spooky happenings. Further investigations suggest there are lots of places where people have seen ghosts and, when driving, their cars stop dead or lose power or have gremlins affecting the electrical systems, all of which are resolved after the ghostly events have passed. [Usually the ghost of Pearson's past tinkering's in my case—Ed.] It happened to us. My Dad, a gas engineer, had a temporary posting to the Midlands and during the school holidays, we all occupied in a flat in Solihull at the expense of British Gas. At the time our family car was a Vauxhall Victor 2000SL, about a year old, the one with quad headlights. My Dad (and brother who could drive at the time) found the lights to be way beyond what they were used to – on main beam, all four headlights were lit, the inner two being the main beam. I think the bulbs were those new fangled halogen variety and I do remember the range and brightness was hugely greater than our previous cars, 1960's Cortina's and earlier model Victor's.

One summer's evening we were returning from a relative in deepest Worcestershire [That's certainly a creepy setting—I believe you now—Ed] and travelling on a single track road, going down a fairly steep hill, to a sharp corner before a narrow bridge, all the lights went out. It was just going dark and slightly misty so losing all forward illumination, we were driving blind. My dad did a kind of emergency stop and we stopped safely just on the verge before the corner, in a state of bewilderment – what just happened? I can remember my Dad fiddling with the light switch and after what seemed ages (but was probably only a few seconds) the lights came back on again and we went on our merry way. Had we been affected by some ghostly phenomenon? We couldn't think of anything else, it was just weird. We had the car for another few years and never experienced anything similar over its 60k mileage. I looked at the maps of the area but could not find anything of a past battle or other event which might have caused such a strange event. We just put it down to our very own spooky experience.

Roll on many decades and the introduction of 'Googling', in particular the Vauxpedia web site, which I find very interesting and gives very detailed reports (and photographs) of the history of every Vauxhall and Bedford vehicles ever produced. Lo and behold, there was description, in the FD Victor section, of a thermal overload breaker in the lighting wiring loom which trips when the lights are taking too much current. What a ridiculous idea – let's cut the lights just when they are needed most!! Further Googling of 'Victor light failure' suggests that this was not an uncommon problem and there were details of retro fits of relays into the loom. Apparently the lighting switch was not man enough to cope with the current required to light all four headlights.

So mystery solved after all those years – and I wonder just how many accidents were caused by such a stupid arrangement.

On a happy note, I'm pleased to report that the new Cars on Coffee venue at Carlton Bingo has gone down well. We had a very good turnout for a cold December morning but still with plenty spaces available. The facilities available are just first class.

Our January meeting, at the Craigmonie Hotel, is our usual annual Auction, so look out those rare items of automobilia, they might be worth a fortune! Alternatively, bring the items of junk you bought last year and sell them on. Remember the date – one week later than normal, the 8th January at 7.30pm.

Finally, advance notification of our AGM is on the 5th February, again at the Craigmonie. We normally finish this fairly early and this year have decided to finish with a natter. We thought it might be a good idea if members bring along old photographs of cars they (or their parents) have owned, or seen, from years gone by, which might get the ball rolling with stories of the past. We might even to be able to get the photos scanned and shown on a TV screen or if slides are available, shown on a big screen (or a sheet hung on the wall for the real authentic experience!). Let me know if you are interested such – I have a scanner for slides, negatives or just any old photo. Email and phone number are given on the front page of this newsletter.

Regards,

Richard

December Club Night

The Quiz



Richard pulled an absolute blinder with this years quiz complete with his Blankety Blank Wand and schoolmasterly attitude, the theme was geographical (and partly historical) based on locations within a thirty mile radius of Avoch (the venue), all with a transport theme. With prizes.

The quiz was at once challenging, informative and entertaining, prompting a fair bit of head scratching and groans of "I know this".

Richard obviously has a grand knowledge of our local geography, and put it to good use. Personally I was not very forthcoming with answers, but the rest of my team, "Van Life" were hitting the answers with confidence, except for one or two. You'd have thought the Harbours section would have been a breeze for me, but no. I completely failed to identify Hopeman Harbour and that's on my childhood patch. We went there A LOT when I was a nipper, but I guess that's a long time ago now. To make up I went visiting it that weekend.

Everyone did really well, including Steve and Trish in a depleted team of two. What an impressive and knowledgeable club we are.

I particularly liked the bridges section, but how prescient that was, as not long after, the old railway viaduct over the River Spey at Garmouth collapsed and revelations of lack of investment in Morayshire bridges hit the news. This may not be the most pertinent news to the Highlands but it was surprising how much of Moray is within a 30 mile radius of Avoch. Not Garmouth though, to be fair.

Once the papers were marked, the winners award went to the Oldtimerz with an impressive score of 36. Congratulations to Michael Fraser, Ian McNeill and Alice Brown. And of Course we'll be looking forward to your quiz next year (or is that this year? 2026 anyway.)

Of course I forgot it was Secret Santa, as did Richard, so we pledged to get each other something for the next meeting. Miles disappeared into the gents for a suspiciously long time but then appeared all, "Ho Ho Ho" in his Santa outfit and sizeable sack. Well played. All those who had entered into the spirit of things received their gift and the standard looked good enough to make me feel a little foolish and left out. Hey ho ho ho.

All in all, it was a fun night out, and so said all of us. We actually did, as we were leaving.



All New Cars and Coffee - Carlton Bingo



Our new venue for Cars and Coffee has been a success! Having a quieter December meeting was ideal for finding our feet for the first event. It is quite an impressive venue inside too, and the catering worked well. Access was through a side door as it's not open to members until 12:00. If anyone has an idea for a quick and easy "Coffee this way" sign, we'd like to hear from you.

Our motto is fast becoming "Something new and interesting every month," and this month was no exception. "Steven Duncan's 1910 Hupmobile was the star today. It has acetylene and paraffin lighting at the moment which can cause a stir on the garage forecourt, but he has sourced a 1911 dynamo so he will convert to electric some time. 1800 cc engine coupled to a 2 speed crash gearbox and the whole package looks delightfully simple," said Jim Mackay.



Other quirky facts are that the cast block is blind bored, which means the head and block are one piece of metal. No head gasket to worry about. The engine was lubricated with a total loss oil system with enough oil for a 250 to 300-mile trip, so no oil changes to worry about, and it came with built-in rust protection. Hupp guaranteed the car to be free of material and workmanship problems.





Furthermore, the manufacturer would replace any damaged material at no cost except for the tyres.

I loved the disc wind shield. Very Mr. Magoo and quirky. I understand there are plans to fit a more traditional screen, but I like this one. Congratulations to Steven for driving through from Nairn on a chilly Sunday morning to delight us with this car.



Here's a wee comedy moment for you, Me and Jim Mackay going for the same shot!



Of course there were other cars at the event. This Ford Escort RS2000 was in time-warp condition and reminded me very much of my youth, where as a "Mini" man, Fords were seen as the rivals. My, how time has changed me! I have a real soft spot for Nevyn's Morris Minor, and Steve's Morris Oxford is always a welcome site.



Steve has another Mini. This one was originally a Mark 1 or 2, but re-shelled as a Mark 3 by Hugh Finney, so it has no external door hinges. The Mark 3 shells are actually a bit taller and you can see where extra fillets have been added so that the rear windows will shut. Also curiously, it has Mark 3 doors but with sliding windows and door buckets inside like the older model. Hugh must have gone to a LOT of effort.

Poor Richard suffered a bit of a petrol leak on his Austin Healey Sprite Mk II



The needle in one of the float chambers wasn't sealing properly. After a bit of dismantling, cleaning and refitting, the problem was cured. It seems that gravity interfered at some point, but a good result was achieved. Imagine having to do that in a car park of some 50 expert observers. No pressure eh?

All in all the new venue has been a great success and so said all who attended. We wouldn't let them



Two
signs
from
Cars
And
Coffee



Fleeting Moments

Trish Brown

Finally. The Merc has made it home. A new Battery Control Module made all the difference and the fault codes went away. The ride, with the standard coil sprung suspension, is pretty on par with the old air suspension in Eco mode and it still rides very nicely. The bill was not quite as high as we anticipated, which was also welcome news. It has taken nearly 4 months to the day to get the car back and there were times where we all wondered whether the car would get back on the road. But our mannie at the garage persisted, admittedly there were days where he would not look at the car just to gather the courage again to have another go. Just as well we are patient people.

The Landie is behaving again when it comes to starting. It was due a service in early November, which was delayed until late November, after we to do yet another starting issue fix. This time by shortening the main battery lead to cut of the corroded last inch. As we arrived at the mannie at the other garage we mentioned that the Landie was still leaking, which is nothing new for a Landrover, but we were expecting it to be sorted after having the engine's rear seal replaced in June.

The service went smoothly and the gent doing the service did not see anything alarming but suggested it could be play in the end float when we came to pick up the Landie. He got the Landie back 2 weeks later as it is leaking a bit more than we would like. Emptying the sump in 100miles is not a good sign. Most likely cause is that the rear seal is not sitting right. If you read the forums, the seal can be a tricky customer that has to be fitted just so, else it simply does not seal. We'll find out next week. [Read the story here.](#)

With Christmas coming up, it is amusing to see what decorations and lights are strung up around the place. Some people really to go town, just like in the movies. We have one like this in the village. Not the usual suspect, which this year round does not have any lights up at all at the end terrace. No, this time it is a detached bungalow that has lights round the eaves, around every window and door, on the garage and on every single shrubs in the garden. It is a sea of light in every available colour. Fortunately they are not on the twinkle setting, but I do hope they turn it off during the night for their neighbours sake.

Trish

The 2026 Rallye Monte-Carlo Historique

This classic regularity rally runs from January 29 to February 7 and celebrates the 100th anniversary of the first John O'Groats start.

On the morning of Monday 18 January 1926 only one car started the Monte Carlo Rallye from John O Groats to drive competitively to Monte Carlo. The driver was Hon. Victor Austin Bruce driving a 2 litre, six-cylinder AC Tourer. He won the Rallye and was the first British winner of the Monte. His navigator was W J Brunell. In 2026 there will be five more cars making the Start of the Rallye Monte Carlo Historique from John O'Groats and you never know there might be a winner – or at least a class winner – among them. The Six John O'Groats Historique Starters are

1952 Sunbeam Talbot 90 MK 11A James Pohl and Joyce Mordenti
1955 Sunbeam Mk111 Saloon Jim Dean and Hugh Crabtree
1968 Datsun Bluebird 1600 SSS Ko Nagai and Masataka Usami
1968 Volvo 123GT Neil Oliver and Cameron Oliver
1978 MG BGT Ken Brown and Aidan Walsh
1979 Porsche 924 Alan Thompson and Alan Brisbane

There was an Inverness photoshoot was on 3 November 2025 outside the Townhouse. Inverness Council, in particular Provost Glynis Campbell Sinclair, went out of their way to allow the Press to get the best shots of the invited Classic Cars from the Highland Car Club. They applied for a TTRO (Temporary Traffic Restriction



Order) for 15 mins, which stopped all the traffic. As you can see the photographers were able to stand in the middle of the road without fear of being rundown.

There will be a Passage Control in Inverness, manned by members of the Highland Car Club. Roddie Main will be the main man on the day. In the tradition of the old Monte Carlo Rallies, the Passage Control will be in the reception area of a hotel, the Columba Hotel, Ness Road on the banks of the River Ness, right in the heart of the City.

Where To See The Cars

29 January 2026

- John O Groats 8.30am
- Inverness Columba Hotel 11.00 am approx
- Glencoe Kingshouse Hotel 2.30pm approx
- Stirling Castle 4.30pm approximately

Stirling Castle will then host "MONTE FEST," a free family friendly event, with live music, and street food. The rally cars will be there between 4:30 pm and 6:30 pm

30 January 2026

- Jedburgh Abbey Car Park 10.00am approx
- Pierce Bridge George Hotel 12.00 approx
- York Castle 2.30pm approx.



Good luck to everyone from The Highland Classic Motor Club, especially the John O' Groats starters.

In Memory of Eddie Ritchie and Alex Mann

We are saddened to learn of the recent passing of two much-loved and long-standing club members, Eddie Ritchie (senior) and Alex Mann.

Eddie Ritchie passed away on 29th November at the age of 87. He served for thirty years in the Merchant Navy before moving from his native Glasgow to the Highlands in 1977. Eddie settled in Invergordon, where he worked with Britoil until his retirement.

A lifelong motor-car enthusiast, Eddie had a particular fondness for classic vehicles. He regularly entered his beautifully maintained cars in local rallies and events and attended club meetings whenever time allowed. In more recent years, his attendance was understandably limited as he devoted himself to caring for his beloved wife, Marie.

Among Eddie's cherished vehicles were a beautifully restored Austin Princess, along with his later pride and joys—a Rover 2000 and a Jaguar XJ8. He will be remembered fondly for his passion, knowledge, and quiet dedication.

We extend our deepest sympathies to his widow Marie, to Eddie (junior), and to the wider family and friends for whom his passing will be a great loss.



The Princess is now owned by Simon Hayes, secretary of the Leyland Princess and Ambassador Enthusiasts club, below.



Alex Mann passed away in his 96th year. Born in Fortrose, Alex trained as a motor mechanic with Fraser's Garage in Munlochy. He later established himself as a haulage and plant-hire contractor before embarking on a second career as a hotelier, first in Arbroath and later in Inverbervie.

Following his retirement, Alex returned to Rosemarkie in the 1990s, where he spent many fulfilling years restoring a wide variety of classic vehicles. In later years, his passion focused on the restoration of World War II Jeeps. In 2004, Alex completed the restoration of a 1932 Austin 7 saloon, which he raffled to raise over £24,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support—an achievement that reflected his generosity and community spirit.

Alex was a familiar and much-respected presence at classic rallies for many years and played a significant role in organising the Fortrose Classic Rally. In recognition of his dedication, he was appointed an honorary committee member in 2022.

Once again, we extend our sincere condolences to Alex's family members and friends at this difficult time.



Cash For Kids - Mission Christmas

HCMC (mainly Miles) raised £819.70 in cash alongside literally van loads of toys donated at Cars and Coffee and Club Meetings through November & December.



Joking aside we should be proud of all our charity work this year including the £1134.14 we raised for MacMillan Cancer Support.

We like to be fairly subtle about fund raising. Many, many thanks to everyone for their contributions. Some have been quite generous but there is no minimum!

HCMC Events

8th Jan 2026 HCMC Annual Auction

Note the date!! Craigmonie Hotel, 9 Annfield Road, Inverness IV2 3HX The HCMC January Meeting is the Infamous Annual Club Auction. Time to clear out your garages, attics and sheds to make yourself some money. 7 for 7.30pm Start. Bring Cash and grab yourself a bargain, it's more fun if the bidding is brisk!

11th Jan 2026 Cars And Coffee - Inverness

Carlton Bingo, Inverness IV2 3ED 2nd Sunday of every Month from 10am-12noon. A Quiet Social Gathering of 20th Century Classics plus interesting Modern Sportscars & Bikes. Park up, buy yourself a hot drink & snack from Carlton Bingo & check out what's in the Car Park. Find us on FACEBOOK.

5th Feb 2026 HCMC Annual General Meeting

Craigmonie Hotel, 9 Annfield Road, Inverness IV2 3HX The HCMC February Meeting includes the Club AGM. 7 for 7.30pm start. Join in with organising of your beloved Club, maybe Volunteer for a Committee position and mould the future of the HCMC.

5th Mar 2026 HCMC Visit to The Oxygen Works

The Oxygen Works, Burnett Road, IV1 1TF Inverness The HCMC March Meeting is a visit to The Oxygen Works with an informative talk on their Hyperbaric Chamber and other facilities. Follow the signs on Burnett Road all the way to the right hand end.

2nd Apr 2026 HCMC Visit to Luxury Auto House

2169 Cromwell Rd. Inverness IV1 1SY The HCMC April meeting is a visit to Luxury Auto House, experts in detailing, upholstery, coil overs, air ride, wheels, audio, media screens, dashcams, trackers & immobilizers. 7 for 7.30pm along from the Inverness Harbour entrance.