

30 years of DAF Owners Club

How it all started

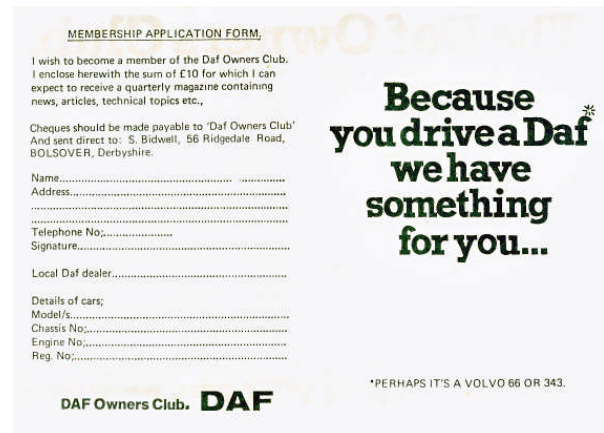
Thirty one years ago, I was asked by a friend to have a look at the wiring on his 1934 Austin Ruby that he was rebuilding. Basically there was no loom and I had to make one up and then connect the admittedly limited components. But it was a challenge and took a couple of weekends to sort out.

Whilst I sorted the electrics he busied himself with various tasks bolting on bits here and there and I was amazed when he said he was going to ring up the Austin Ruby Club for an exhaust system which would arrive the following day. Wow, no wonder the Austin Rubies remain on the road, so a seed was sown.



I got to thinking that unless we did something similar with the DAFs then there would be very few DAFs in a matter of only a few years. And that was how we came to create the club 30 years ago.

It doesn't seem that long ago and for sure the time has whizzed by, but we have seen some amazing things and met some super people, many of whom are sadly no longer around.



Back in 1980 I had a good career ahead of me; we had had a house built to our specification and we had enough time on our hands plus the enthusiasm to establish the club. Naturally things would change – Maggie and I both seemed to get busier and take on more responsibilities, but largely we always found the time for the club and have been proud to see it grow to the point where we had 350+ members. They were the heady days and not all of the members then were actually that keen on the DAF - to them it was just a cheap form of transport which the club helped to maintain at an economic cost.

Their loss was not such an issue for the club and it was always understood that we would decline in numbers, but those who stayed with us would be the true DAF enthusiasts, and that has come about over time.

It is hard to believe that early magazines were typed onto stencils (no room for error and no spell checkers in those days) before the stencils were laboriously duplicated off by an old Gestetner, I think.

Going digital

The pages were then stacked on the dining table and local members were drafted in to walk around the table to pick up one of each of the sheets to create the magazine. It was hard work and it seemed a blessing when we moved from a manual to an electric typewriter. But what a quantum leap when in 1985 we bought our first Amstrad computer to do the word processing. We never envisaged the access to information or the

every day acceptance of computers to do the donkey work, nor did we have any idea that we would be able to shoot material and photos around the country with no real effort, when we started the club. Yet now it is amazing just what the technology allows us to do and all so easily.



Some of the social events were of course mad extravaganzas, involving visits to Holland, France, Luxembourg, and Belgium. We developed good friendships with our friends in DAF Club Nederland and that led to meetings with the German club, and it was astounding when on one visit to Holland we were joined by Kaz Wysocki from New York.

Kaz went on to start DAF Club America which survives today and Eugene Lapidaire started the Belgian Club, which still is going strong.

Since those times we have hosted visits from DAF Club Nederland to social events in the UK in Sherwood Forest and more latterly at Princethorpe, thanks to our excellent relationship with Princethorpe College which only came about because Alex Darkes was a DAF fanatic.

Events – something for everyone

As for club events we have always had a good strong programme and always managed to keep away from just motoring events so that all the family was catered for by holding events where other attractions were available.

We developed good relations with the Volvo Owners Club, the Renault Owners Club with some obvious linkages there, but we also had a brief spell when we seemed to keep bumping into the Panhard Club, yet we have seen nothing of them for many years.

It would be too easy to start to list those members who have had a significant impact on the club as we know it, but that would invite disaster in that someone would inevitably be left out, albeit unwittingly. Just writing this article is causing me to think back at some of the characters that were members and who sadly are no longer with us. They enriched our club through their involvement and I certainly remain grateful for their contributions over the years.



DAF Owners at a weekend event in North Wales 1983

There are of course the next generation too, for many members attended club events with their young families and those little children have probably got families of their own now.

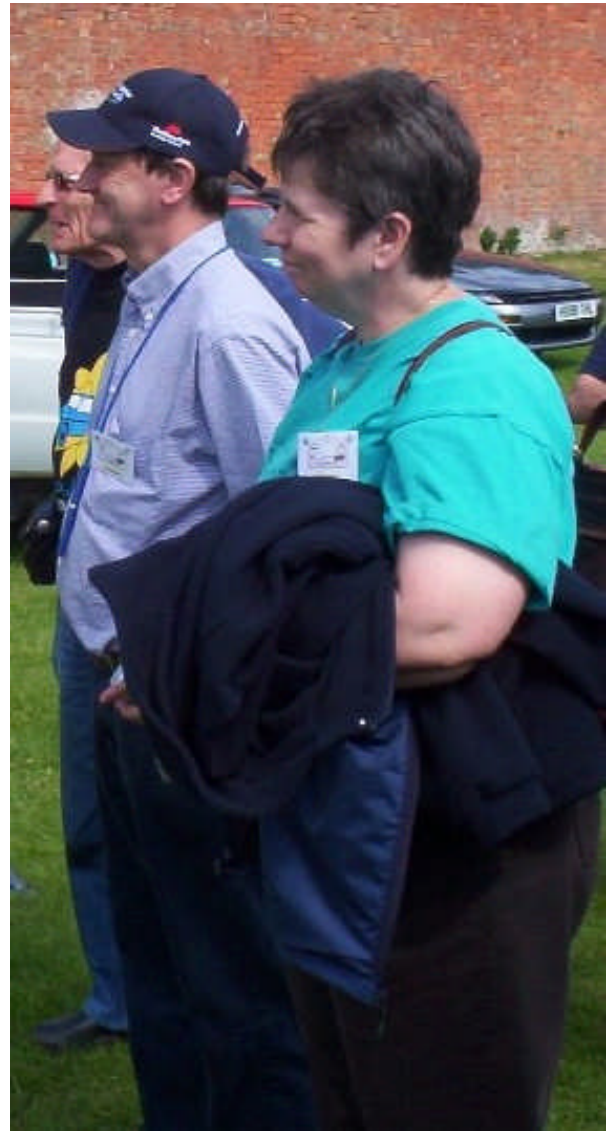


British DAFS somewhere in Holland in convoy

And we have attracted our fair share of those I can, in a kindly sort of way, describe as eccentrics even they themselves don't recognise this in themselves!

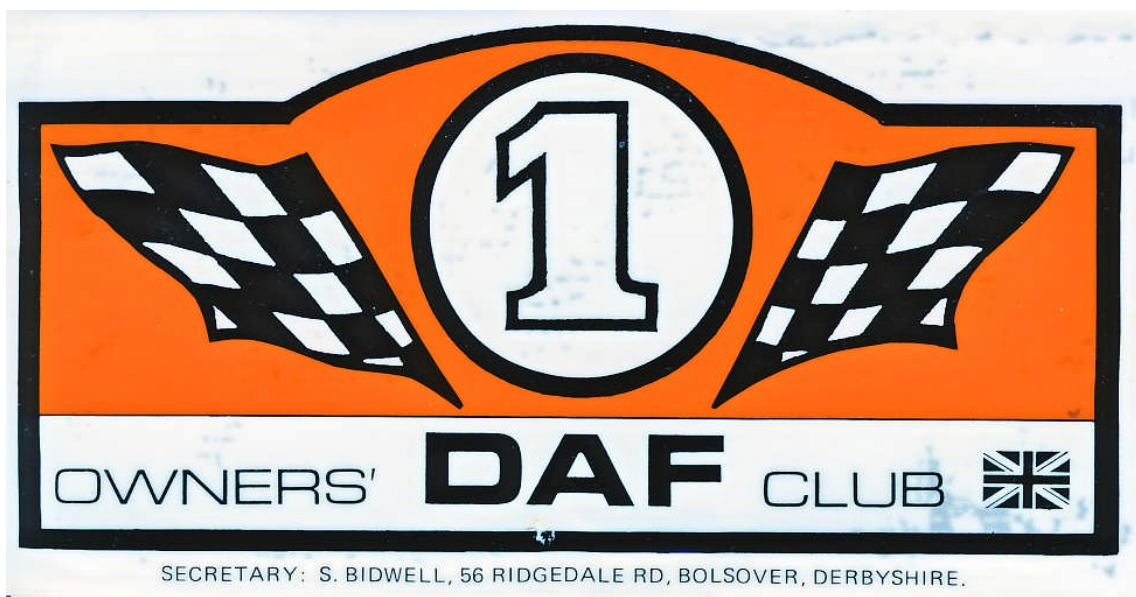
Yes, we have had some really good times and the camaraderie remains strong and it has all been well worth it.

Here's to the next 30 years of the Club.



Steve and Maggie – it's all down to them!

Steve Bidwell



Where does the time go?

The very nature of a classic car club means that its members like to look back on things and have a certain nostalgia for things past. But, many of us also keep an eye on the present and try to look into the future.

I've not quite made the 30 years membership yet – I'm on 29, having joined in 1981. I was young then, and was the proud owner of my first car; my mimosa yellow DAF 55, which as you will have read before, I came to own by pure chance – it hadn't been planned!

But one day, whilst waiting to pay for a new clutch and drum to be fitted at the local DAF dealer that was still around then, I saw the home-made typed notice that announced the formation of a DAF Owners Club. "This seems like an interesting idea," I thought, and decided to give it a go. The rest, as they say, is history.

in etc, but I was persuaded that it was near enough to get to and come back quickly if it wasn't for me.

Needless to say, it was a marvelous awakening and I remember that we all met at a nearby hotel so that all the DAFs could arrive together. I was amazed by the buzz and enthusiasm – there must have been 15 or so DAFs there that day, which was a sight I had not seen before! I was immediately made to feel very welcome by the other DAF owners there. I soon worked out who Steve and Maggie were, because they were also quite young (!) and were in a Saab 99. I thought it best not to ask questions, but then it dawned on me that they had taken loads of bits and bobs for other people that would not have all fitted in a DAF.



The sight of so many DAFs in one place was special

The Daf Owners Club.


Founded in January 1980. The aims of the club are to promote and preserve Daf cars and cars that use the variomatic transmission pioneered by Daf.

DO I HAVE TO BE A DAF OWNER?
No. Although most members do own and drive Daf cars, we welcome with equal enthusiasm owners of Volvos 66 and 343 series. In fact the club exists for anyone who is interested in Dafs, car owner or not.

CAN I GET A DISCOUNT ON SPARES?
Yes indeed. More and more spares are becoming available at extremely good prices. A spares list is provided for each member who then orders the necessary parts through the club.

To quote you a few examples.*
A pair of drive belts for the Daf 44 will cost £43.33
Brake pads for the Daf 66 will cost you £4.25.
Spark plugs are only 80p each.
A Volvo 66 oil filter just £1.95.

* Prices correct at going to press.



DAF 31 DAF 33 DAF 44 DAF 46 DAF 55 DAF 66 VOLVO 66 VOLVO 343

HOW DO I JOIN?
On the back of this leaflet you will find a membership application form. Simply fill it in and send to Steve Bidwell (whose address you will find on the form). Give him the details of your car, if you have a Daf or Volvo, as it enables us to make up our file of cars still running.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?
A years membership is £10.

WHAT DO I GET OUT OF IT?
The Club's quarterly magazine which is filled with Daf news and views, members letters and technical articles. If you want to buy or sell anything Daf, you can place an advertisement in the magazine free of charge. Several outings a year, organised by the Club, where members can meet and get to know one another. If you have problems with your car, there is always someone to offer advice, either through the magazine, or at one of the Club events. And, as already mentioned, you immediately become entitled to order spares at greatly reduced prices.

I received a magazine, and there was an announcement that the club hoped to attend a classic car show at Donington Park. This would be a new experience for me, because I was very new to being a car owner and driver, and had not been to one of these events before. So I decided to give it a go, not least being the fact that Donington Park was quite handy for where I lived.

Mind you, I nearly didn't get there in the end, because being a shy retiring sort of chap, I suddenly had last minute doubts about fitting

I also experienced my first auto jumble that day. David Owen told me that there was a genuine DAF 55 workshop manual for sale on one of the stalls, and that I should get it. I didn't like to let on that I probably wouldn't be very good at making sense of it. But I bought it, and still have it.

That day, seeing lots of different DAFs and owners of all ages and backgrounds sharing their common interest and enthusiasm, was a pivotal stage for me, and from then on, I was, I suppose, hooked. I have also made some very good friends as a result.

Other events started to happen around the country and I found myself attending many of them. I became a frequent visitor to Bolsover DAF HQ, either to help walk around the

dining room table stapling magazine pages or to have things done on my 55.

I attended AGMs, and just prior to the one in 1982, Steve phoned me to say that as I had been to several events and meetings, would I consider being the, wait for it, “social events co-ordinator.” No pressure there then! But this saw me getting out and about to even more DAF events.

Off the top of my head, I remember the regular events including Christmas get togethers in Lancashire, various visits all over Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Watford, Kent, Sussex and many more. We had two weekends in Wales. Then, of course, the rather ambitious foreign jaunts.



1984 on a street in Utrecht, Holland

Naturally, visits to Holland remain in my mind as highlights, making many Dutch friends, and also, of course, playing hosts for their visits to this country. 1984 saw our first club trip to Holland, and it was, for me, a mixture of excitement and perhaps a bit of trepidation, having not driven abroad before.

But, safety in numbers and supreme planning and organisation meant that all was well. Oh what a trip that was in 84... the convoy of DAFs down to Harwich and through Holland; the laid-back hotel/guest house in Utrecht, that the DAF Owners Club took over with late nice illicit tea parties; Eric Bhojani running through the streets of Utrecht flashing his DAF t-shirt to some passing locals, only to

have it pointed out to him that he wasn't actually wearing it at the time.

The visit to the original DAF Museum and a tour of the DAF factory, where brand new Volvo 340s were coming off the production line. But above all, the friendliness and hospitality of our group and hosts.

In 1985, we hosted DAF Club Nederland, starting with a big gathering at Brands Hatch before taking over Sherwood Forest. We went back to Holland as a group in 1987, where we picked up on much of the good times had before. 1990 saw another visit there for the One Thousand DAF Day.



How could I possibly forget January 1988, when Steve, Maggie and I decided to attend the DAF Club Nederland AGM? We went in one car – their DAF 33 van, and yes, it was a van, not a combi, so there was no rear seat, and I therefore sat legs straight out in the luggage area! In those days, you had to show your passport when leaving the country, and to this day, I don't think the officer knew that I was in the back. That visit was also remembered for the wild weather – snow and ice on the ground and gale-force winds for the crossing. Steve and Maggie insisted that we have a proper meal in the ferry's restaurant. I went green.

Talking of that 33 van, I remember the time when on a hot sunny day, Steve and Maggie were in the van closely followed by me in my 55 heading towards Bromley for the classic car show. Unfortunately, the van attracted the attention of the Police on the M25, and was pulled over. They were concerned that it seemed to be sitting low on its axles, and that the front number plate was not showing properly.

It was a tense few minutes as I observed from the hard shoulder some “little chats”

taking place. One of the main reasons for the van sitting so low, was the fact that Steve had taken along his lawnmower, as well as loads of spares that people had ordered. He wanted our DAF area to be neat and tidy!

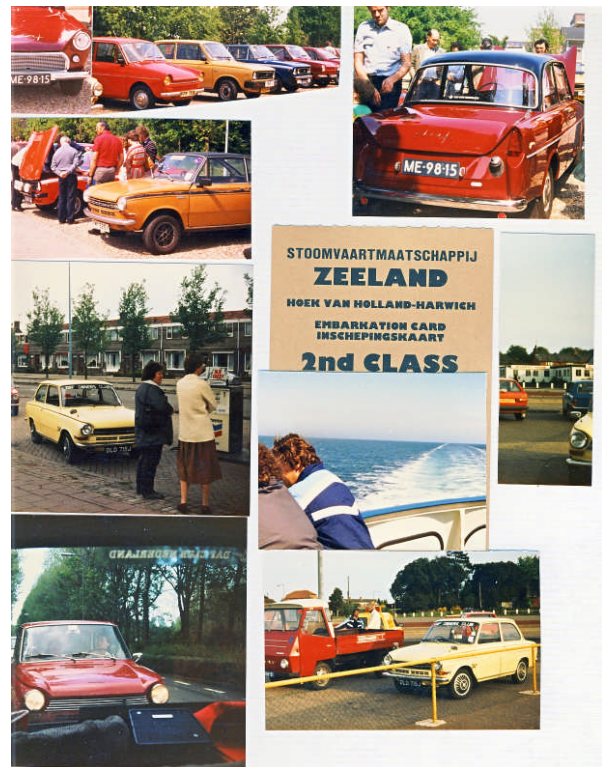


Steve mows the grass at Bromley with the mower carried down in the back of the 33 van

The number plate query was resolved when Steve pointed out that the van was showing a number plate to the front of the vehicle, which is simply all that the law requires, but instead of being in the customary place, it was mounted on the front of the van's roof – i.e. securely fixed and facing to the front. We were soon on our way again. This brought relief not just to us, but, I suspect, the Police.

Then in 1989, there was the quite remarkable trip from the UK to Belgium, France, the Swiss borders, Luxembourg and back up for a DCN event in Holland.

After a few years of being the events co-ordinator, I took on the task of editing the magazine from Elaine Owen, who had set the magazine on a solid road. And twenty-odd years later, I'm still doing it. Much to Maggie's amazement, I seem to have embraced computer technology with both the magazine and website. For many years, I know she used to worry about my understanding, or lack of, regarding the intricacies of computer commands and programmes. "There there, Richard," she'd say, as I vented my fist and frustration on a totally innocent keyboard.



Holland '84 – Steve came home in a Pony

And here we are now, in the club's 31st year. Some things have changed, people have come and gone, some are still here. We are a lot smaller club than we used to be, but that doesn't really matter – quality not quantity, perhaps.

Something else that makes me proud of the club is the fact that for many years, the motoring press and experts have come to us when looking for information about DAF cars. The club has built up a good reputation – not one of shouting the odds all the time, but one of professional calm and knowledge. Recent years in particular has seen an increase in coverage not just for the club, but also for DAF Variomatics.

Who knows what the future will bring? And despite all these years and activities, I have still only ever owned two DAFs – well, four if you include the Volvo 340s. But, if we have our way, the DAF Owners Club and the DAFs will continue to belt along for a long time to come.

These are but a few memories to kick things off. Please share yours with us, too – and we can all read about them in future magazines!

Richard Butler