HGV road wear

In the continuing debate over who should pay what and how much in order to pay for the upkeep of our roads, one reader recently opposed any reduction in tax for low mileage drivers on the grounds that one couldn’t expect a pro rata refund of one’s TV licence for only watching once a week.

He seems to be missing the point of how wear occurs on our roads network. The wear has to provide a service regardless of the number of viewers. The A26, however, will not deteriorate if it isn’t driven on!

True that a car will inflict more wear overall to the roads the further it travels. But the wear my lovely 1978 1275GT Mini subjected the roads of the UK to during its 5000 miles per annum pales in insignificance to that caused by any HGV over the same distance (I work it out to 10 to the power of 6 times more miles per mile according to my own TRRL experience).

Why can’t I pay for the upkeep of the roads by the mile through the cost of petrol for my Mini? I can hardly wear out tarmac when it is stored off-road as it is for nine months of the year plus I already pay for a lot of fuel in the course of 40,000 business miles undertaken in my Mondeo.

Isn’t it time for the real culprits who are reducing our roads to rubble to be made to pay more to rectify the damage they wreak? Assuming all the contributions work, it cancels the upkeep of the road network, my Mini would cost me next to nothing if HGVs were made to pay the thousands of pounds they really should.

In passing, we mini owners awaiting the time that our ‘modern classics’ reach 25 years of age to get our ‘free’ tax disc are now sadly going to wait forever. Nice of the man to freeze the ‘free’ tax on cars made before 1 January 1973. As the Chancellor giveth, the Chancellor taketh away, eh?

John C Blass

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A correspondent objected to the suggestion that Motor Vehicle Taxation (which he describes with the long defunct title of ‘Road Fund Tax’) should be replaced by a simple tax on fuel. He points out that vehicles do not all use fuel at identical rates, forgetting that we are all free to select ‘gas guzzlers’ and pay for the privilege or may go for more economical vehicles if we so wish. This is not unfair, simply a matter of choice.

Sadly, despite being a major oil producing nation, we already have the most expensive motor fuel in Europe - thanks to tax. Petrol cost only 31p per gallon in 1970 while it now sets us back around £3. Maybe there really is a limit beyond which even a rapacious Revenue is not prepared to go in taxing an otherwise cheap but totally essential product. But I wouldn’t care to bet on it

Konald Chamulfin, East Yorkshire

Left right, left right

As is well known, there is an accelerator pedal and a brake pedal in an automatic car, and as nature has endowed me with two feet, I use my right foot for operating the accelerator and my left foot for pushing the brake pedal. In built-up areas where an emergency stop may be required, such as a child darting out from behind a parked car, I feel sure that left foot braking is milliseconds faster than lifting the right foot from the accelerator and then applying the brakes.

Another advantage of using the left foot on the brake pedal is the extra control it gives when moving off up a steep hill, or reversing slowly to hitch up a caravan. So, on a long journey why not let both feet share the workload?

G A Serrels, Dorset

Dot gain

Unlike Philip Paul (April page 8) my car top was spattered a few years ago with pinhead sized pale yellow spots. I identified as pollen grains from honey bees. A Tony-keeper told me that ‘cleansing flights’ are quite common and occur when bees have been confined to their hive by inclement weather. When conditions improve they fly out to expel their gut contents and so not foul their hive.

This action is not noticed unless a clean car or drying washing are in their dumping area. The spots were easily removed.

K J Coghill, Bristol

Slow motion

P R Morris (April page 33) assumes that a slow moving caravan is the cause of his delay. In fact the caravan too is often held up by trucks, farm vehicles and senior citizens in their little Micros/Fiestas/Metros etc - the 35mph everywhere brigade. Consider also that on a single carriageway road a caravan is limited to 50mph. Don’t blame the driver, it is the law.

G A Serrels, Dorset

Cell by date

I thought you might be interested to hear that my Volvo car battery passed away quietly in its sleep on 16 April 1998, suffering from a cell breakdown. So what? Well, when I purchased my present 1988 Volvo 240 GL it was two years old and to the best of my knowledge had the original Volvo battery fitted. Now just over eight years later, with a total of 170,000 miles recorded from new, I have had to replace it. Is this a record I ask myself. Even if it isn’t, it’s reassuring to know that Volvo batteries last almost as long as their engines.

David Long, Northants

Left right, left right

As for people taking risks in overtaking, the police have a phrase for it - suicidal impetue.

G M Holmes, Peterborough

There is no doubt that at times caravans are an inconvenience, but that is all. They are certainly not a hazard or a danger as P R Morris suggests. I therefore think it important to introduce him to a new word with which he is clearly unfamiliar: tolerance. When I am driving solo and get stuck behind a caravan, yes I do get impatient and frustrated. The difference is that I recognise those two conditions as human weaknesses and I do not give in to them. If we all exercised more tolerance on the road we would all be better drivers and better people for it.

Tony O’Brien, Bristol

As a caravanner, I too am often frustrated by slow moving lorries, tractors, cyclists and even sight-seeing motorists, but I accept that that is how things are on the roads today. Most regular caravanners would not allow following faster traffic to accumulate to the extent described by P R Morris - they would, where possible, pull into a lay-by to allow faster vehicles past. The trouble is that most minor roads are ill provided with suitable lay-bys. Perhaps Mr Morris’ energies might be directed more profitably in campaigning for such facilities in his area.

People using caravans in Mr Morris’ locality are on a holiday, something perhaps not possible otherwise given the high price of hotel and B&B accommodation. They are therefore spending money in the local economy and helping the local business community. As for banning caravans between 0600 and 1800 this is not practical as people would be arriving at their campsites too early in the morning (after travelling all night) or too late to book in.

Perhaps Mr Morris would also like to ban senior citizens/farm vehicles/milk floats/bicycles and so on because he finds them inconvenient to his progress. HGVs cause far more traffic congestion than caravans and are a problem all over the country.

C Colin, Nanton, Hants

After reading the letter from P R Morris I can only believe that

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