Barmouth Sailors' Institute

(Founded in 1890 by the late Canon EDWARD HUGHES B.A.)

Sailors' Institute, The Quay, Barmouth, Gwynedd, LL42 1ET

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NEWSLETTER ISSUE THIRTY ONE

(Edited & Published by Trevor Roberts)

June 2024



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Reverend Benedict (Ben) Griffith

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Trevor Roberts.

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Chairman's Notes

Well here we are again half way through another year and we have reached Issue 31.

Lots of articles in this issue and I'm sure you will enjoy reading them.

Two news items I need to inform you of at the start of my words are:

Firstly, after managing to keep our annual membership rate at £5 for almost 28 years your committee discussed over several months a way of increasing our funds. They have now accepted my proposal of increasing the annual membership to £10.
We realise that the cost means doubling the fee, but after 28 years I doubt if there are any other organisations who can claim to still have continued to improve the facilities that we have at the Institute without asking their members for extra payments.
Remember this new fee doesn't start until January 2025.

Secondly, I am sad to inform our members that our Vice Chair John Puddle has decided to resign from his position.
Although I asked John to reconsider as he has been part of our team for many years, due to personal reasons he felt that he wished to stand down as Vice Chair.
I'm glad to report that John has agreed to continue to open and close the Institute daily and to ensure that someone else is available to carry this out on the few odd occasions when he is unable to.

I'm still hopeful in our next newsletter due in December to return to continue theme of your officers/members profiles and also as promised previously to produce a history of our Railway viaduct.

Again I'm grateful to our officers for all their help and support, with our Treasurer Alan Vincent also doubling up helping compiling some of the newsletter articles.
Helen Palmer our Membership secretary keeping our

membership updated almost weekly.
And of course my personal thanks to Janet who besides being the Institute secretary keeps the Chairman in order (Tries ?)

Not forgetting our President the Rev. Ben Griffith who as an active President who takes part and plays an active role in the committee's deliberations.

Enjoy the rest of the summer months and I look forward to December 2024,

Trevor (Chairperson)



SECRETARY'S CHAT

'Summertime and the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high'

I hope by the time you read this, Summer really will have decided to pay us a visit.

When the every day life at the Sailors' Institute ticks over steadily, the Secretary's job is much quieter and less onerous but when it comes to Trevor asking for some words for the Newsletter, things are more difficult because I have less to report.

I'm looking forward to an email saying when I can meet up for our annual coffee with loyal members who I helped in some small part with their family history during lockdown. It's always interesting to hear the latest discoveries.

Just a few weeks ago I met another member who was looking for information on Major William 'Bill' Tilman, our local adventurer who has been described as the greatest explorer and adventurer of the 20th century but alas was lost en route to Port Stanley, Falkland Islands where he had hoped, despite being 80 years old, to have climbed Mount Foster.

Unfortunately, I couldn't help with the enquiry but am pleased to say I could pass him on to a couple of people who certainly could. One who is a very loyal Institute member and my 'go to' person should I need any help about Barmouth's history on land or sea. The other had actually sailed with Bill, as he liked to be known.

Our member should now be in the Dolomites with a group visiting Belluno, a town Bill Tilman knew very well during WW11 whilst fighting in the SOE with the Albanian and Italian partisans. He intends to trek the Alta Via Vista, an area well known to the partisans. We are hoping we'll have an interesting story to include in our end of year Newsletter.

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Via our website, a gentleman told me he had discovered at low tide what looked like the remains of an old boat, on Llwyngwril beach. It's in the area where a lot of petrified forest is visible. Again, unable to help, I referred him to the Marine Archaeology department in Bangor.

Unexpectedly I received an email from a gentleman with a copy of an article he had written for the June edition of the publication' Best of British'. It would have been nice to have met up with him but he hadn't known exactly when he would be visiting Barmouth. This is the second publication the Institute has featured in. Way back in 2018 the prestigious magazine 'World of Interiors' produced a lovely six page article written by Ruth Guilding which included marvellous photographs of the interior of the building. Despite it being a dark and wet day, the photographer did not want any artificial lighting. The results were quite amazing. From the article, we gained a member from the U.S.A. who owns an antique shop in Concord, N.H. Other antique dealers from Mid and South Wales also got in touch. A number of people have told me recently they've seen reruns of television programmes in which the Institute has featured. So we're out there!

At the moment I'm struggling to submit our Museum Accreditation renewal application – a most important accolade I must try and keep for our small Sailors' Institute. It more or less puts us on a par with the 'big boys' such as county museums and libraries. Due to lockdown everything was deferred and now it's caught up with me!! Keeps me 'off the streets' as one says.

It doesn't seem that long since in Issue 19 (December 2014) I touched on the anniversary of the beginning of WW1 and the part Welsh soldiers played in the Battle of the Somme and now it's the 80th anniversary of D Day. Having just watched the commemorations on television this morning, it's a very sombre and sad thought that after so much human sacrifice, other wars are still currently going on. But on a cheerful note, today is sunny and dry. I hope all of you have not suffered too much from the wet and cold Winter and Spring and can enjoy the Summer warmth 'in the bones' between mowing the grass and weeding. Summer delights in sound and smell!

Knowing that Trevor is waiting for my words, I'll sign off and see you in December. Very best wishes to you all.

Janet Griffith Hon. Secretary



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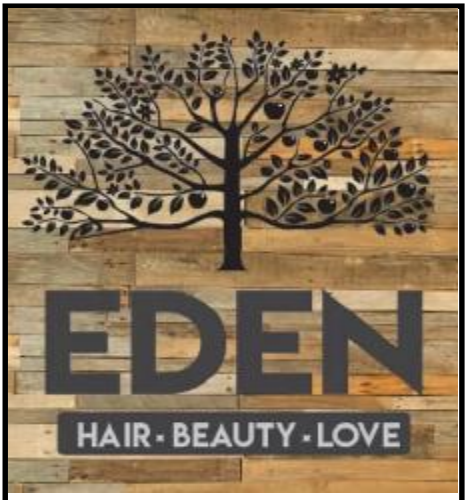


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Barmouth to Fort William Three Peaks Yacht Race: How I became Interested and Entered By Dave Bird

I've never understood how addiction works, how someone can go back to something then go back, then go back, then go back, and back, and back, and ..... Until I did the Three Peaks Yacht Race in 1998

The race has nothing to do with chemical addiction but more to do with terror, jubilation, enjoying experience and sharing with other competitors thinking what on earth has just happened over the last however number of days. Many participants saying never again at the end of each race only to enter as soon as entries are accepted.

And here, at the time of writing, I'm preparing for my 17th race

In 1978 I watched the beginning of the race and a few years later I was asked if I wanted to be part of a team entering the Race, that was 1998.

Ian Hudson, a local Barmouth estate agent, owned the yacht 'She Fever', a She 32. The team consisted of two of Ian's sons, John, a friend of one, Ian and myself. The race was the last but one year it would use Ravenglass as the Scafel stopover.

We came last that year.

The learning, for me that year included:

1. **The need for preparation before the race. That for me starts the year before and then January/February the year of the race.**
2. **The team needs to know each other and their limitations. That was proved to me in later races. Several 'bonding' meetings need to happen well before the race.**

3. **Several people have said to me they plan for the weather months before the race. I think, It's a load of tosh. A week or so before the race is important. The weather can be summed up by the saying 'Yes there's going to be weather'. Deal with it. Yes, plan for the extremes and expect them. Then prepare to adapt for different winds, tides and conditions as you go.**

That race was the first time I experienced a katabatic wind, off the Mull of Kintyre. In simple terms, it's where warm air



rises one side of a hill or steep slope and as it reaches the top it cools and rushes down the other side, only very fast.

For the 1999 race I marshalled with, the late, Colin Walker at Corpach, the village at the entrance to the Caledonian Canal. Corpach is used now as a result of the entrance to Fort William, off the pier, becoming unsafe. It also offers a safe haven after being battered in the race, a pub, showers and a shop.

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I remember as Colin and myself finished our shift at 07:00, on a beautiful sunny morning, mentioning to Colin I'd like to walk the Ben. I collected sandwiches and drinks and set off. There were two people I passed on their way up well before the Zig Zags. They'd stopped for a drink; we exchanged hellos and I carried on. Stopping at the start of the zig zags for a coffee, they caught up. We chatted and it turned out Darren was an ex-parra, and just happened to be in to ultramarathons. He'd done the Marathon Des Ables, twice. I had a Three Peaks Yacht Race shirt on and he asked about what it involved. Darren had a friend he trained with who was also an ex-parra. That was the start of getting a team together for the 2000 race. Now we needed a competitive boat.
Darren's then girlfriend became his wife and two boys later, as they say, the rest his history.

Ian Hudson and myself were at the Olympia Boat show promoting the Three Peaks Yacht Race, sharing a stand with a Helly Hanson supplier. We went to see other stands and met a guy who did yacht charter, asking him if he had a boat that would be competitive in the race. He said he did. What a load of ……. We went to Cowes and tried 'his boat', Predator'. It needed 10 people just to keep it in a straight line. We met in the bar at the hotel we were staying and just looked at each other waiting for somebody to say something, then everybody shouted "let's go home". The following day we met with the charterer to say no. He said he would only charter us a boat if his son was skipper. We left him to himself. A couple of days later he contacted us to say he'd found us a charter of a new Reflex 38; we'd made it clear his son was not welcome. John Lever, Chairman of Helly Hanson Europe was to be the third sailing member with John and Darren as runners. That was late summer 1999. Helly Hanson sponsored the Race for 4 years.

We had a team and a competitive boat ready to enter the 2000 Race.

We also found a sponsor, Charter Continuum, a rather large software company. At the time if you called BT or similar big business you'd go through their software. Then, year 2000,

through their software, any problems would be sorted within 24 hours.

There were three Reflex 38s in the race that year, two skippered by racing skippers, one had done the race before and one who was a professional racing skipper. Geoff West who had done the race before was an amateur racing skipper. We've done the race together a few times since, along with the Scottish Islands race a few times, coming first in class and 2nd overall twice.

January 2000 John Lever called me to say his daughter had arranged her wedding for the week of the race and had to drop out. That left us without the third sailor. Enter Martin Parouty. You'll know Martin as one of the guys who operates one of the Barmouth ferries.

We entered the 2000 Three Peaks Yacht Race

Due to insurance difficulties for a lot of yacht owners, the committee decided to use Whitehaven instead of Ravenglass.

The race then started with a parachute flare with the 5 minute warning beforehand, we crossed the line about level with the other two Reflex 38s. By Bardsey we were approx. 30 min behind the other two. It was here I heard the phrase "I reckon ....." from Ian, for the first time. We were about 30 min ahead of the rest of the fleet when Ian did an "I reckon". We sailed into the lee of Bardsey, sat becalmed and watch the rest of the fleet sail past.

The Reflex is so simple to sail we caught and passed the rest of the fleet arriving at Caernarfon in third place. When Darren & John came back from their 23 mile 'jog' and onboard we were told the leading two yachts had run aground 'round the corner'. They were aground off Plas Menai.

We sat at anchor and cooked a thawed out frozen meal as the second placed boat sailed past. They shouted across asking us if we were in trouble, we replied "no we're just having something to eat". They shouted "but we're in a race". It was just breaking light so as not to wake other

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crews we quietly said you won't get through the, tide's wrong, they carried on. We sailed past the two other Reflexes, laying on the sides, and into the Swellies with the oars ready before the first bridge. The port hand oar going over the head of a guy fishing in a small dinghy. I still don't know how we missed his head

We passed the yacht that had passed us earlier, they were aground on the Platters rock, with a look of shock on their faces, trying to use a pair of dinghy oars to get off the rock.

On Charter Continuum we had one of the best sails I've had between Caernarfon and Whitehaven setting the record for the leg only to break it 3 years later on Spirit of Barmouth, another Reflex 38. A record that still stands



John and Darren had another blistering cycle and run of 53 miles from Whitehaven to Scafell and back. Then back on to the boat.

Leaving Whitehaven, the wind dropped and we remained in view for nearly 20 hours with sea like a mirror. We did catch some wind to get us past Mull of Galloway, Port Patrick and

Mull of Kintyre only for Martin and myself rowing just to stand still in the North Passage hour after hour.

We found out that some teams had retired due to Charter time running out. Cedric another Barmouth local team was one such boat

We picked up some breeze but having rowed hour after hour we were 'cream crackered' and decided to sail into the bay just off the entrance to Crinan Canal. We anchored under sail had 5 hours sleep, something to eat and drink, and set off at day break.

We sailed with a light breeze through the islands off Corryfrechan, and as soon as clearing the islands we raised the spinnaker. The filming boat came close asking if we needed anything, we declined the offer because the rules stated no outside help. We were running out of water and food.

Little did we know then that the wind had started to build from south and other boats were beginning to catch us.



We sailed under spinnaker until we cleared to souther tip of ..... when all hell broke loose. The wind out of nowhere was on the bow. Mad panic dropping the spinnaker and shortening sails with a number 3 jib and a reef in the main. We tacked all the way to Corran Narrows where looking back we noticed the sails of other teams in the distance.

Tacking through Corran Narrows is not for the faint hearted, with wind and tide against us. Ian skippered and kept both sails aloft, with Myself handling the sheets and Martin shouting out the depth before each tack.

I learned a lesson from that I used in following races: take the weight off the jib by letting it flap and use the main as the driver. This allows the boat to point, all be it slowly through the Narrows. I was criticised by an on-looker saying my sails were a mess. I just looked at him thinking "you've never sailed through there with wind and tide against you".

We sailed into Corpach in first place and John and Darren set off on their run. Later they learned they were just 8 minutes off getting King of the Mountains. Darren turning to John saying that was you stopping to 'do your business' behind that rock. King of the Mountains is the fastest runners over all three legs, Snowdon, Scafel Pike and Ben Nevis.

We won the race. The next year, 2001, there was no race due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. 2002 we entered with a chartered boat from Whitehaven, Midnight Getaway finishing fifth. 2002 we chartered another Reflex 38 from the Isle of Wight. We won that year, as Spirit of Barmouth, coming in 16 hours before the next team. But these are another story all together along with more 'I reckons'.

David Bird



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THE FISHERMAN'S ALPHABET

A stands for anchor, it's the fisherman's hope.
It's a very good thing with a chain or a rope,
To ride out the storm and keep time with the tide,
In his beautiful craft, which he watches with pride.

B stands for binnacle, which is close to hand,
When steering his craft far, far from the land.
To the grounds which he knows are oft covered with fish,
That get him a living and make some people rich.

C stands for the capstan, the crew at it work,
And woe to the lad who his duty do shirk.
For the captain is blunt and he thinks it no sin,
To give him the sack without any tin (*money*).

D stands for darkness, through which he must go
On cold winter nights, in rain, frost or snow,
When dangers are rife and fill landsmen with dread,
Even when they are snug in a warm cosy bed.

E stands for eke out the bread, beef and tea,
'Waste not' is the motto when sailing at sea.
For when you are hundreds of miles from the shore
It is hard to replenish an impoverished store.

F stands for fish, a most cheery sight.
Let them be caught in the day or the night,
And those who do catch them with net or with line,
God bless their toil, and send them plenty of prime.

G stands for gaff which is attached to the sail,
To hold it smart in calm or in gale.
So up with the peak and hold her a-luff,
To steer a smack well, you must not be a muff.

H stands for hatchway which leads to the hold,
Where they carry tackle, water and coal.
And ballast to make her stand up to the breeze,
Top carry her over gigantic seas.

I stand for ice, a most useful thing,
It enables fishermen his catches to bring
For many a league from his own native home
Where fickle fortune compels him to roam.

J stands for Jack, oft a fisherman's name,
But they christened him John, though that was too tame.
He spends his good money quite free on the shore,
Then to sea he will go for to earn him some more.

K stands for keel, of timber so strong,
Which stretches from stem to sternpost along,
And never, no never, your smack to keep sound,
She never should touch on any hard ground.

L stands for lamps both red and green glass,
To prevent sad collisions when vessels do pass.
So keep them well trimmed to make them burn bright,
Then you shipmates below will sleep more safe at night.

M stands for moon; it's the fisherman's joy.
He is as pleased with its rays as a child with a toy.
For it lightens his path and makes the fish sport
And gladdens his heart as to market they are brought.

N stands for north, the compass card round
If you raise it up beneath will be found -
A small bar of steel and a lodestone as well,
Always points to the pole and acts like a spell.

O stands for oyster, a most expensive treat,
And if you buy natives you will vouch they are sweet.
They are a dish for the king and will nourish the brain,
So once you have tasted them you will try them again.

P stands for port when sailing at sea,
Whether close hauled or with the wind free.
It's the rule of the road and an excellent plan,
To use the port helm whenever you can.

Q stands for quick sands, a most dangerous place,
That gets lots of skippers in a shocking disgrace.
Do look out for the lightship and cast over the lead,
This hint then may save you from sorrow and dread.

R stands for rigging, which holds up the mast
When carrying sails before the rude blast.
So give her the sheet, it's a lowering sky
And to see bonny Kate tonight we will try.

S stands for stars, those heavenly flames,
Though only a few fishermen boast of astronomer's fame.
But they can point to Orion and Saturn and Day,
Yonder is the Pole Star, cross the Milky Way.

T stands for tacking, get ready about.
"Hard down with the helm", the skipper will shout.
"Ease off the jib sheet, your bowline stand by.
There goes the *Bold Admiral* to catch him we'll try."

U stands for Union Jack, if you please.
A flag that we love to see float on the breeze.
It's a fisherman's hope, where e'er he may roam,
It reminds him of kindred and loved ones at home.

V stands for vane, so trim and so smart,
'Tis a guide to the eye and a pride to the heart.
To hoist up gay colours of every hue,
With a smart, active, willing, wide awake crew.

W stands for windlass, the crew as they shy
To heave in the cable, the bobstay and guy.
Ship your handspikes together, sing a merry song,
With hands that are light and arms that are strong.

X is a letter hard to bring in,
That every seaman should learn to swim.
Then if by misfortune you fall in the sea,
What an *ex*cellent thing this letter might be!

Y stands for yarn that an old tar can spin
To his shipmates below before they turn in,
Of adventures at sea, or freaks on the shore
That would cause you to wonder or laugh till you roar.

Z stands for zero in winter so cold,
This letter reminds you my tale is now told.
So clear up fishermen friends on the main,
God guide us to sea, bring us safe home again.

I came across this article a couple of weeks ago. I bought it very many moons ago when David (my husband) and I visited Southwold Sailors' Reading Room.
For those of you who do not know it, the building is right on the shoreline of Suffolk and is brick built. The inside of the building

has an uncanny resemblance to our own Institute. Blue walls and opposite the entrance, a door leading to a billiard room, which like ours, was locked.
As with our building, it is still used as a Reading Room and place in which to relax. The building had been restored a couple of years or so previously but alas, was showing bad signs of damp in the walls' paintwork. I really felt sorry for the people involved with the building seeing the deterioration so soon after what must have been a lot of hard work.
At that time, the Barmouth Sailors' Institute committee and I were desperately trying to find the £101,000 needed to save our own building. I must say I remember thinking, are we going to be faced with the same future? Are we forever going to have a damp problem? Thank goodness for a wooden structure!!
Two or three years after our Southwold visit, our building was finally well restored and testament to that work shows today.

We don't get away completely scot-free, the elements are not that kind to the outside woodwork at the entrance door but with a willing volunteer recently wielding a paintbrush, we look shipshape for this summer's visitors.

This gives me the ideal opportunity to thank those of you who support us by keeping your membership up to date and also attend our coffee mornings. Grant money is not easily obtained these days and when I do apply for some possible funding, I have to prove (quite rightly) any money will be given will be for a sustainable project. With your help, I can normally prove their money will be well spent!

A big thank you to everyone. Diolch yn fawr iawn.
Janet Griffith Hon. Secretary

A post script to the above gives good news.
I contacted Mr. Vulliamy a trustee of Southwold Sailors' Reading Room to enquire whether there is any copyright I should observe on the Fisherman's Alphabet and had a nice conversation.

The aforesaid damp is still a problem but is to an extent, under control. The 2nd of June 2024 celebrates the 160th anniversary of the Reading Room, quite an outstanding achievement. We are only 134 years old.

For further information on this unique building, they have a website: www.southwoldsailorsreadingroom.co.uk

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POSTCARD FROM GWYNEDD
Bob Barton

The top left-hand corner of Wales is known for its mountains, narrow-gauge railways, lofty castles and the beaches of Cardigan Bay. Not surprising, then, that Gwynedd has long been among my favourite holiday destinations. On a recent visit, I decided to do something different. I wanted to find out what things were like in the days before railways brought large numbers of tourists. That bygone era when sailing ships were the only reliable way of travelling any distance. Then, riverbanks echoed to the sound of shipbuilders' hammers.

On the quayside in the Victorian seaside town of Barmouth is a slab of Italian Carrara marble, polished and carved into a dramatic sculpture. The Last Haul by Frank Cocksey depicts three fishermen heaving a rope. It's often missed by people concentrating on their ice-creams. Fewer still realise the stone was one of 43 marble blocks carried by a ship that sank 300 years ago on this very shore. It is known as the Bronze Bell Wreck, named for a bell that has pride of place in the town's diminutive Tŷ Gwyn museum (barsailinst.org.uk/gwyn.html) . A myriad of other items from the unnamed ship - a heavily armed French trader discovered by amateur divers in 1978 - are displayed. They include cannons, pistols, coins from 10 countries, navigational equipment and some fine cutlery. "We even have a fly that was entombed with the vessel. It may be a Genoese insect that flew on board when the marble was loaded." said a volunteer.

I got another insight into the marine life of Barmouth a few yards away in the Sailor's Institute (barsailinst.org.uk). A brightly painted, corrugated iron building on the quay, it was founded in 1890. The last of its kind open daily in Wales, this nautical time capsule hasn't changed since the days of brigs, schooners and clay pipes. At first, I was the only one there and felt like a time traveller.

A polished wood floor has mismatched chairs around a long, narrow table. Nautical journals, handwritten albums, maritime books and back issues of newspapers cover most surfaces.

There are ship models in glass cases and framed portraits of Edwardian sailors. A heavy chain is captioned: "Portion of mooring chain from Schooner Edwin, wrecked off Barmouth Jan 1843. 6 of crew, having lashed themselves to rigging, died of exposure"
Another exhibit commemorates local hero Harold Lowe, fifth officer on RMS Titanic. Apparently, he left town for life at sea, aged 14. He famously had a role rescuing survivors when the liner sank in 1912.
My browsing was interrupted by the arrival of a man clad in boots and waterproofs. He introduced himself as the ferryman whose boat crosses the Mawddach estuary to the Fairbourne steam railway. "I guess I'm the last professional sailor left in town. There's no commercial shipping any more. Time was, this building was busy with fishermen and sailors who crewed trading vessels along the coast" he said.

A glance at one of the albums confirmed the 18th and 19th centuries were their heyday. The boats imported coal, limestone and flour and exported oak bark, timber and coarse woollens called webs, made locally. "The webs were a cottage industry. Kids would learn to knit before they could talk" he said.
The following morning, I climbed the mountain behind the town. Locals call it "the Rock" but it seemed mightier than that. I reached the summit out of breath. I was amply rewarded with panoramic views of the coast, its long sweeping beaches and the sublime Mawddach estuary. The peak is called Dinas Oleu, which means citadel of light. In 1895, it was the first beauty spot bequeathed to the National Trust (01341 440238, nationaltrust.org.uk/snowdonia).
My trek involved negotiating the Old Town - Barmouth's first modest settlement, its slate-built cottages clinging precariously to a series of terraces.
The river, once plied by pleasure steamers, snaked into the distance. I could make out riverside hamlets, each with a tongue-twisting name, where boatbuilders had their busy yards. Llanelltyd, Maesgarnedd and Penmaenpool among them.

This piece is an extract from an article by Bob Barton published in the June 2024 BEST OF BRITISH magazine.
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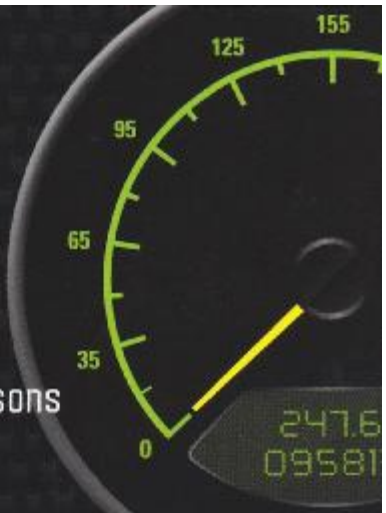
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