

Summer 2019

# Travel & motoring magazine





As a travel and motoring writer I regularly contribute articles to publications in the UK and abroad but the time has come to provide a dedicated magazine about family travel, a luxury that is fundamentally good for the soul but of course travelling with a young family brings its own challenges and I often touch on these in my pieces.

This exciting new publication launches at a very difficult time when Britain might leave the European Union and Brexit has thrown the government and country into absolute chaos. This in turn has seen many of us opting for staycations while others simply cannot afford a holiday. But even if money is tight a walk in the country or a trip to one Britain's fantastic beaches costs nothing and is incredibly invigorating.

Britain is a truly beautiful country and I celebrate this fact in my articles. While I have been privileged to travel to far flung places like Nigeria and Indonesia it is all too easy to forget the beauty that is on our doorsteps.

Combining passions for travel and motoring also allows me to put some interesting vehicles through their paces so these will feature in this magazine, too.

I hope you enjoy reading this fledgling online edition and I welcome your feedback.

**Tim Saunders**

**Editor**

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Travel & motoring magazine  
49 Church Close  
Locks Heath  
Southampton  
SO31 6LR

[www.travelwriter.biz](http://www.travelwriter.biz)

Cover: Heidi Saunders at Diggerland, Kent

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Harriett Saunders at Diggerland

# Stay in Ashford

By Tim Saunders

Returning from a break feeling relaxed is something that's pretty hard to achieve in my experience. But it has happened following our stay at the newly opened Travelodge in Ashford, Kent.

The town centre located hotel constructed of metal is situated in a modernised part of the area surrounded by other modern structures that surprisingly blend in with more historic dwellings nearby. There's a pleasingly continental feel. Traditionally, Ashford has become associated with the Eurostar train and little else. But this is an attractive town with much to offer. We find out

some interesting tales from the flagstones next to the Travelodge. We discover that the Queen of Romania was born in the town in 1875, that there's a local cycling superstar, Jamie Staff OBE and that the nearby river has claimed at least one life.

The redevelopment is still underway, which should go some way to rejuvenating the place and provide greater interest. Despite Brexit, during our stay we come across a variety of Europeans both staying at the Travelodge and in our travels around Kent. Inside the Travelodge are three floors of bedrooms and a restaurant, accessed by lift or stairs. We stay in a family room complete

with an almost entirely white bathroom, which creates a very welcome clinical and hygienic feel. There's instant hot water; hottest temperature restricted to 38 degrees Celsius so no one gets unexpectedly burnt. There's a small bath and shower allowing each one of the Saunders family to relax in peace for a little while. This is very much appreciated as I am getting over a bad cold.

Usually a Travelodge family room will only accommodate four people but we are able to shoehorn little Henry (3) inside with an oversized cot, which works well until about 2am when he wakes up and comes into our bed. Harriett (8) and Heidi (6) are comfortable in their single



beds. On the first night, despite new surroundings, the children sleep well.

Travelodge offers unlimited breakfasts that we all love. Adults pay £8.95 each and children go free. Served from 7am to 10am we amble down at around 8am and enjoy an unhurried experience. Have what you like and take your time. So we do. We all have fruit juices: apple or orange from the machine. The set up gives the children independence – they can serve themselves at the drinks machine and select their own breakfast. There's a variety of cereals, fruit salad, yoghurts, croissants, toast and of course the full English breakfast. A plethora of coffees and even hot chocolate. This meal truly does set you up for the day and I find that I can do without lunch as a result. It is possible to have dinner at the restaurant, too with a three course meal for under £13 a head.

On the second night, after a long soak in the bath I slip into the comfortable double bed after my wife reminds me to use the Vick that she packed and I sleep like a snoring elephant. She sleeps better, too. The staff are all very welcoming and polite and even help carry our bags to the car.

During our stay at the Travelodge we park on a private driveway, just under a mile away. We book the space through [Yourparkingspace.co.uk](http://Yourparkingspace.co.uk), which provides an extremely cost effective solution to expensive car parking in town centres. We also like the fact that as we park away from the town centre it gives us the luxury of exploring a little further afield than we would typically do if we parked in a central car park. When away we try to do something every day. On our first day we visit Wildwood, the park and conservation charity at Herne Bay where there are 200 animals on 40 acres of woodland. It's such a popular place that on arrival we are told that there will be a wait to get into the car park, which is full. We don't have to wait very long though and it gives us chance to have a quick bite to eat. No sooner are we through the gates and there's a make a mask activity, which all the children are keen to do. Heidi and Henry make hedgehog masks while Harriett creates a rabbit one. We then make our way round with Henry racing away; he suddenly has a burst of energy, which is great to see. Usually we have to carry him everywhere. Harriett becomes distraught when she sees a raven tearing into a dead rabbit's head, which is a bit gruesome but she has to understand how these creatures live, sooner or later. After a bit of consoling we watch the barn owl gracefully flying. There are so many wonderful animals to see including polecats and wild boars. But the highlight for us all is seeing the bears and we climb along a high rope bridge to watch them. It's

all a bit scary but very memorable although Henry doesn't seem to bat an eyelid. We learn about bees and how very clever they are and when we've done with that the children run themselves ragged in the play area where they thoroughly enjoy climbing and playing on their own bridge.

On the second day we head for Diggerland at Strood, not really knowing what to expect and fretting that Henry might not be able to do much there due to being small. But how wrong we are. This is a truly amazing experience. One where little people get to operate diggers. There's a bit of queuing but it's worth it to be able to sit in a big digger and learn how to operate it. Henry sits on my lap and is in his element as he looks out of the windscreen and nonchalantly moves the joysticks to lift the arm and bucket. We even manage to scoop up some earth. It's quite difficult to do and makes us look at roadworkers in a whole new light. We then get to try our hands at driving a dumper truck. Oh the fun of it. We even see a very elderly woman doing this with a big smile on her face; it really is open to all ages. We take a ride on the Diggerland train. After a quick picnic the children play in the Little Tikes area where there's a little house and sit in cars. They then run round the indoor play barn. It's time to dig for some treasure after which we discover the Robots where the girls drive themselves round a course, followed by Henry and me – these are vehicles the size of a small car and yet little Heidi (6) is able to drive one quite competently. It's amazing to see. The children have a blast driving the mini Land Rovers, too. Little Henry cannot believe his eyes and the girls allow him to do the driving, too. We finish our day by racing the electric go karts.

Our final day is spent visiting the Debenhams opposite the Travelodge and then making our way to Maidstone where we watch Goldilocks & The Three Bears & The Mayor of Porridge-ton at Hazlitt Theatre. There's singing and dancing and scene changes, all of which grips our children for almost two hours. The show finishes with the children being invited on stage.

What a great experience.

For more information visit:

[www.travelodge.co.uk](http://www.travelodge.co.uk)

<https://wildwoodtrust.org>

[www.diggerland.com](http://www.diggerland.com)

<https://www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk/Hazlitt-Theatre>

[www.yourparkingspace.co.uk](http://www.yourparkingspace.co.uk)

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# West Sussex





By Tim Saunders

Watch out... there are elephants in West Sussex...

Well, that's what we find when we visit. There's Dumbo at The Dome – a truly magnificent art deco building - and Elmer at The Connaught, both in Worthing.

Dumbo featuring Danny DeVito and Michael Keaton is a film adaptation of the 1941 animation by Walt Disney. Computer animation and special effects have added something special to this already memorable tale gripping us all for the best part despite Colin Farrell's acting. It is an emotional rollercoaster that sees little Dumbo starting out not fitting in and separated from his mother, Jumbo. By the end he finds his feet, becomes the star of the show and is eventually reunited with his mum. They live happily ever after in the jungle.

Then there is a puppet adaptation of Elmer the patchwork elephant. A nice celebration for the David McKee creation, who is 30 this year. Similar to Dumbo, little Elmer complains about not fitting in but learns to like his colours and that it doesn't matter how you look - it's what's inside that counts. It's an upbeat cheerful production with plenty of songs about colours - yellow being the happiest one. The puppeteers are certainly busy operating the cast, which includes elephants, zebras, cheeky monkeys, a lion and a giraffe.

We stay in a lodge at Cottessmore Golf and Country Club, about 45 minutes from Worthing and set in 247 acres of rolling countryside. There are only seven lodges and ours has an en-suite bathroom and separate shower room. This does help us all relax, Caroline especially as she makes the most of unwinding in the bath, which is located far enough away from the other rooms that she doesn't hear the drone of the children. The accommodation is clean and comfortable and we all enjoy the open plan layout, which makes a breeze of self-catering. Linen, towels and slippers are provided. Daddy particularly, really appreciates the dishwasher. We enjoy and savour the surroundings. Caroline and I sit on the settee watching the sun go down behind the trees. I am actually able to grab a few minutes each day to read my Wallander thriller. The lodge should allow for a pleasant night's rest but little Henry (3) who is not well, cannot sleep the whole night through so our pattern of broken sleep continues. There's no chance for Caroline or I to indulge in a game of golf on the 27-hole course but that's a blessing I should think for the well maintained course.

During the break, the behaviour of Henry and older sister Heidi (6) is challenging. Heidi struggles with



Ice cream time

change while Henry finds it difficult to walk, only allowing mummy to carry his three stone. There wasn't room in the car to take the pushchair. We have our unfair share of crying and sulking...

From the lodge we walk bleary eyed to Douster Pond, gingerly crossing the golf course wary of flying golf balls... There's a gate that leads to a wonderful woodland and the clear blue skies can be seen through the tops of the trees. It's quite a long walk and it would be really enjoyable if only Henry would walk. He eventually relents and allows daddy to give him a piggy back but he's a heavy little toe-rag. When he does finally wish to use his legs we really savour the moment.

Only a few miles down the road is Nymans, a historic, originally Regency property, which was bought by German stockbroker Ludwig Messel in 1890. Picturesque landscape surrounds it. Much of the house was destroyed by fire in 1947. It's a biting cold day but we are determined to walk as far around the grounds as we can. There are plenty of stunning flowers such as Euphorbia Purpurea and Dicentra spectabilis. Placid Harriett (8) has a good run and Heidi enjoys herself for a while... As an early riser she tires by around midday, which makes it tough for her to find the energy to enjoy the art exhibition inside the house.

Nearby at Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods we discover a playground with swings and climbing frames as well as picnic benches, which makes a good spot for lunch.

At Worthing we are blessed with good weather and enjoy a walk along the seafront and an ice cream, which makes Henry's day.

For more information visit:

<https://domecinema.co.uk>

<https://worthingtheatres.co.uk>

<http://www.cottesmoregolf.co.uk/>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/nymans>

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# Civic duties

By Tim Saunders

“Where’s the gearstick?” I panic as I sit in the driver’s seat of the Honda Civic 1.6 diesel. “You don’t need a gearstick,” says my son Henry (3). He knows about these things. This automatic version has an exceedingly minimalist 9 speed automatic unit that takes a short while to get used to. Honda always seems to develop new and inspired futuristic design features that others follow years later. Of course that design is also extremely aerodynamic, aiding efficiency. Look in the boot and there’s a sliding parcel shelf and there’s lots of digital jiggery pokery on the dashboard, some of which shows it reaching 80mpg during the test, encouraging economical driving.

I’ve just had a week with the considerably wider Jaguar E-Pace that felt quite clumsy in comparison to the smaller Honda. I also found the Jag’s interior to be very dark. Not so in the Civic, where there’s a generous electric tilt/slide glass roof.

Another surprise for me is that the Civic is lower to the ground than my wife’s Vauxhall Corsa, and feels very sporty as a consequence. It certainly doesn’t feel like a five door family hatchback and is completely different to the last Civic model it replaces.

It is finished in eye-catching Rallye Red and while the front certainly demands your attention I cannot help but feel that the angular front bumper could age quite

quickly in this fashion conscience world we live in.

Just before I embark on a journey to Kent I must drop my wife off at the library to return a few books. After doing this there’s a persistent bleeping from the sensors alerting me to something that it does not like – it tells me it’s underneath the car but this clearly is not the case - as we make our way out of the car park. I don’t need this aggravation at the best of times and certainly not in a vehicle with which I am unfamiliar. It finally stops as I leave the car park. Perhaps the cars were all too near the sensors and it didn’t like it. I don’t know. Thankfully this experience does not repeat itself during my week with my sporty red friend and things quickly improve. I am determined to stick to the speed limits as we head down the M27 towards the A3 and the intelligent cruise control really helps me as it rigidly adheres to the 50mph limits often in place these days. Just as well too because we count some 17 police vehicles, many unmarked whipping down the outside lane after speeding motorists, providing my back seat passengers with plenty of entertainment.

It is only when I have been driving for a couple of hours that I realise the seat is a little high compared to my wife’s. Lowering the driver’s seat provides a much better driving position. Now it really does feel like a sports car. I begin to like it very much.



# Small is beautiful

By Tim Saunders

Usually when travelling a distance my wife insists on packing the map “because I can’t trust the sat nav”. On this occasion she forgets. And I can report that we get to Ashford, Maidstone and Herne Bay without too much trouble. But there are issues. The main one is that the sat nav does not recognise the address of the new Travelodge in Ashford. It takes us to the old one where the staff explain where the new one is located, telling us that we’re the second perplexed customer to ask that day. It’s not that difficult when we find out. Sometimes there’s a one minute delay with the instructions, which I overcome by slowly going round the roundabout that I typically find myself on - twice. On another occasion the device insists on taking me down a closed road due to gas works. I overcome this by ignoring it and using my brain. I suspect any sat nav would have come up with these problems. It seems that this part of Kent is a bit of a nightmare to drive round. Roadworks, traffic jams and a great many signs to navigate.

It’s a comfortable car, my wife enjoys using her heated front seat but complains that she might have to call 999 for the fire brigade to put out her hot bottom. My bird does enjoy a good roasting...

The position of the seatbelt points in the rear is good allowing us to make light work of installing our little urchins. There’s a good amount of space in the back and the boot is a good size. Addled, as per usual, I forget to engage the childlocks on the rear doors but fortunately the rascals are well behaved and don’t try to open the doors while we’re driving.

The Honda delivers an enjoyable drive. It can be driven as an automatic or the paddle shifts can be used for a more engaging experience.

As we return home an elderly gentleman in a soft top Jaguar F-Type is showing off his car’s performance to his young wife (I presume) and as we pull up beside him, he doesn’t seem at all pleased with the Honda’s low down acceleration as we leave the traffic lights. Yes, the Honda Civic is full of surprises and you cannot help but smile when behind the wheel or indeed outside looking at it.

It always ceases to amaze me how much power can be squeezed out of a tiny engine. The Kia Picanto GT-Line with its 998cc three cylinder engine and a little help from a turbocharger is a good example.

Here is a car that will undoubtedly make a good city runabout; it’s certainly nippy in town but I’ve got bigger plans for it – a run to Bury St Edmunds (over a 300 mile round trip), which will really show this car’s mettle.

My first impressions are that it is well designed and attractive from the outside, helped by its white finish with a go faster red stripe beneath the doors, around the front fog lights and inside the black radiator grille. The chrome door handles are a nice touch as is the twin exhaust. And when the engine is revved hard there is a satisfying roar – for me the best part of this car; try getting that from an electric car. During my time with it I spot an increasing number of the more standard models on the roads; it is certainly a popular choice.

Over a short distance the driving position is comfortable but stay in it for too long and it become apparent that the seats are just not designed well

## Facts at a glance

Honda Civic 1.6 i-DTEC EX 9AT

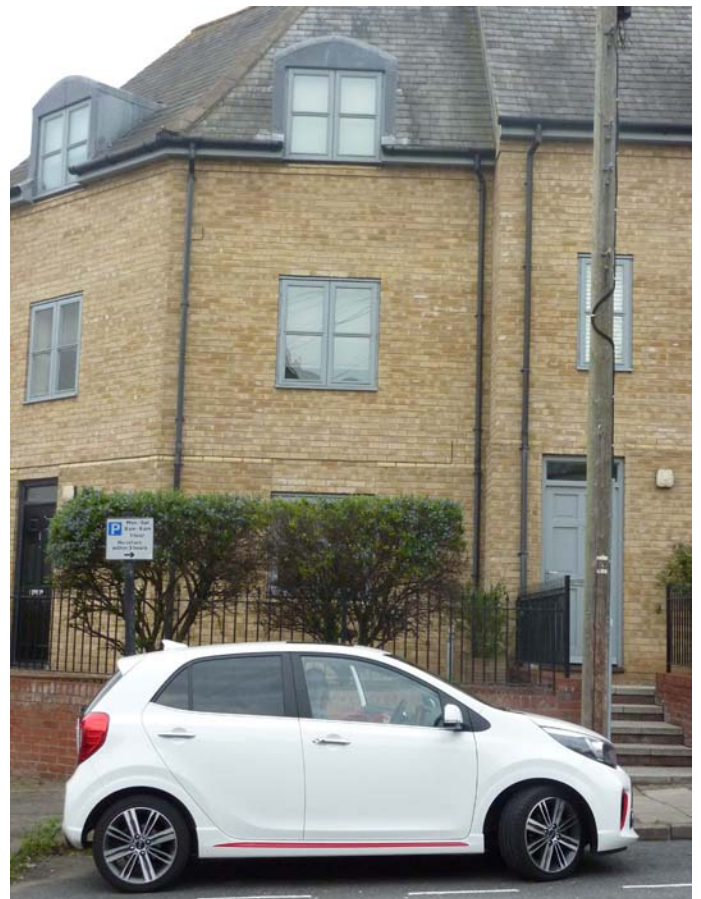
Price £26,620

Top speed: 124mph

0-60mph: 11secs

Economy: 50mpg

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enough resulting in very achy backs. The five-speed manual gearbox is smooth to operate and it's great fun to drive, just like the delivery driver told me. There's a traditional handbrake, too. All in all it feels well put together and the black and red faux leather seats are good quality. It comes loaded with goodies including all round electric windows, air conditioning, satellite navigation, reversing camera, heated steering wheel and front seats, cruise control and speed limiter. There's even a tilt/slide sunroof. This spec is often only reserved for larger more expensive vehicles. It does feel a bit like operation overkill, though. Is all of this really necessary in such a small car?

Three sizeable children's car seats will squeeze into the back but it's very difficult to try using the seatbelts in such a scenario. A great car for four but five is going just that bit too far. Space is tight.

There's no need to put the key in the ignition to drive, simply put your foot on the clutch and push the start button. At the end of the journey the button is pushed again to stop the engine as in many vehicles these days. But when I leave the car there's always a lot of bleeping, which is really annoying.

The tiny 35 litre tank covers around 300 miles if driven carefully, which means it frequently needs filling up; not as impressive as its competitor the ultra frugal Skoda Citigo.

On the motorway it holds its own and easily keeps up with the flow of traffic. No matter what car you drive trying to maintain a consistent 70mph is difficult

because invariably you get stuck behind a dawdler or the flow of traffic demands a faster pace. The Picanto is fitted with both a cruise control and speed limiter. They both deliver the same result but the former allows you to take your foot off the accelerator. On one occasion when the cruise control becomes fed up and refuses to work I resort to the speed limiter. When the set speed is exceeded a similar noise to that for a seatbelt being undone sounds, which unnerves me as I think one of the children have removed their seatbelts.

A very welcome addition on a hot summer's day is the electric tilt/slide sunroof but the switch to operate it is awkward; I still can't tell you whether it requires pushing in slightly to work but after some faffing about and a little talking to it does eventually work. Overall though, it's a fun little car to drive with welcome character.

#### Facts at a glance

Kia Picanto GT-Line S 1.0 T-GDi

Price: £14,895 OTR

0-60mph: 9.8secs

Top speed: 112mph

Power: 99bhp

Economy: Around 40mpg

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