

Travel & motoring magazine



Special fossil hunting issue

Exploring Devon and Dorset

Fun day out with Thomas

Vauxhall and Lexus road tests

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Since it's launch in June 2019, it has been a joy to watch Travel & motoring magazine evolve. Initially it was just an idea and the first issue saw an encouraging trickle of interest. As the design and marketing has improved, so too has the readership, which I can now report is enjoyed not only by travel lovers and holidaymakers in the UK but further afield in Guernsey, Italy, Germany and Australia. It just goes to show that no matter what the political climate, it doesn't affect our love of travel. It's a luxury that we should all be entitled to; absolutely vital for the soul. And travel of course encompasses everything from an inexpensive day out to more extravagant breaks at home and abroad. But no matter what the option and budget constraints, it is the time spent together and the memories created that money cannot buy and that stay with us forever. Yes, that is the joy of travel.

I hope that you will find inspiration for your next trip within these pages and do let me know your thoughts. I should also mention that www.travelwriter.biz now boasts a really useful search facility thanks to David Morley our web developer, who is a genius when it comes to any technical web related issues.

Tim Saunders
Editor

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Cover: The popular pink tram at Seaton Tramway



Trip to the Jurassic Coast

By Tim Saunders

Millions of years ago the Jurassic Coast was under water. Creatures that swam in this vast sea have since turned into fossils. These can still be discovered by a keen eye, making for a wonderful holiday memento. We have visited the area before, and in fact I grew up here, but it is only now that the children are old enough that our attentions turn to this hugely important aspect of Devon and Dorset. At school Heidi (6) has been learning about famous Lyme Regis fossil hunter Mary Anning.

We didn't imagine being able to walk on a beach and actually finding any fossils but at world renowned Charmouth, this is just what we do. There's a fascinating heritage centre that even David Attenborough has visited, and the staff will happily confirm whether you have found genuine fossils. Never before have we visited a beach where so many people are bent double looking for ammonites. The staff at the centre recommend that we walk for 10 minutes down the beach for the best fossil hunting spot, which we duly do and while away the best part of a glorious summer's day carefully sifting through pebbles. At the end of the day we all find something of which to be proud.

A trip to Seaton Jurassic certainly quenches the thirst for greater knowledge. We learn that a massive Jurassic landslide exposed fossils and we are taken on a memorable interactive journey through time. The designers have really excelled themselves incorporating period furnishings through to 3D imagery. There are 13 boxes to discover where the children have to answer questions and at the end they receive a gemstone. Harriett (8), Heidi (6) and Henry (3), all avid watchers of TV's Octonauts are instantly drawn to what they call the Octopod where they can see underwater life. There is also a large outside area that runs alongside Seaton Tramway. Here there is plenty of flora and fauna including dreaded horsetail, which we gain a newfound respect for discovering that this stuff that we have resorted to burning in our garden to eradicate, actually existed before dinosaurs.

After a bite to eat we make our way to the beach where we fly our kite. And then it's time to board the tram back to Colyford. We love this form of transport. Sitting on the top deck with the wind blowing through the hair we can really appreciate how it works as the cable above us captures the electricity to power it. The backs of the seats can be pushed forward or back so that no matter which direction it travels passengers sit the right way round. The journey cuts through

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wetlands beside the River Axe where there is a nature reserve featuring all kinds of birds including curlews and fields where there are cows and sheep grazing and even rabbits. Crossing the main road we wave to the traffic. Along the way dinosaurs have been placed beside the track, guaranteeing to keep the attention of younger passengers. It is such a relaxing and enjoyable form of transport, reminding older passengers of how they used to travel in their childhood.

At Beaminster Museum, Brian is a mine of information. His enthusiasm is infectious and helps bring the wonderful exhibits in the museum to life. So much can be learnt about the area from the fascinating axes used for killing mammoths through to smuggling, crime

and the hanging of witches. Henry particularly enjoys the naughty burglar that a local WI group created. We also learn about the importance of flax to the area, which is further emphasised by our visit to Bridport Museum. "Locals stake claim to winning the Battle of Trafalgar," smiles Brian, adding that sails made in the area, to exacting Royal Navy specifications, were used on the ships in Nelson's fleet.

"You must visit Bridport Carnival," recommends Shige, owner of Hell Barn Cottages in Chideock, where we stay. So we do and enjoy seeing the floats. Hell Barn Cottages, a complex of five self-catering stone cottages, is only about 10 miles away down a quiet country lane. We stay in Rosemary Cottage. The first thing we notice is that we can park directly outside the accommodation, which is really helpful for unloading. Inside it's well presented, comfortable and clean. Downstairs is open plan given to sitting and dining and off this is a sizeable kitchen. There's a downstairs bathroom and shower. Upstairs are two bedrooms, easily accommodating the five of us. We enjoy relaxing here and there is a very popular games room where the children play and so do the adults, given chance: snooker, badminton and table tennis. There's a go-kart that Henry thoroughly enjoys riding. One evening Caroline, Harriett and I are able to play a





game of badminton and it's great to see that Harriett's co-ordination is improving. Heidi and Henry are on the swings. It's an idyllic setting and it's no surprise that Shige, who has run this business for over 20 years and cooks Japanese food for guests, receives many repeat visits.

For us, holidays are all about mooching and trying to relax if the children will let us. Our first attempt is over the border in Devon at Beer where we visit various exhibitions and an antiques centre. And then it's picnic time and the beach. Even though it is pebble, on a warm summer's day, we have to just lie down and savour the view.

The furthest we travel is some 70 miles away to Pennywell Farm near Buckfastleigh. Here the children hold rabbits, very cute piglets and feed the goats. They are even able to walk goats and watch piglet racing. The bamboo maze that leads to a tower gives views across the Devonshire countryside where we see gorgeous brown deer. When we are not admiring the animals the children are playing on the toy tractors and Henry loves the excavator where he can dig sand, returning to this throughout the day. "My favourite thing is cuddling the piglets," he admits. Pennywell is a great day out.



With his local knowledge Shige recommends a hairdresser for Caroline in Bridport. She is happy with the results. Bridport itself is a busy market town with a good mix of independent and national retailers. For me it is the old bookshop with its tables of books lining the pavement that is a joy to visit. Here I find some gems that at some point I shall enjoy reading.

Bridport Museum itself is another must to visit. Here we learn that the town is famous for producing nets. So next time you watch a football match the nets have probably been made in Bridport. During our visit the museum proudly exhibits the watercolour that JMW Turner produced of Bridport Harbour and it is a privilege to see it. There's just chance to relax in the Borough Gardens where we enjoy looking at the flowers and spy some butterflies and a dragonfly.

Just over 20 miles away at Ilminster we visit a Creative Coverage art exhibition featuring selected professional artists and craftspeople.

We dine at the Talbot Arms at Uplyme, a busy and vibrant pub run by Wendy and Steve where Caroline, Heidi and I enjoy beef and ale pie with chips while Harriett and Henry have sausages and chips. There's an ice cream dessert for the children. It's a friendly pub at the centre of the community and we have a good chat to Wendy who explains how close knit and supportive the locals are, raising funds for renovating the village hall, which has become well used. From here it is possible to walk cross country from the pub to Lyme Regis.

A night time walk round Lyme Regis sees us try to find the grave of Mary Anning, and make it to the beach. We leave Hell Barn for home at 10am the following morning.

For more information visit:

seatonjurassic.org

www.tram.co.uk

www.pennywellfarm.co.uk

www.beaminstermuseum.co.uk

<https://talbotarms.com>

www.charmouth.org

www.hellbarn.co.uk

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Day out with Thomas the tank engine

By Tim Saunders

“I treat it as if I am five years old,” says Karen, who provides the humorous commentary at the Watercress Line, urging Thomas the tank engine to be patient, to stop whistling and let the passengers get on.

“It’s great fun and magical for the children.”

Karen has worked on the Day Out with Thomas events at this Hampshire station for the past 12 years and clearly loves what she does as much as all of us.

The railway’s Day out with Thomas typically runs for a couple of weeks in April and August each year. Henry (3) is an avid follower of Thomas the tank engine, created by Reverend W. Awdry, who was born in Ampfield, Hampshire in 1911.

We arrive at Ropley and park in a large field with a great many other visitors. It’s an extremely popular event.

There is an air of happiness. All worries forgotten, at least for today. What a joy. Passengers are transported back into the 1940s and the wonder of steam. The smell and the sound. But also friendliness, so often absent from life today. Fellow passengers wave at each other and when we cannot find seats where we can all sit together a very kind woman sitting on her own, offers: “Don’t worry I’ll move.” When would this happen on one of those characterless modern

diesel trains?

Grandparents reminisce about how these used to be a regular feature of their travels to school and on the family holiday. Those of us too young to remember this can imagine though and the old films we have watched and the books we have read have helped give an idea of what life was like back then. The beloved Watercress Line, its army of staff and volunteers, all dressed in period attire bring the past to the present.

There are numerous old signs for such things as Fry’s Delicious Chocolates, R White’s Ginger Beer and Camp Coffee is the best. If only the beautiful and vibrant flowerbeds and hanging baskets that adorn the platforms could be found at mainline stations. The sheer hardwork and attention to detail of the staff ensures that any visit is a memorable occasion. At one railway station we spy vintage milk cans as if they are waiting to be loaded. Then of course there are the drivers and the firemen stoking the coal.

Lovingly restored trains and carriages provide regular trips to railway stations in Alresford, Medstead and Ropley. These are not that far away and so no journey is very long, which is ideal for the little ones. Harriett (8), Heidi (6) and Henry all settle down in their seats around the table in anticipation of the journey ahead.



We all enjoy the chug chug clickety clack and the views across the wonderful Hampshire landscape. At the time of our journey the farmers have been busy harvesting and so the fields of gold are much closer cropped.

Life was different in the past; no mobile phones and it is a shame that some passengers cannot tear themselves away from these devices to savour this fabulous experience.

We decide to stay on the train at Alresford and eat our picnic and by the time we have finished we return to Ropley and onto to Medstead where we alight for the children to complete their spot the engines sheets.

We are dawdlers and almost miss the return train to Ropley but for a kind guard who alerts us.

As the guard's whistle is blown Henry looks out of the window and comments on the steam blowing past. He's also looking with great interest at his spot the engine sheet and says that he has seen the majority but cannot find Emily.

A lot of hard work goes into creating this memorable day and it has not gone unnoticed.

Henry loves to know how things work and when we enter the education centre at Ropley he is greeted by a model of a crane which highers and lowers the bucket when the handle is turned. He is mesmerised with this. Up the stairs there are toy trains to play with and one happens to be a crane operated by a handle so Henry plays with this for ages. "I'd like one of

these," he says. Meanwhile Harriett and Heidi colour in and complete a maze. There's an interesting video about the history of the Watercress Line together with books and magazines about locomotives. "It's nice to have this room," says Caroline. "It gives the children chance to do a bit of playing and allows the parents a little break."

The ride on miniature railway is ever popular and is another enjoyable aspect for us all. Rusty & Dusty, joined by the Fat Controller, is an entertaining show for the children with a question and answer session for Sir Topham Hatt.

The children all have to have a rub on tattoo; Henry has one of Percy while the girls go for Thomas.

At half the price of attractions like Paultons Park, the Watercress Line represents excellent value for money.

And there's always something exciting happening here. For that extra special treat it is possible to dine in one of the first class carriages.

At the end of our day, Caroline says: "I don't feel tired as I often do on a day out; it's been lovely and relaxing."

For more information visit:

www.dayoutwiththomas.co.uk

<https://www.watercressline.co.uk/>

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Sleek red Vauxhall Insignia

By Tim Saunders

Guernsey provides a great challenge for driving. Cars owned by the locals are bashed and dented. So too, are the hire cars. The reason for this, I soon discover is that the roads can be uncomfortably narrow. And I mean so narrow that there is absolutely nowhere to pull over. Lay-bys are few and far between. So if you meet an oncoming motorist one of you will have to reverse for some distance in order to get passed.

So what better place to put the Vauxhall Insignia through its paces?

When I first sit in the Insignia my first impression is that it feels wide and when I use the indicators the stalk feels a little too plasticky and flimsy for my liking. Then I cannot fathom how to open the boot. After watching Vauxhall's youtube video I understand. The very sleek design at first makes you think that the emblem is just that but look closer and there is a bit of a gap between this and the bodywork. So push it down and the boot opens. Simply. A little gap appears between the bootlid and the bumper; slide your hand

into this and open the boot. I'm not convinced that this is very easy compared to traditional grab handles and if it's dirty you're going to get filthy.

The boot itself is sizeable and while there is a good amount of room in the rear for three passengers, installing three standard childseats is a chore due to the placement of the seatbelt slots.

The Insignia is comfortable to drive but I find the manual six speed gearbox is notchy. There's an electric handbrake. The sat nav is a joy to use being very simple to operate.

And so, perhaps naively, we visit Guernsey not really appreciating what will await us.

Boarding the ferry introduces us to tight spaces. Motorists are warned about disabling their alarms so that they don't go off during the sea crossing. I have never fathomed how to do this and hope that it doesn't. It's all fine.

On arriving at Saint Peter Port, Guernsey, we are introduced to the 35mph speed limit and the fact that

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there are no speed cameras. But the police do use mobile radar guns. Apparently offending motorists must attend court and are banned for anything from one month upwards. "This should be the case in the UK," says a taxi driver, adding that speeding has been drastically cut as a result.

So with trepidation I potter around the island's roads but note that locals can become very impatient and are not averse to using their horns, even if they happen to be an elderly woman.

Leaving a hotel car park and breathing a sigh of relief that we negotiated the tight exit without leaving any of the Insignia behind, we soon meet a speeding oncoming motorist who screeches to a halt, thankfully. The problem is that there is no pull over spot, it's a tight country lane. He's not going to budge and I can't because all of a sudden there's a car behind me. Eventually, this local gives in and begrudgingly reverses his tiny Fiat 500 up the hill so that I can move forward and reverse into someone's driveway. And the journey continues while I worry about the alloy wheels scuffing the rocks that protrude from the side of some of the roads. But we're lucky.

Further on we exit a bend to be met with a massive lorry. Again, tight country road, no lay-by. Using my reversing camera I slowly reverse back up the road and am able to pull in. They weren't going to wait, edging forward with each step I took back.

The amount of scraped cars I have seen is worse than I recall seeing in Milan where they really do drive like lunatics. I wonder how the Ferrari got on that I spotted boarding the ferry.

There's certainly no chance to exceed 35mph on this tiny island and so we have to wait until we return to Poole to get up to 70mph when cruise control can be engaged and more relaxed mainland driving can be enjoyed.

Facts at a glance

Vauxhall Insignia 1.5 Elite Turbo

Price: £18,995

Top speed: 138mph

0-60mph: 8.4secs

Power: 165bhp

Economy: around 50mpg

Watch the video at www.testdrives.biz



Lexus UX250

By Tim Saunders

Patience and understanding are required when driving the Lexus UX 250.

As an impatient, approaching middle aged man... I struggle with this especially when faced with the following issues:

1. When on a slope it rolls forward after the park function and the handbrake are applied – thank goodness I park it some distance from the wall of my home
2. It takes far too long to engage drive and get the vehicle actually moving
3. The rear seatbelt sensors repeatedly sound an ear-piercing bleep when my children's car seats are unoccupied
4. There is not enough space for three car seats to fit as they should in the rear; one of them sits awkwardly at an angle

Combine these factors with a Friday night when I'm late night shopping these days (not clubbing or going to the pub any longer). And more tired than usual I feel very justified in being really quite fed up. And it shouldn't be the case when I'm driving a car valued at nearly £40,000.

Not only do the rear seatbelt sensors deafen me on my trip to the supermarket, giving me a very uncomfortable headache – and I don't usually suffer from these – it then does it on the return journey, too. What have I done to deserve this? I ask myself. This is absolutely ludicrous. I swipe an angry arm into the rear to try and move the offending carseats to see if this will help but of course it doesn't. What am I meant to do? Remove my three children's carseats every time they are not in them? Having had time to simmer down, I think that the sensors think that the carseats are people that should be strapped in. It's a bit ridiculous really. My wife adds that these carseats are not very wide and



that many people in this obese age that we live in will be much wider, making it more of a 2+2 if the truth be known.

Rather than promoting safety this earpiercing repetitive beeping results in erratic driving to either get to the destination or to pull over to try to stop the damn problem. Regular readers will know that I drive a geriatric 2002 Ford Fiesta, which is as basic as it gets. But, as I increasingly find, the rear seats allow for my children's three car seats; yes it's a bit tight but nothing like the much larger vehicles I have driven lately including the Vauxhall Insignia and this Lexus. And it's a great shame because it taints my view of the car, which does actually have some good aspects to it. For instance, while I don't warm to the exterior, parts of which remind me of American cars of the '80s, the interior is luxurious. We all love the high quality of the cream leather upholstery and the comfortable seats. "I like the feel of the armrests," says wife Caroline. "The centre armrest is ingenious in the way it lifts and unique, I think."

But these positives are then soon forgotten when trying to operate the overly complicated sat nav, which takes a long time for my wife to get used to – I haven't got the patience. The controls for the radio are interesting but again irritate me immensely as does the positioning of some of the other buttons and switches. You'll either love this or loathe it.

I have tried to understand the Lexus. The exterior design is striking and the hybrid concept should be appealing in helping the environment. My diesel Fiesta is hated by the environmentalists for all those unfriendly emissions. But I remain unconvinced about self charging hybrids and I'll tell you why. Rarely does the ev (electric vehicle) mode kick in despite me permanently being in economy mode. The only way I am able to get it to work is by literally stroking the accelerator pedal; my right foot has to be so light that this just serves as another way of really irritating me. We are able to travel in ev mode while driving down the road where we live at 9mph but any faster and it clicks over to petrol.

We take it to the Isle of Wight (to drive it into the sea, Henry jests) in the hope that I will rekindle my

floundering friendship only to find that I am made to look a fool yet again. When waiting to board the ferry I push the engine start button and as the cars in front are already moving I too need to move with them but the system isn't ready and the Lexus isn't going anywhere, the steering wheel locks. I don't need this pressure. The cars behind become impatient and I have my head in my hands. After switching off and back on again we finally get moving but by this time the attendant tells me I must wait for the queue of 20 or 30 cars next to me to board. It's all just a bit embarrassing and I don't like it. Turn the ignition of a normal car and it will start immediately and that's what I've grown to expect. In life, especially since having children, I have grown to adapt to having low expectations so that I do not get disappointed but I do not expect to have to adapt this to my motoring needs as well.

The target market for this Lexus must be an affluent retired man who has time on his hands. Unfair? Well, as with my life in general, I have no time; I'm not here for long and I certainly won't be wasting it sitting around waiting for a lethargic vehicle to start. Push the start button and engage D in the Lexus and a good few moments pass while the system boots up to allow the driver to do what he is itching to do. Impatience results in the vehicle just rolling backwards or forwards depending on the incline it is on. It's just not good enough.

Facts at a glance

Lexus UX 250 with Premium Plus Pack (Terrane Khaki)

Price: From £39,105

Engine: 2-litre petrol

Top speed: 110mph

0-60mph: 8.5secs

Power: 176bhp

Economy: averaging 46mpg

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