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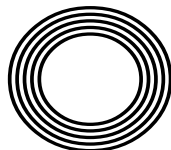
Pantone Colours
of the Year 2021

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excuses
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A SICKIE**

Remembering a legend
**DAME BARBARA
WINDSOR DBE**

Lewis
HAMILTON

Sports Personality of the Year racing into the record books



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Editor's notes...

JANUARY 2021



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** Rayleigh. Well, let's just say 2020 was quite a year. There is not a single person in the country who hasn't been affected by COVID-19. As a publishing house, over the course of a few months, we sank to some profoundly low depths; our nose was bloodied. It's fair to say I had sleepless nights over what the future might entail, but looking back on it now I'm left with a sense of having gained from the experience. That might seem a strange thing to say, but in a way, coronavirus woke us up to what we needed as a business. I'm talking about boring financial reviews, the drive for greater efficiency, streamlining, a change to work practices.

And what about the positives we as individuals have discovered? Working from home - brilliant; making more contact with relatives - overdue; paying more attention to our health and fitness - great.

Of course, we have all lost a lot, but now, on the dawn of a new era - and a vaccine - let's try to gather in all the things we have gained, while being better prepared and stronger for the new year ahead.

With that in mind, I'd like to thank all our loyal customers and readers. We are in this together. Wishing you all a very happy and healthy new year.

Nik Allen

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At the time of print all content in **VISION** was relevant and up to date according to COVID-19 government guidelines



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The great Dame BARBARA WINDSOR DBE

CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND CAREER OF THE QUEEN OF TV

In a troublesome, traumatic year, many saw Dame Barbara Windsor's death in early December 2020 as another profound low.

An only child born in Shoreditch two years before the breakout of World War II, 'Babs' made her West End debut at the age of just 13, in the musical *Love from Judy*.

As the Swinging Sixties swung, so too did Barbara Windsor's buoyant, bubbly, effervescent personality carry forward an industry. From appearances in films *Sparrows Can't Sing* (for which she won a BAFTA), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and *The Boy Friend*, to sitcom work with *The Rag Trade* and *Wild, Wild Women*, her acting talent was as admired as it was, at times, underplayed.

Indeed, when the slapstick comedy of the *Carry On* movies came around, while decorated in her roles, Babs became somewhat pigeonholed.

Nonetheless, she re-emerged in the 1970s to return to stage work with *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *Twelfth Night*, among others.

From high jinks to heavy drama, Babs was an entertainment icon in her own right. Never clichéd, never disrespected, she came to represent an era of British entertainment in which our output rivalled anyone else the world over.

And in accepting the opportunity to take ownership of the Queen Vic pub in Albert Square in 1994, Babs' career reinvention proved a masterstroke. A boisterous, no-nonsense, independent pub landlady, she kept a lid on Walford's most tempestuous characters, and remains the only person in *EastEnders'* 35-year history to have tempered the problematic Mitchell brothers, Grant and Phil – her sons.

Of course, Windsor's infectious persona,

effortless charm and cheeky sex appeal saw her decorated with no shortage of admirers. From relationships with Ronnie Kray and comedy sidekick Sid James, she enjoyed a lively 21-year marriage with nightclub owner Ronnie Knight. The pair shared a luxury home on Stanmore Hill. She later married chef Stephen Hollings and wed a third time in 2000, to Scott Mitchell, bridging an age gap of 27 years. She didn't have any children.

Following her passing, the tributes came from far and wide for an actress whose time in front of the camera was really only a platform to a breath-taking life in showbusiness.

The sadness of her death was calmed somewhat by the fact Babs had been in unsteady health for a number of years. In 2014 she retired from all acting duties when diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Undeterred by the darker clouds that she sensed were about to gather, and ably assisted by her husband, she leapt into a new role of raising both funds and awareness for the disease, and continued to campaign up until her death.

While still seen out frequently over the past few years, the toils of public engagements eventually proved too much for someone who had previously bathed in the decorative sunlight of press and publicity.

Slipping away quietly, as she did on December 10, was perhaps the most inauspicious of conclusions to a booming, bustling life full of big personality. And yet, while we all take away slightly different memories of Barbara Windsor, our collective recollections will surely always be of an actress who spearheaded a golden era of British entertainment, always accompanied by a warm smile and mischievous laugh.

Photo credit: Shutterstock



THE WORLD AROUND US

Part 3

In the third part of our environmental series, we look at the key driver in the health and well-being of the planet. In this issue, it's the air above our heads.

In all the trust we place in environmentalists, activists and those passionate about preserving our planet, perhaps when it comes to air we need to invest the greatest level of trust.

On the ground, the world in which we live seems largely pleasant, and as far as air quality goes, our immediate environment is certainly much cleaner today than at any time since the Industrial Revolution, and noticeably so.

Yet in 2020 we are driven by targets – achieving a net zero greenhouse gas equation and an 80 per cent cut in emissions by 2050 being two of the biggest headline grabbers.

The problem for the preservation of air quality is that industry rolls on. We are a long way from the smoggy days of 1950s London, but air pollution still contributes to almost 10 per cent of premature deaths, while costing around £40 billion each year.

Of course, the enforced lockdown in the spring of 2020 was perhaps the greatest exemplar of

how great our footprint is. Within weeks, scientists reported a 40 per cent drop in air pollutants. It showed that protecting our personal health had a hugely beneficial effect on that of the environment.

And yet, when back at full capacity, even the healthcare systems in England will be responsible for an estimated 4 to 5 per cent of our carbon footprint, with 6.7 billion road miles each year coming from patients and their visitors travelling to NHS hospitals and centres.

Never in starker terms was it clear that the play-off between the health of the planet and the health of the people who inhabit it remains a tug of war we will continue to see.

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BIG ENERGY SAVING WEEK...

- ☒ CHECK
- ☒ SWITCH
- ☒ SAVE

JANUARY 18 – 24

What better time to try to reduce your energy bills than in the week before payday when you are undoubtedly feeling the pinch after Christmas?

Plus, you don't even have to make massive changes to your lifestyle to enjoy significant savings.

Remember, all the little things really do add up.

1. Use your microwave more: Using your microwave is one of the most efficient ways to both heat up and cook food.

2. Be water-conscious: Whether you are making a cup of tea or boiling food in a pan, only use the amount of water that you need.

3. Slow cook your family meals: Cooking in a slow

cooker over a whole day only uses the same amount of energy as a lightbulb.

4. Don't use metal trays in the oven: Glass and ceramic dishes retain heat better than metal ones, making them more energy efficient.

5. Keep heating rings clean: Any food that has become stuck to your heating rings will absorb heat, making them less efficient.

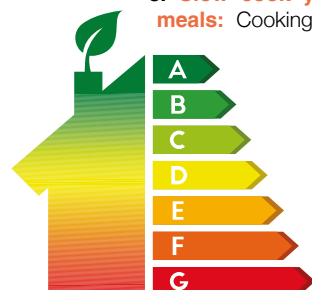
6. Wash your clothes at 30°C: 90 per cent of your washing expenditure is spent on heating the water, so by reducing the heat to 30°C when possible, you can save one-third on your washing costs.

7. Unplug any unused appliances: Unplug or switch the power off on any appliances that you aren't using. This includes charger cables.

8. Turn down your thermostat: By turning down your thermostat by just 1°C, you can save up to £80 per year.

9. Use halogen lightbulbs outside: Halogen bulbs use a quarter less electricity than incandescent bulbs without affecting their brightness, so are ideal for exterior lighting.

10. Defrost food overnight: Defrosting food typically halves the cooking time, meaning less energy used per meal.



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Viva

DRIED FLOWERS

HOME & DIY

If there is only one interior design trend that you embrace this year, make it the revival of dried flowers. Cost effective, eco-friendly and, most importantly, Pinterest-approved, anyone can dry flowers and arrange a beautiful bouquet to be proudly displayed in their home.

HOW TO DRY FLOWERS

If you want to prolong the life of a bouquet of flowers that has been gifted to you, then drying it out is the perfect solution.

1. Strip off any excess foliage and cut stems to desired length
2. Find a dark and dry area, such as an unused cupboard, and hang your flowers upside down using unflavoured dental floss or string
3. Leave for 2–3 weeks until completely dry
4. Take down and spray with unscented hairspray

WHAT ARE THE BEST FLOWERS FOR DRYING?

If you are new to the flower-drying business, you may want a few ideas to get you started. The below flowers are ideal for drying, although you can dry any varieties: Pansies • Amaranthus • Artemisia • Lavender • Hydrangea • Yarrow • Eucalyptus (although not strictly a flower, this will add lovely greenery to your bouquet)

HOW TO DISPLAY DRIED FLOWERS

Once you have dried your flowers, it is time to carefully arrange them into a delightful display. Below are four different arrangements for you to try out:

- Hanging bunches – tie a few bunches together using twine and hang upside down from a branch or an interior wall
- Wreaths – create a dried flower wreath to hang on your front door
- Mini bouquets – dried posy bouquets look lovely placed in a small vase or as a gift
- Statement displays – if you are looking to create a big and bold display, tie together dried flowers, herbs, leaves and grass. Hang over your dining table for maximum effect.



HOME & DIY



Grey DAY?

Revealing Pantone's Colours of the Year, Ultimate Gray and Illuminating

Across a year that offered so much but delivered so little, it's perhaps apt that Pantone has selected not one, but two Colours of the Year. Combined, they reflect the trials and tribulations of 12 months that have seen the very fabric of our lives ripped from under us; and yet we emerge energised, enthused and even perhaps enriched.

Pantone has chosen a combination of shades to represent these feelings. Yes, Ultimate Gray (17-5104), at first glance, appears stern, solemn and even echoes back to the styles and sensibilities of the 1980s. And yet, look closer, and it provides solidity and fortitude.

Now combine those emotions with Pantone's second Colour of the Year for 2021 – Illuminating (13-0647). At first a yellow that resonates with cheerful, sparky, spring-like abandon, it offers light, vivacity and thoughts of energy.

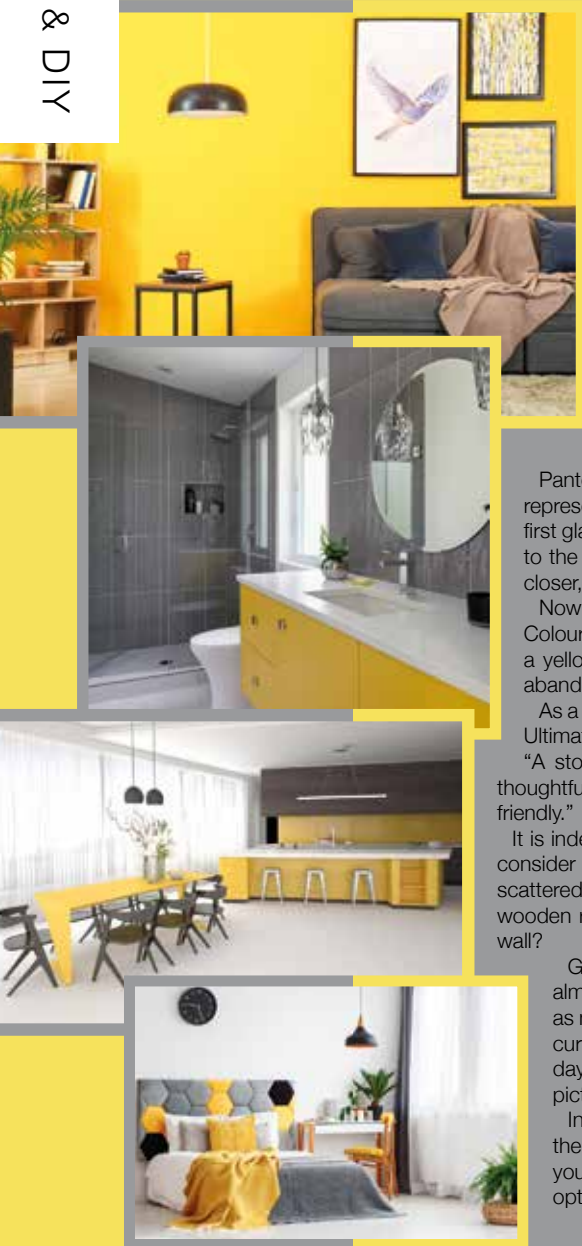
As a single shade, Illuminating works, but combined with Ultimate Gray the end effect is, in Pantone's own words, "A story of colour that encapsulates deeper feelings of thoughtfulness with the promise of something sunny and friendly."

It is indeed a combination that can reignite your interiors – consider a statement piece such as a grey sofa, with yellow scattered cushions. Or what about an existing white or wooden room patterned with a grey rug and yellow feature wall?

Grey and yellow, together or alone, will combine with almost any colours. There is a chic harmony that blends as much as it stands out – even in the bedroom, yellow curtains can offer a feeling of light on the drabest of days; while grey walls, white skirting boards and yellow pictures present a classy combination.

In summing up, expect the Pantone Colour(s) of the Year, Ultimate Gray and Illuminating, to drop into your consciousness, guiding you to happier and more optimistic times in the weeks and months ahead.

Photo credit: designer.com, designbarn.com



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LOCAL NEWS

from your neighbourhood



New community centre plans revealed

Rochford District Council (RDC) has revealed plans for a new community centre in Rayleigh to replace the closed Mill Arts & Events Centre.

RDC said the new centre will be spread over two floors and will face Rayleigh Windmill and the sensory garden.

Upstairs there will be modern meeting rooms and office spaces for use by the council and its partners to meet with members of the public – maintaining important service provision in Rayleigh.

Downstairs will be the publicly hireable space, which can open out onto Rayleigh Windmill to make full use of the outside space and the backdrop of the windmill.

It will be configured into a single hall which can accommodate 170 people with built-in storage and a bar/kitchen area.

The downstairs space will also be subdivided to

accommodate smaller groups simultaneously.

The council claims it is not good value for money to recreate the existing building as very large spaces are not used frequently enough. Consequently, the new community facility will be smaller.

The plans are part of a new Voyage Partnership which RDC said has been launched in order to deliver a long-term regeneration programme.

Leader of RDC, councillor Simon Wootton, said: "I am delighted to launch the new Voyage Partnership, which recognises the importance of our proud heritage and connects this with future opportunities for growth and prosperity.

"This partnership will make best use of council-owned buildings and provide value for money, while also providing better community facilities for our residents to enjoy."

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MARK FRANCOIS MP



Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford



LOCAL NEWS

On Tuesday, December 1, a vote took place in the House of Commons regarding the imposition of a tiered system to replace the national lockdown we saw throughout November. Having thought very carefully about this issue, in the end I voted against these restrictions as they were proposed and, as your Member of Parliament, I thought I should explain why I did so.

For me, the question was not whether or not we wish to combat the virus – we all do – but rather whether the knock-on effects of the proposed restrictions would be so severe, not just economically but also in terms of mental health and delaying treatment for other serious illnesses, to outweigh the good that they might otherwise do.

For instance, I have been contacted by a number of small businesses in my constituency in recent weeks, which are now virtually on their knees financially and are asking, I think quite legitimately, whether the

proposed cure is now becoming worse than the disease itself.

I am not a doctor but, even as a layman, I can see that there is a balance of medical risks here and the argument is not nearly as simplistic as some advocates of ever tighter restrictions might suggest.

Nevertheless, at the time of writing this column in mid-December, the government resolved to place the bulk of Essex into Tier 3. Around the same time, the NHS, with some logistical support from the military, commenced the roll-out of a national vaccination programme, which should have begun to gather momentum in the New Year. I very much hope the new vaccines will allow us to return to at least some kind of “new normal” by around Easter.

In the meantime, I will continue to use my judgment when voting on these matters, even if it means defying a three-line whip again.

Dodgy pumps blamed for car issues

A supermarket in Rayleigh has paid compensation to another customer who claims to have had issues after filling up at its petrol station.

The latest claim by a motorist follows a spate of similar complaints in September last year, which led to compensation being paid by Sainsbury's as a “goodwill gesture”.

Back then, it was believed that water had been mixed in with the fuel, leading to issues for several motorists whose cars subsequently broke down.

Sainsbury's claimed it was over a two-hour period that customers were affected.

It later contacted all motorists who had used that particular pump and handed out compensation.

However, the latest customer to complain had a similar story to tell as those affected in September – hours after filling up, their car broke down.

The furore it caused back in September led one Rayleigh woman to warn others not to use the station.

She said: “My car broke down literally an hour after filling my tank and others have also broken down after filling up at this station.

“I'm so happy to finally have an explanation but I



Photo credit: Ruby Ward @theartoflondonn

don't want others to have to spend loads of money when this is the reason.”

A Sainsbury's spokesman said: “We have made contact with the small number of customers potentially affected and in the vast majority of cases they have received compensation.”

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NEWS FROM

RAYLEIGH TOWN MUSEUM

2020 – a legacy for Rayleigh. An interesting year and one that will leave us all with permanent changes to our lives.

Who would have thought that so many of us would now be competently videoconferencing with friends and relatives? The long-predicted switch to cashless shopping has also taken us by storm, the high street hit hard by the restrictions imposed – the much-chronicred gradual transition to online shopping has, in reality, arrived with the speed of an express train.

Such rapid changes to our way of life have been upsetting for many, but this landmark year brought with it many positive changes as well.

It provided many people with a brief respite from the normally pressured life that we lead; more time at home for commuters, with the concept of working from home now proven and realistic. More family time with walks and exercise; it has given people a chance to reconsider what is important to them – people, associations, hobbies; for many, a real chance to restructure their lives and priorities.

The Rayleigh Town Museum has charted how this pandemic has affected Rayleigh, and in years to come we will no doubt hold an exhibition charting its full story.



Appeal following burglaries

Police are appealing for help in identifying a man they want to speak to in connection with two burglaries that occurred on December 1 between 10am and 12pm.

The first incident occurred at a property in Nursery Close, where an offender forced their way into a home and stole jewellery and perfume.

Later, what is believed to be the same offender forced their way into a home in Church Road, Benfleet

– a short distance away – and stole perfume, jewellery and a laptop.

Officers believe both incidents are linked and are appealing for anyone who saw anything, or anyone who recognises the man captured in the CCTV images, to get in touch.

Anyone with information is asked to contact PC Michelle Stoneman at Castle Point and Rochford CID, quoting incidents 599 and 417 of December 1.



LOCAL NEWS



News from THE ROTARY CLUB

Rayleigh Mill

It is not at all well known, but Santa Claus is a very special friend of Rotary. Both Rotary and Santa like being nice to people.

For a number of years, Santa, when he was out and about meeting children just before Christmas, managed to collect quite a bit of money and, being a good friend of Rotary, donated it to a very big charity called Rotary Foundation.

This is a very well-organised charity, where 99 per cent of its income goes to aid projects. Only 1 per cent is used for overheads. Rotary Foundation helps people all over the world by giving aid when there are natural disasters, providing clean drinking water in areas where it is scarce and helping equip schools where resources are hard to come by.

Last year, because of COVID-19 restrictions, there were not as many places that Santa could visit and, of course, like everyone else, he had to practise social distancing and could not get too close to the children.

But Santa did, however, still manage to get out to meet a few children. On December 12 he helped to

host Breakfast with Santa at The Bull Inn at Hockley. There was a small collection from the attendees and Steve Playle, the pub manager, made a very generous donation which, when donated to the Rotary charity, will help lots of people all over the world.

Santa then hurried off to Mill Race Garden Centre just outside Colchester where Gavin Marlow, the operations manager, had arranged for him to visit in the afternoon so some of the children there could come and talk to him and have their photograph taken with him.

He enjoyed chatting to the children so much that he went back on the following day when he was again very busy, despite the rain trying to put him off.

Thanks to the kindness and generosity of all those who visited, a lot more money was raised for Rotary Foundation.

Santa's three visits, with everyone's help – especially Charlotte at Colchester – raised £515 which will, through Rotary International, help people all over the world, not just at Christmas but whenever people are in trouble.

Arrests made after drug bust

A man and a woman have been arrested after police carried out a drugs raid in Rayleigh.

Officers searched a property in Glasseys Lane on December 2 after a tip-off.

They smashed in the front door and made the arrests after a quantity of drugs, paraphernalia linked to drug cultivation and cash were found.

A spokesman for the Rochford Community Policing Team said: "Every piece of intelligence we receive is assessed and recorded on our database to support warrant applications such as this."

The raid was also praised by the council.

Simon Wootton, Conservative leader of Rochford District Council, said: "This is good news and we support any action by the police to enforce this and take people and drugs like this out of the community."

"This is not acceptable behaviour with possible drug dealing anywhere in our borough. I am pleased to hear the drugs, equipment and cash was taken off our streets. I think this is always shocking in a nice



community and area such as this.

"Neighbours will find it a shock to think it's happening so close to home in the midst of such a pleasant area."

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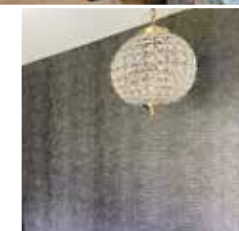
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The PROPERTY Bug?

HOW COVID-19 HAS TRANSFORMED NOT JUST OUR LIVES, BUT THE PROPERTY MARKET TOO

While so much of our COVID-19 focus in 2020 was on health, employment and income, the pandemic's impact on the property market has been extreme, with further fluctuations due over the next few months as the industry reflects the variable conditions we find ourselves living under.

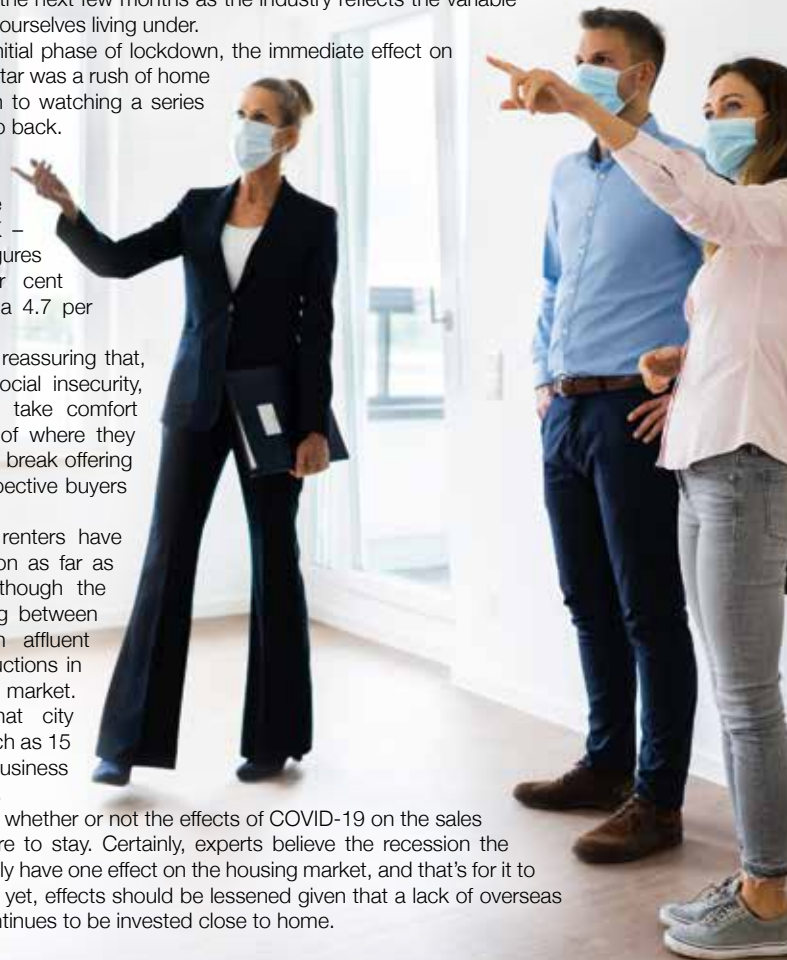
Certainly in the initial phase of lockdown, the immediate effect on our bricks and mortar was a rush of home improvements akin to watching a series of *DIY SOS* back to back.

Sure enough, the Land Registry – generally considered the best guide to house prices in the UK – published September figures that indicated a 1.7 per cent month-on-month rise and a 4.7 per cent increase year on year.

For many, then, it's been reassuring that, through a time of great social insecurity, homeowners can at least take comfort from the increasing value of where they reside, with the stamp duty break offering a further incentive for prospective buyers to go in with higher bids.

And at the same time, renters have enjoyed increased protection as far as tenancy conditions go, although the market finds itself diverging between an increase in rentals in affluent areas and fewer new instructions in the bottom portion of the market. Research also shows that city centre lets are down as much as 15 per cent as some urban business areas become ghost towns.

It all leaves us speculating whether or not the effects of COVID-19 on the sales and lettings market are here to stay. Certainly, experts believe the recession the economy is suffering can only have one effect on the housing market, and that's for it to follow suit into decline. And yet, effects should be lessened given that a lack of overseas travel means the pound continues to be invested close to home.



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The ULTIMATE formula

Sir Lewis Hamilton's ascent to being the greatest F1 driver of all time

It's fair to speculate that Sir Lewis Hamilton polarises opinion, even in the midst of being unveiled as the greatest ever Formula One racer.

His victory at the Turkish Grand Prix in the middle of November ensured the Stevenage-born speedster equalled Michael Schumacher's record of seven Drivers' Championships, having already surpassed the German's race victory total in October, in another season of unparalleled dominance. By the close of the campaign in Abu Dhabi on December 13, 2020, Hamilton's points tally was 347, a colossal 123 ahead of closest rival Valtteri Bottas.

The champ said: "To all the kids out there, dream the impossible. Seven is just unimaginable, but when you work with such a great group of people and you really trust each other, there is just no end to what you can do together. I feel like I'm only just getting started; it's really weird."

He may just be correct in that statement. At 35, the Mercedes driver has time on his side – the great Luigi Fagioli was 53 when he scored his final race win at the 1951 French Grand Prix.

Certainly, it's becoming difficult to remember a time when Hamilton's grit, speed and desire wasn't present in the sport. Many believe he truly announced himself at the British Grand Prix in 2008, driving for McLaren. Although he'd already clocked up six victories, dating back to Canada a year previously, his mastery of brutally wet driving conditions to win by more than a minute after starting fourth on the grid set a precedent where he was regarded as the driver to beat.

The world title duly arrived later that year in spectacular fashion, as on the final corner of the final lap in the final race, in Brazil, he overtook Timo Glock to snatch victory from the gearbox of defeat.

After switching to Mercedes in 2014, following a fallow period, Hamilton's synchronicity with the technicians and mechanics accelerated success beyond all expectations, failing just once, in 2016, as Nico Rosberg pipped him to title glory by just five points. The German realised he would most likely never repeat that feat, and promptly retired from the sport, never to be seen again.

Wind forward, and even finding himself struck down with COVID-19 at the start of December was not to dampen the determination and drive of Hamilton, a man who now looks towards new heights, the first of which will be making up the handful of race wins required to get to that magic total of 100.

As far as being the sport's 'Marmite man', his award of the 2020 BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award on December 20, 2020, proves that public swell remains with him.

And anyway, Hamilton gives short shrift to the detractors. He will discuss his knighthood, announced as part of the New Year Honours; he'll reference all those times he's arrowed across the finish line in first position; he'll note the 84 occasions he's started on the front of the grid; and, of course those seven titles. And he'll point to the fact that he is, truly, the greatest ever.



PUZZLES & TRIVIA

PUZZLES

Answers: see end of The VISION Listings

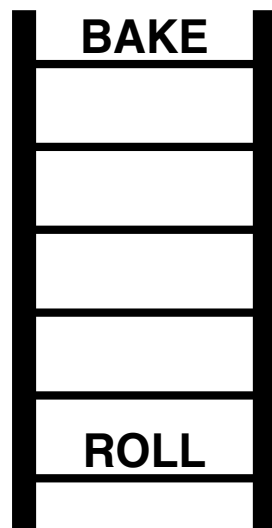
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DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Nepal's flag is the only flag in the world that doesn't have four sides
- ▶ Purple is the most uncommon colour to be used on flags
- ▶ The flag of Belize uses more colours than any other flag
- ▶ Hawaii's state flag contains the Union Jack. It is the only US state flag to include a foreign country's national flag
- ▶ There are 12 stars on the flag of Europe
- ▶ When the Queen goes to Parliament, the Royal Standard is flown from Victoria Tower
- ▶ Denmark has the oldest flag in the world, designed in 1219 and unchanged since
- ▶ South Sudan has the newest flag in the world
- ▶ The study of flags is called vexillology

WORD LADDER



THE AIM: Change the word at the top of the ladder one letter at a time to make the word at the bottom.

HOW TO: Change one letter on each step to make a new word. By the time you reach the end, you should have created the new word.

DO NOT rearrange the order of the letters.

TIP: There is usually more than one way to solve this puzzle.

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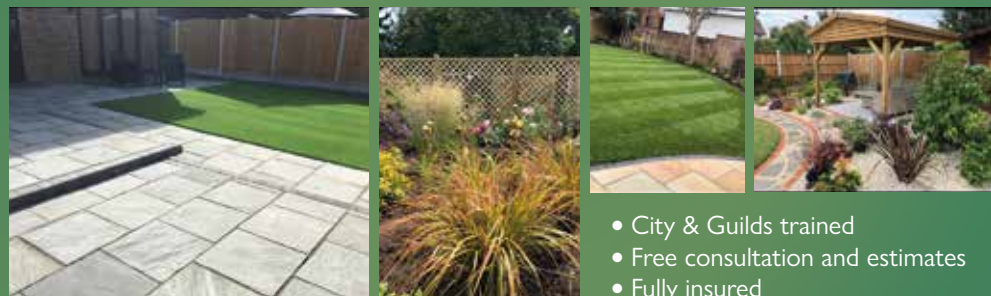
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GARDENING

Carnation

JANUARY BIRTH FLOWER
OF THE MONTH:

If you were born in January, then your birth flower is the delicately scented and long-lasting carnation. Commonly gifted on Mother's Day, carnations are one of the easiest flower varieties to care for.

WHAT DOES A CARNATION SYMBOLISE?

Carnations come in many shades, and each colour has a different meaning:

- > **LIGHT RED** carnations symbolise admiration
- > **DARK RED** carnations represent deep love and affection
- > **WHITE** carnations are used to convey purity and luck
- > **PINK** carnations are used to show gratitude as well as to remember the deceased
- > **YELLOW** carnations convey disappointment and rejection
- > **PURPLE** carnations stand for unpredictability

WHAT DOES THIS BIRTH FLOWER SAY ABOUT YOUR PERSONALITY?

If your birth flower is the carnation, you are said to be fiercely loyal and have unrivalled love for your family and friends. You are also strongly motivated and will work hard to gain a position of power in your career.

HOW CAN I GROW CARNATIONS?

Carnations are relatively easy to grow, although they do need between four and six hours of direct sunlight a day. For best results, plant in drained soil that is slightly alkaline and fertilise regularly. Tall varieties may need support to hold up their stems as they grow. You can grow carnations in flower beds or in containers such as pots.

DO CARNATIONS COME BACK YEAR AFTER YEAR?

Carnations come in annual, biennial and perennial types, so depending on the amount of space you have, you are guaranteed to be able to find a variety to fit your garden.

Perennial carnation seeds should be planted in late autumn to early spring and annual carnation seeds can be sown directly in the ground from April to May or in shelter from as early as March.





Horticulture Heroes:

There's nothing quite like learning building knowledge from the ground up, and for a young Ellie Harrison, the wildlife, ecology and wide-open spaces of Zimbabwe provided a fertile and expansive canvas on which to construct her career.

From kids' TV to wildlife programming and on to the BBC, stopping off along the way at the Chelsea Flower Show, the now-43-year-old's focus has always been in the embracing of the natural world, even in home surroundings.

"I'm not sure where the phrase 'wildlife gardening' came from, but it requires little explanation," says the presenter and broadcaster. "As much as I admire the ingenuity and craft so many of us invest in our green spaces at home, I sometimes feel it is a look that can be a bit too contrived and planned.

"Wildlife gardening is really about embracing living landscapes. It doesn't matter if you're talking about

a 100ft lawn or something as simple as a flower bed, the point is that our spaces have all the life and variety that nature and the countryside provide."

At the heart of it is having the right platforms for birds, bees and insects. That will stimulate the impact of genuine wildlife in an area that might be bereft of anything noticeable.

"It's a case of making natural and organic decisions to decorate your space. Instead of using a dull wooden fence, invest in a living boundary that can feature bamboo, twine, flowers, scent and berries."

Similarly, a pond can be used to harvest natural life such as newts, tadpoles, frogs, toads and insects, rather than fish imported in from the local pet shop.

"The exciting thing about wildlife gardening is the creation of a world that grows and evolves in front of you, and all by itself. The phrase 'how nature intended' never seemed so pertinent."

Photo credit: bbc.co.uk

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GARDENING

Just as people need a helping hand to combat the seasonal selections of health afflictions, so too should we be aware of the pests and disease that threaten the green goodies in our gardens.

CABBAGE KILLERS

You wouldn't think the humble caterpillar would rate high in the list of garden gremlins, but the larvae of cabbage moth caterpillars can reap havoc in a bed of well-tended crops. A simple insect-proof mesh covering should keep most of them away.

THE SLUG BUG

Your average garden slug will happily eat away at any type of vegetable it finds, and whether leaves, shoots, fruits or stems, he's happy as long as he's feeding. Encouraging hedgehogs into your garden is a great way to get a classic slug predator to help you out.

THE CUCUMBER SLUMBER

Blossom end rot sounds a lot worse than it is... in fact, it's not even rot. More precisely, the blossom end of anything from aubergines to chillis, cucumbers to squash and melons, develops into a sunken rotten area. It comes as a result of irregular water supply, so is easily fixed.

FEAR THE APHID

A sticky residue that gradually turns into a sooty mould is a sure-fire sign that your plant has an aphid problem. Sometimes barely visible to the naked eye, aphids can cause stunted plant growth and curled-up leaves, but can be warded off by good garden hygiene and natural predators, such as ladybirds.

BLIGHT

A fungus that causes leaves to shrivel and brown patches to appear on fruits, this fungus-like organism loves damp environments, and there's little you can do to halt its rapid spread, other than remove affected plants and start again. Once more, maintaining good hygiene in your plot is the best way to ensure you don't have to deal with the problem in the first place.



GO NUTS!

With Shrove Tuesday fast approaching, what better time to discover a new tasty topping for your pancakes?

Check out our own version of a well-known hazelnut cocoa spread which is half the calories, vegan and packed full of healthy fats and vitamins.

Super Healthy Homemade Hazelnut Spread

WHAT YOU NEED:

240g raw hazelnuts | 1½ tbsp pure vanilla extract | ¼ cup cocoa powder | ¼ cup pure maple syrup or unrefined sugar | ¼ tsp salt | ½ cup vegan milk (or normal milk if you do not need a vegan recipe) | 2 tsp oil

HOW TO MAKE:

- Set oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6
- Roast hazelnuts for 6–8 minutes
- Leave to cool slightly and then rub off skins
- Blend the nuts in a food processor until they are the consistency of butter
- Add all the other ingredients and blend until smooth

Not just for pancakes, try using your homemade hazelnut spread in these yummy

recipes that the whole family will love.

Hazelnut Hot Chocolate

All you need to create this dangerously addictive hot chocolate is cocoa powder, milk and some hazelnut spread. Simply mix all the ingredients together and pop in the microwave for 2 minutes.

Caramel Cream Nutty Chocolate Lollies

The perfect little treat for tiny hands, simply dissolve 70g of hazelnut spread in a pan over boiling water and set aside half. Pour a thin layer into small, round silicone moulds and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Take out and place a hazelnut-sized piece of salted caramel cream in each mould and cover with remaining spread. Place a lolly stick in each and refrigerate for a further 5 hours.

Nutty Iced Biscuits or Cake

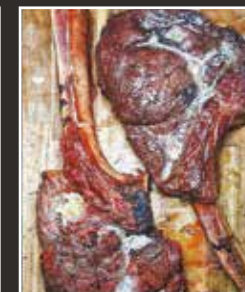
If you are bored with your usual icing, why not use some hazelnut spread instead? Just warm some of the nutty mixture in the microwave for 10–20 seconds and then gently spread over biscuits or cakes. It makes a great cake filler too.



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Not quite boasting the seclusion of a desert island, a number of former boathouses and pumping rooms have, however, been converted into cool little overnight abodes. The Whitby Boathouse, sleeping two, features a narrow bridge separating guests from the not-so-distant 'mainland'.

BUSES

With original features such as iconic winding stairs, original seats and even the steering wheel handily in place in what is now a downstairs bathroom, converted double-decker buses give travel fanatics the ultimate experience... just don't expect it to stick to the timetable (not that it ever did).

PLANES

Fancy the thrill of flight without the faff of the airport? Look no further than The Jet Star. Tucked away in Redberth, Pembrokeshire, this little-known Welsh wonder was originally a first-class private plane from the 1970s. Grounded, it now sleeps up to four people – you don't even need to remember your passport.

FIELDS

Wherever you wish to roam in the British countryside, you are sure to be within reach of a traditional shepherd's hut. Originally an essential place for farmhands to seek refuge from inclement weather, the advent of the Airbnb revolution has seen them transformed into cosy and sometimes luxurious boltholes – the ideal way to bask in the beauty of nature without having to pitch a tent.

TRAINS

Finally, for train fanatics, how about staying in a converted restaurant carriage? Rather than slumming it on bumpy rails, this static wagon, positioned overlooking the Rother Valley Railway in Kent, provides more room than you'd expect, and dates right the way back to use during the Second World War.



Photo credit: we love whitby.com, coolstays.com, applecampin.co.uk, coolcamping.com, railwaytreats.co.uk



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'90s HAIR revival

From Jennifer Aniston's boho beach waves to Victoria Beckham's bob to Winona Ryder's pixie cut, one of the biggest hair trends of 2021 will be the return of hairstyles from the '90s. Think new year, new do.

THE LIVED-IN LOOK

One of the greatest things about the '90s was the effortlessly cool and laid-back style that spread across the nation, in terms of both fashion and haircuts. Spring 2021 will see hairstyles that feel less structured and more lived-in. Whether you go short or long, ask your hairdresser for a natural-looking, low-maintenance cut.

THE BOB

Although the bob has been a strong and unwavering hair trend throughout 2020, next year will see the return of the classic '90s bob. For those with straight hair, opt for a blunt and unstructured bob that is cut to chin level and tucked behind the ear.

THE BOXY CURL

If your hair is naturally curly, then 2021 is all about short and boxy shapes for added bounce. Avoid a straight cut and instead ask for layers and a light fringe. This look is all about texture and volume so you may want to invest in a good-quality volumising spray for added oomph.

THE SUPER-SHORT PIXIE

If you are feeling particularly bold and daring in 2021, you may want to try the super-short pixie cut. Or, if you are ready to take the ultimate plunge, you could even choose a buzz-cut pixie loved by the likes of Kate Hudson and Cara Delevingne.

THE FACE-FRAMING LAYERED LOOK

This look was fairly popular this year but is only set to get stronger in 2021 and beyond. In fact, you won't be able to go five minutes on Instagram without some face-framing plaits popping up on your feed.



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Are you READY TO GO ~~SO~~BER?

Although January may feel like the worst possible time to try to give up your favourite tipples (isn't this month depressing enough?), you may be surprised at how great you feel after cutting out alcohol for just one month. What to expect when you give up alcohol...

WEEK ONE

Undeniably the most challenging week in your booze-free month, you may experience some unwanted side effects in the first seven days, such as headaches and intense sugar cravings, especially if you are a heavy drinker. That being said, you will also start to see the positive effects of giving up alcohol, including: Better decision-making | More energy | An improved sleeping pattern

WEEK TWO

After two weeks without alcohol, you will continue to enjoy the health benefits listed above, as well as a few new ones, such as: Reduction in acid reflux as your stomach lining becomes normalised | Weight loss | Better mental health

WEEK THREE

As you are now past the halfway mark, the effects of not drinking will start to contribute to your long-term health, with benefits including: Improved vision | Better kidney health | A reduction in blood pressure, which can lessen your risk of future health problems, such as heart disease

WEEK FOUR

The final week of your no-booze challenge and the effects on your health will be apparent for everyone to see and will include: Better-looking skin | Reduced dandruff and eczema | Up to 15 per cent less fat in your liver

IS DRY JANUARY WORTH IT?

Although Dry January has become increasingly popular in recent years, is it really worth it in terms of your long-term health if you continue to drink for the other 11 months of the year?

According to Alcohol Change UK, yes it is, with this challenge forcing you to confront how much you drink and to take notice of the harm it can cause.



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NATIONAL PULL A SICKIE DAY ON



According to UK statistics, the first Monday of February is the day when employees are most likely to pull a sickie. Although excuses may be limited this time round, that doesn't mean we can't take a look at some of the more inventive reasons that people have come up with over the years. You can't make this stuff up!

"My only pair of work trousers is in the wash"

Not the best excuse, as what would you do if your employer simply told you to come in your casual clothes?

"It's my dog's birthday and I need to arrange a party for him"

Even though we are a nation of pet lovers, we can't see too many bosses accepting this far-fetched fabrication.

"My grandmother poisoned me with her ham"

Yes, somebody really did use this as a reason why they hadn't turned up for work. Although, to be honest, this might just be crazy enough to actually work.

"I'm too drunk to drive"

Although this may actually be true, we are not sure that this reason would go down too well with HR.

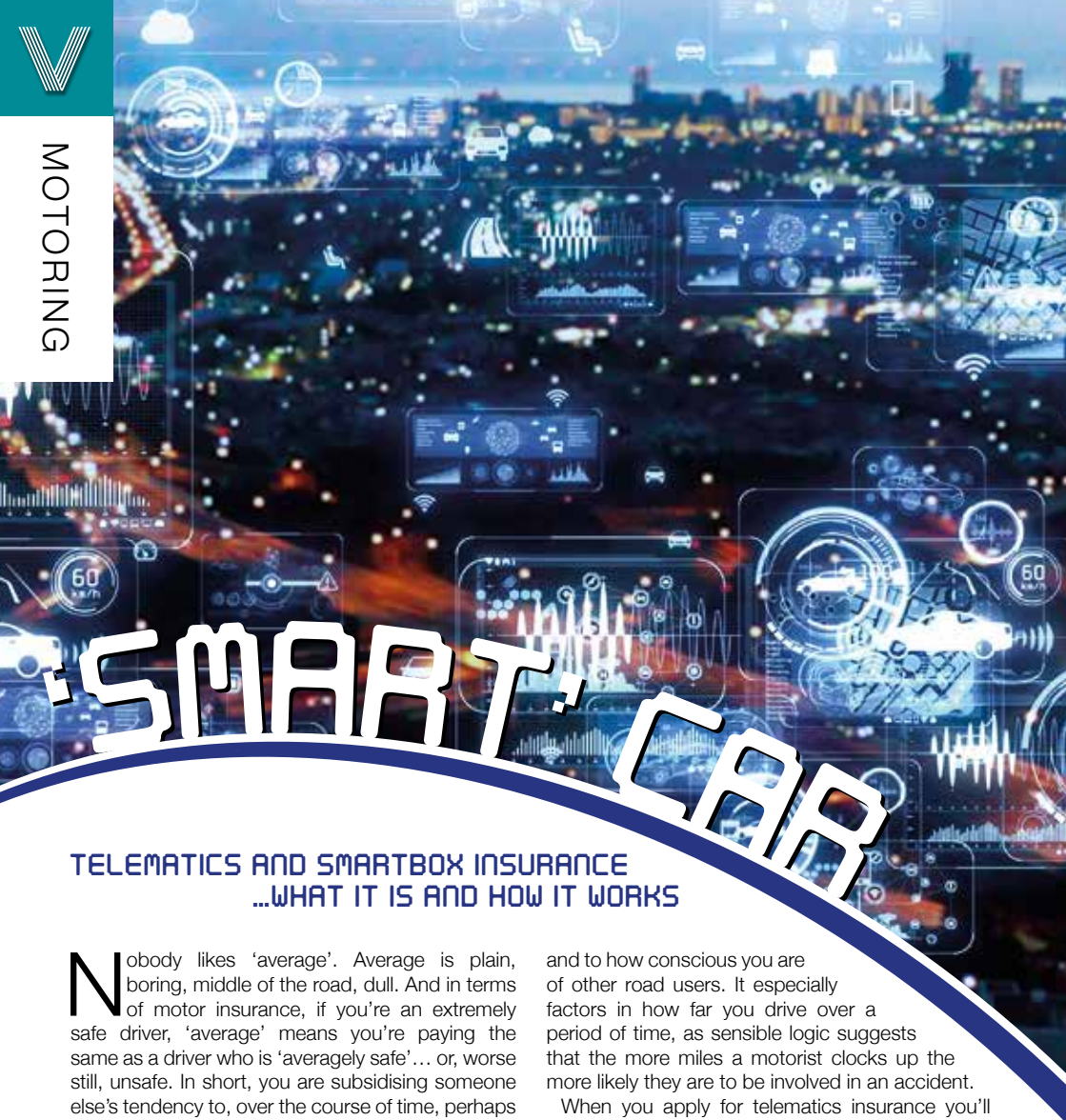
"I can't come in today, the show I've been watching just released a new series"

Another truthful explanation, and to be fair, we've all been there. Damn you, Netflix!

How you should call in sick to work

- > Contact your employer as soon as possible
- > Keep your reason brief
- > Be as helpful as possible
- > Make sure you speak to the right person
- > If you are struggling with your mental health, be honest and say so, but you are not required to go into details
- > Only text if your employer has previously okayed this method of calling in sick
- > Consider remote working if you feel able to





SMART CAR

TELEMATICS AND SMARTBOX INSURANCE ...WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

Nobody likes 'average'. Average is plain, boring, middle of the road, dull. And in terms of motor insurance, if you're an extremely safe driver, 'average' means you're paying the same as a driver who is 'averagely safe'... or, worse still, unsafe. In short, you are subsidising someone else's tendency to, over the course of time, perhaps break the speed limit, undertake, be aggressive, and all the other things that lead to accidents which, in turn, lead to car insurance costs being as high as they are.

That's where telematics insurance comes in. Using the technology found in a smartbox (actually just a small device that plugs in below your steering wheel), this clever piece of tech will measure how well you drive.

In other words, the days of having to pay premiums based on the 'average driver' are no more – what you pay is directly related to how safely you take corners, to how much you respect road conditions

and to how conscious you are of other road users. It especially factors in how far you drive over a period of time, as sensible logic suggests that the more miles a motorist clocks up the more likely they are to be involved in an accident.

When you apply for telematics insurance you'll have to provide information regarding where your car is parked, when in the day you usually drive, the types of roads you use and approximate annual mileage. All being well, you'll be rewarded with an initial monthly cost that's much lower than standard insurance.

You'll encounter few problems if you stick to your promise of driving safely and stay within your mileage quota.

However, be warned: from hard braking to speeding to driving too many miles, telematics insurance may well cost you more in the long run if you fail to keep your motoring promises.

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Remembering

DIEGO



A hero of the game, a villain to himself

The gap between hero and villain has perhaps never been better exemplified – in sporting terms, at least – than through the life of Diego Maradona.

When the Argentine departed us on November 25, football, sport and the world as a cultural sponge lost someone whose notoriety was as decorated as his talent.

In the space of four short minutes in the Estadio Azteca, in Mexico City, on June 22, 1986, Maradona showed the two sides of his character in the sort of perfect juxtaposition usually reserved for a Shakespeare play. The tragedy came first – that ‘hand of God’ moment that we all know, even if few of us, now, here in 2021, actually saw it happen live.

And then, the comedy, even if it was again England’s footballers being derided, as a dancing, pirouetting, sauntering, bulldozing run through the Three Lions’ defence rubbed salt in our wounds,

while offering up a perfect apology to that same deity for the forward’s earlier misdemeanour.

When that higher force claimed the 60-year-old in November, football fans the world over began to ponder again the best ever – Puskás, Pelé, Ronaldo, Messi. Of course, Maradona would never enter into such debate.

He may have led an average Argentina side to World Cup glory in 1986, and an even flatter version of themselves to the final four years later. He may have performed miracles in guiding unfancied, unfashionable Napoli to Serie A success in Italy. And in later life as drugs, gangs, sex workers and other lurid temptations possessed a man whose only passion, really and truly, was to kick a ball, he may have lost sight entirely of those dusty, poverty-stricken streets in Buenos Aires where he grew up.

And yet, through it all he stayed true to himself: ‘I am black and white... I’ll never be grey.’

Photo credit: Carlo Fumagalli/AP/Shutterstock

Remembering

RAY

Bidding farewell to former Liverpool, Spurs and England keeper Ray Clemence

There’s something unique about goalkeepers – they have spirit, longevity and a sense of bravery that far outweighs any other player on the pitch. It’s also commonly known that they’re rather daft... how else can you explain wanting to have footballs fired your way at more than 100mph?

And yet, Ray Clemence was as close to normal as you could get. The former England stopper, who passed away on November 15 at the age of 72, was a scholar of the game – his MBE for services to football bore evidence to that. In more than 1,000 career appearances, more than half of which were for Liverpool in a golden era for the club, he clinched five league titles, three European Cups, three UEFA Cups, two FA Cups and a host of other trophies.

He took his knowledge, guile, influence and experience to the next level with management and coaching projects – he oversaw Barnet as joint manager and tutored the keepers at Tottenham as part of the club’s coaching staff.

Yet it was as the national team’s goalkeeping coach under Glenn Hoddle, Kevin Keegan, Sven-Göran Eriksson, Steve McClaren and Roy Hodgson that he truly excelled, with multiple World Cup and European Championship campaigns.

Also employed as the FA’s Head of Development, Clemence’s involvement with the game continued right the way through to his death, and most recently he had been back working with Spurs.

An initial prostate cancer diagnosis arrived in 2005. He lived with that for 15 years, but finally succumbed to the illness in November. His passing was marked by a flood of tributes, as one of the greatest-ever England goalkeepers hung up his gloves for the final time.

Photo credit: Colorsport/Shutterstock



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