

Syncronauts Chairman's Report 2008/2009

Welcome to the AGM...

As this year has just demonstrated, there is no denying that a renaissance in the popularity of our favourite vehicle has really taken hold. It has to be said, that so many more are really cherishing their Syncros whether they be vans, pickups, campers or caravelles. And more are seeking them out with a view to long term ownership, even if considerable refurbishment is on the cards.

It's good to see this is the case with both first time Syncro owners and also those who have had a longer term relationship with them - albeit sometimes on and off!

The level of innovation and enthusiasm in all its guises never ceases to amaze... and no more so than in the quality of engine installations, or further refinement of the original factory fit. Then, we have those who've committed considerable time to the design & provision of Syncro-specific parts, add-ons and custom developments. More services than ever across the country are being offered to help with repair, maintenance and modification. A lot of work has been going on, and from what I've seen this year particularly, some really good quality and diverse approaches to further improving these vehicles has been taking place. Also, it's good to be able to report that recent worries about basic spares availability are either resolved or looking to have a solution in the near future.

This last year, our site-events and club activities have attracted considerable new blood, again, some coming to Syncros or more serious off-roading afresh. Hopefully, each of our main site-based events have a flavour of their own, with the earlier meets focused towards refreshing skills, giving some guidance and encouragement to others as well as uncovering weaknesses and faults needing ironing out. Being able to attract owners and whole families from all corners of the country to one or more meetings a year means we must be doing something right – maybe it's rumours about our convivial campfires? Syncropendence 2009 achieved our biggest attendance yet, so please, read on to see what we got up to...

== The Syncronauts' mission ==

The **Objective of the Syncronauts** remains to encourage ownership and off-road driving of our VW Syncros, the latter being through the organisation of off-road site events and green-lane driving in various parts of the country. Also to make these meetings sociable and as good a place as any to exchange ideas, see other Syncros in action and hone driving skills; wild-camping skills and a bit of fun always plays a part too.

A further effect, though not an explicit aim, is that our group enthusiasm for these vehicles encourages better general support from within the trade and stimulates the production of custom fitments and components relating to many aspects of their usage.

Having now a developed, mature organisation and membership, also gives us an International presence and allows us to play our part in such activities described below, the 2010 25 Year celebration in Germany.

==The Syncronaut Year 2009==

Syncronauts 2009 **Calendar** – this was produced rather late due to myself and Jenny setting up an updated forum for Club 80-90. We eventually sold about 50 calendars – generously sponsored by SyncroNutz & AidanTalbot - Thanks. We aim to produce the calendar earlier this year and garner further corporate orders and support.

This year has had a big focus, something that has developed and gathered a lot of momentum as the months have gone by – **The 25YearSyncro** celebrations next year... Although we were anticipating a big meeting sometime, somewhere next year, Mike (Busman) Plompen kicked this off again back in January with a timely Yahoo forum for potential organisers to discuss possibilities and garner international interest.

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We suggested one role we could play would be to help with the forum and website side of things. Having got a proper interactive forum setup for better communications, we volunteered Treasurer Jenny's skills to design & build a pukka 25YearSyncro website. This has been a quite major task, getting the look just right, incorporating videos and recently making it multi-lingual – I think she'd rather not know how many hours has gone into it! Many thanks Jenny.

Henning Gramman who organises the annual Mammut Park meet in Germany has become the de facto group leader.

At Vanfest this September, Aidan, Henning and Mike organised a face-to-face meeting to agree some priorities and a preliminary programme. This was successful with several Syncronaut Committee Members in attendance as well as some of the lowlanders. Recently, our Secretary Kevin Horler, represented us at a meeting with VW PR staff, at Hannover, again with promising and positive outcomes.

Please read the various reports for further details. UK booking through Syncronauts.

Dubfreeze – sold some stickers & calendars & enrolled 1 or 2 new members. Overall thought by Club 80-90 not to be as successful and well attended as last year, possibly due to the raised ticket prices. Thanks to Doug and others who helped setup and man the stand again

Shipston – our first Spring event.

Thanks to Doug who recce'd this site and with help set up the trials etc. This turned out to be an inspired choice of venue, our first time there, and our first time at a site providing such fun playthings as a see-saw and girder-bridge. The campsite was good, weather fine for the weekend itself, and everybody seemed to find the driving and challenges sufficient and good fun. The Dodoka was brought by Pete, got plenty of use (and abuse no doubt) and John Morrill kindly agreed to drive it back to Cambs with an ailing clutch – he didn't get half way, but stuck with the recovery – thanks John!

What was encouraging was the attendance (over 20) and the number of first timers to a Syncronaut meeting. It was particularly good to meet some of the Irish contingent for the first time and as touched upon in the intro, was obvious that a lot of work had gone into their Syncro campers.

Although Jenny and myself had recce'd some Oxfordshire lanes it proved too wet giving bad visibility. Those routes are still in the book...

Again choosing our favourite Llanfyllin farm site for **Syncropendence 2009** was the largest turnout of any event to date – well over 30 vehicles, and I can report that we just about kept everything ticking along, with a nice trial near the camping area (Doug again!).

The campsite field was thought by all to be the best yet, with just a small challenge upon entry ☺

Lewis brought the Dodoka, the Range-Rover Special (yup, same one as 2006) was brought by Nigel, and a lot of good site driving was had by anybody who wanted. I thought it was particularly pleasing to see Muna and Jenny getting some driving (and making some good steep climbs and descents in the Dodoka).

Aidan organised some local lanes again for the Monday, which about 5 or 6 of us stayed for.

Since CJ had wrapped up his Syncrospares business in Devon and moved on, it was in the spirit of maintaining the tradition of the **August Devon Event** that a handful of diehards decided to 'go there and do it, anyway'.

We drove some known lanes Saturday, including one requiring a good team effort with picks, spades and waffle boards. Sunday was a different outing altogether, a drive through Exmoor, finding some really lovely and very ancient ways buried in the Devon landscape. After a rather grand tour along the North coast, cream teas at the Valley of the Rocks rounded it off well. Several took the opportunity of driving up to South Moulton to introduce themselves to the owners and staff of the New SyncrosparesUK on the Monday, before departing for home.

A friend (and Syncronaut associate), Brish Dutt, offered to cook communal curry for Friday night, several others helped with assorted side dishes and everything went down so well, that noises were made (!) about repeating the idea next year.

Next year will hopefully see the event restored to its full former glory!

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On the syncro forum, Neil (Axeman) mooted a **Salisbury Plains Lanes** meeting. Neil found a friendly farmer near Wilton where about 10 units camped riverside; the weekend chosen was the end of August bank holiday, quite the best time as the British Army are on holiday all of August.

This was an excellent chance to see the plains and surrounding army training areas close-up driving many of the carriageways and getting some superb vistas across vast swathes of valleyland between ridges. **Tip:** Take a good pair of binoculars if you drive the plains. A fair bit of on-site maintenance went on with several CVJs being knocked out...

P.S. Julia brought her best carrot cake, Jenny lots of jars of home-made jams, plums & greengages. Doug delivered countless sets of waffle boards, all meticulously cut to size and packaged to order – all in all, a very enjoyable and quite different event.

Our final (we think!) meet up this year, an informal gathering arranged by Secretary Kevin, was near **Hope in the Peak District**, using the same campfield arranged by Paul (Blurb55) two years ago. Being late September, things can get a bit chilly, so the farmer even provided a large pile of wood for our campfires.

The Saturday was a cracking bright day, two groups taking in much the same routes of a year earlier, but enjoying the beautiful Peaks landscapes with the much better visibility.

On the Sunday, things got a more serious, with stone step climbs and descents being tackled by just a few – one vehicle destroying a wheel and tyre in the blink of an eye!

Apart from permission for a campfire now being almost mandatory at our wild camping fields, it seems on our laning meets, a pub lunch on one or other driving days is often a planned stop...

==The committee and thanks ==

Thanks to all the committee members, working well together this year with plenty of discussion on whatever diverse subjects warranted their time and making quick decisions as and when required.

Thanks to the club's officers Doug as Vice Chairman, Kevin as Secretary and Jenny as Treasurer again who carried out their work efficiently behind the scenes and giving good support and advice throughout.

52 members renewed their memberships this year – most of these attended events, but 17 didn't.

Thanks to all our members then for supporting us, many of whom contributed in their own ways, to making our meetings successful and pleasant events.

Thanks to Matt for organising stickers with the new logo design early in the year PrinterAl for producing them and Dai and Mark for design input.

Replacing our normal Spring event **Next Year** of course, at the end of April, many will be travelling to Mammut Park and are already booking and making travel plans.

The grapevine also has it that a secret/surprise Whitsun Bank Holiday event is being planned...

Now that club80-90 forums have been updated and consolidated on their own servers, progress is being made by Jenny re-writing the Syncro website, which hopefully will allow a more interactive experience, as well as an easier task of updating it's content.

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Finally, note that AOB includes an item suggesting we consider making PrinterAl an honorary member his readiness to always help with artwork and production of labels and stickers.

Till next year brings more to see and do Syncrowise,

Clive Smith
Chairman