



Photo: Neil Murray/Brighton and Hove Motor Club

Photo: RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

The 2021 Brighton Speed Trials are set to take place on September 4



Photo: Many Evans Picture Library/Grenville Collins Postcard Collection

Automobile Club Rally outside The Old Ship Hotel on King's Road, Brighton in 1909

Out for a spin

Don your driving gloves and drop the top – it's time to vroom through the story of how the motor car made tracks in the county

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The RM Sotheby's 2021 London to Brighton Veteran Car Run is taking place on Sunday November 7, marking the 125th anniversary of the event



Photo: Courtesy SSPL

An early 1920s poster by the Brighton Tourist Board promoting travel to the seaside town

Portrayed as the kingdom of the South Saxons, Sussex was known to many by the early 20th century and heavily promoted as a place of interest by the railways. But it was the emergence of the motor car in far greater numbers during the inter-war years that spotlighted the county's scenic landscape as an ideal getaway for those with wheels.

Motoring was progressively identified with the British countryside, as taking to the car represented a new age of freedom, providing an insight and opportunity for city dwellers to discover a picturesque and sometimes hidden world, together with a gentle reassurance of what it meant to be English.

In the early 1920s, largely driven by its proximity to a large and captive London market, new A-class trunk roads provided convenient escape routes, playing a significant part in a regeneration of the Sussex countryside economy. In tandem, the flourishing motor trade aided the revival and rural British life would increasingly come to rely on commercial traffic with

the motor car inviting its owners into a world of touring and weekend jaunts.

It was part and parcel of rebuilding the post-war tourist industry, where motorists were encouraged to see their own country first before heading abroad. Modern motoring played its part in helping to preserve a pre-industrial landscape that was carefully cultivated by image makers. In time, the sheer volume of cars on the road would come to significantly impact modern motoring and the countryside's harmony leading to the contemporary environmental movements we witness today.

GEAR CHANGE

The most rapid period of change began in 1922 when local authorities had commercial freedoms to promote themselves. As a result, poster advertising featuring bespoke images became a key tool for attracting visitors. The same images were often used in different marketing materials, such as for local holiday guides, with Brighton becoming one of the nation's most heavily promoted resorts.

Quite naturally, road transport ▶



Photo: Brighton and Hove Motor Club



Photo: RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

The action-packed Brighton Speed Trials usually attract more than 200 cars and motor bikes to take part in a high-speed timed run along Madeira Drive



Photo: James Beame/RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

The first London to Brighton car run in 1896 celebrated raising the speed limit for light locomotives on public highways



The 125th anniversary car run event will re-enact the 'tearing of the red flag' moment when, in 1896, cars were liberated to run freely on British roads by running from Whitehall to Brighton

Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library/ John Macdellan



Holidaymakers with a car on a street in Hastings, June 1927

linkages were quickly adapted as they delivered ease of access. In many ways, sylvan Sussex was typical of the new trend for taking to the countryside in the car. The 'Sussex countryside, beautiful in its fresh green robes, presents its most attractive aspects,' accorded the *Sussex Agricultural Express* in May 1930. The newspaper's use of an open-top car driven along a rural road personified the mood for travel indulgence. This allowed motor manufacturers to thrive during the inter-war years, resulting in a profusion of new models and the motorisation of the middle-classes. Car prices by the mid-1930s fell in real terms with the average cost almost half of what a car was 10 years before.

Increasingly, the open road was slightly less open; more cars on the road required integrated traffic control management – lights, signposting, junctions and eventually the modern roundabout – became the norm. Specialist buildings appeared on roadsides, such as garages, service stations and car parks and all were necessary as part of a

support infrastructure to get you there and back. Road liberty was a constant promotional theme, helping to change the character of country house life in the first decades of the 20th century. Parties heading to the country for the weekend was now a familiar troupe and, in their promotion, car companies and fuel suppliers bent over backwards in a bid to encourage this well-off group.

Motor manufacturers and petrol companies created innovative advertising campaigns, recruiting some of the country's best artistic talents projecting thoroughly modern must-have projections of life. Film and a new notion of celebrity endorsement also took a turn in the spotlight in the production of widely distributed marketing materials used to influence leisure plans.

Bloomsbury Group member Vanessa Bell, who had lived at Charleston Farmhouse in East Sussex for many years, painted a scene known as *Alfriston in 1931* for Shell's expanding See Britain First on Shell poster campaign. There was also an



Hailsham High Street, circa 1965

Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library/Francis Frith



East Grinstead High Street, circa 1955

Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library/Francis Frith

informal artists colony known as the Sussex School, which included AM Randall and Miss E Scott-Maldon who studied at Newlyn under Stanhope Forbes, portraying the county to great esteem during that decade.

Likewise, poet Cecil Floersheim – better known in life as a barrister – penned a number of titles to reflect a special Sussex countryside affiliation. Hardly surprising with such stimulus, vehicle ownership steadily increased, encouraging a transition towards an individualised leisure and travel culture. With it came an eagerness for touring and taking cars on holiday as the gradual tarmacking of hundreds of miles of country roads opened up longer-distance car (and charabanc) travel.

Likewise, motoring supporters such as the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) and the Automobile Association (AA) which, had been set up as membership organisations in the early years of the motor industry, were closely aligned to tourism. Coaching and country inns were renovated while breweries – big supporters in the production of up-to-the-

minute tourist guides – built new forms of comfortable hospitality entertainment. They all closely cooperated with destinations in developing a grading system for accommodation – period images of AA and RAC lanterns adorned above hotel and pub entrances – really left an imprint on travel services.

Modern motorist activities stirred a new and convenience-led hospitality industry with developing networks of roadside pubs, hotels and eateries – food-on-the-go had arrived. Yet problems were already identified, leading to specialist groups alert to keeping a vigilant eye on preserving Sussex's countryside. The *Bognor Regis Observer* in November 1928 noted that 'motors and charabancs have so changed the conditions on the seafronts that the footpaths in the "hinterland" have become increasingly valuable assets to the amenities of coast towns'. By the 1940s, conserving the Sussex countryside against the intrusion of the car was used by supporters of an east/west division of the county for administrative purposes. A hint of municipality was everywhere. ▶



Photo: Brighton and Hove Motor Club

The Brighton Speed Trials, which date back to 1905, culminate in a top six run-off to find the fastest car and bike of the bunch

TOOT TOOT, BEEP BEEP

The influence of the motorcar continued to be felt throughout the county and beyond. By then there was a complete suite of car-related marketing designed to ease travel to places of interest, with many of them designated ‘special places’ best accessed by car and Sussex was ideally placed to exploit this.

Even commercial firms latched on to the use of location place themes. Hovis conjured an illustrative street panorama based on the ancient town of Rye, as backcloth to advertising by incorporating an appealing scene of a tea room with clever company-infused signage built into the image. The car – crucial for countryside exploration – loomed ever present.

In its association with the car, Brighton holds a special place. The Hotel Metropole was put on the map in November 1896 as the official finishing point of the London to Brighton Emancipation Run – now called the Veteran Car Run – a festival to commemorate passing of the Light Locomotives

on Highways Act, which had come into force increasing a national speed limit to 12mph.

Elsewhere, Bexhill dabbled with vehicle sprint races held on the local landowner’s private estate – a clever twist to escape the 12mph speed limit – and all neatly packaged in a bid to cement the town’s reputation as a vibrant and smart resort.

In 1905 the city’s Madeira Drive was transformed with the introduction of the Brighton Speed Trials, which grew in popularity over the years as car ownership swelled. Organised by the Brighton and Hove Motor Club, it is now the world’s longest-running motorsport event and a key anchor in the city’s tourism calendar.

Post-war, people wanted to get to the coast quickly. As increasing numbers got behind the wheel, the concept of food on the go evolved with roadside restaurants popping up along the way – US-style diner Little Chef appeared in 1958. A new era of tourism, leisure and dining had come of age, with the motor car the driving force. ♦



Photo: RM Sotheby's London to Brighton Veteran Car Run

Entries for this year’s RM Sotheby’s London to Brighton Veteran Car Run are launching in late June