

Motor sport and recreation in the next ten years

The 'threats' to motor sport and recreation in the next ten years are not likely to be 'express' against recreational motoring as a whole, or against individual disciplines. The *defra* proposals on green lane access do not target trail driving and riding *per se* - they affect the land resource essential to the activity. There is no reason to suppose that the government will, one day, propose to ban, say, moto-cross, or sporting car trials; there is every reason to suppose that the government will introduce additional measures that will impinge on some disciplines of motor sport and recreation. The list below sets out some areas of government involvement and what effects might be caused.

Planning

The Planning and Compensation Bill went back to the House of Commons for its final stages in late April. As explained in another paper, the new Planning Act will change the land use planning system in such a way that is more likely than not to make it more difficult for motor sport sites to get planning permission, especially if the site operators are 'pushed' into applying by some adverse situation. Further, expect some tightening of permitted development rights when the consultation comes out in the summer of 2004. Expect planning authorities to be proactively tougher on breaches of planning rules.

Environment

Expect higher levels of environmental protection. Designated sites such as SSSI, SPA and SAC may well be extended to cover species and features not now included. Expect national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty to get increased protection powers.

Noise

At the moment the government's main concern - largely pushed by the EU - is urban and neighbourhood noise nuisance. Expect this to be extended slowly to the notion of expectation of tranquillity in the countryside. There will be a different approach to 'necessary noise' (tractors, commercial flights, military jets) than to 'noise for fun' (motor sport, rock concerts). Example - new rules coming in now on fireworks. Expect 'occasional noise' (e.g. two events per site per year) to be reasonably acceptable, but regular noise (e.g. an MX practice track) not to be.

Anti-social behaviour

This is the big growth area in social regulation. Expect 'cowboy motorcycling' to be seriously clamped-down on - maybe machine confiscation will become normal practice. This may affect 'lawful casual use', e.g. riding or driving for fun on land with permission, but not in an 'event'. Speeding - particularly sports motorcycles - and 'cruising' in cars will steadily shift from traffic issues to behavioural/social issues. The use of motor vehicles 'for fun' may itself steadily become 'anti-social'. Behaviour associated with motor sport (e.g. paddocks full of large transporters, barbecues and discos) may be affected, even if the event itself is 'authorised'. Expect the police to become harder on technical issues like insurance and number plates.

'Subsidiarity'

This term seems to have dropped off the political table of late, but the notion of devolving power as far down the governmental ladder as possible/appropriate has not gone away. Regional government seems inevitable. Planning powers will be regionalised and, in time, varied between areas. Whereas with the current system a national park is, to a degree, prevented from clamping down totally on motoring because it is constrained by available powers, in the future such 'low tiers' of government will get more opportunity to frame powers to suit their own purposes. This is visible also with the notion of making the police forces 'more responsive to local wishes and needs'.

(Other) Recreation

There is unlikely to be any general diminution of people's desire for outdoor recreation, and the manifesto desire of government to provide for this. The Forestry Commission plantations will steadily become more like 'nationally owned national parks'; motor sport access on its historical basis is then likely to be harder to maintain than easier. Expect 'sustainability' to be a key determinative factor in the desirability/acceptability of outdoor recreations. Expect noise to be another. Expect people increasingly to choose to live in an area for its recreation potential (e.g. walkers in Snowdonia, equestrians in Wiltshire, etc.) and then to exhibit extreme NIMBY behaviour, especially as the traditional tolerant country dweller/owner diminishes as a major land provider.

What to do?

Each discipline of motor sport and recreation needs to look at itself and consider how it might appear in the context of the parameters outlined above, and how it might change and evolve to survive. Here are some suggested examples of what might be done:

Noise. All of motor sport and recreation, and the industries, could institute a protocol to 'eliminate noise from countryside motor sport and recreation'. Plainly this does not bite on Brands Hatch and Silverstone - they operate in their own planning and political microclimate. Road-going sports motorcycles are once again becoming a major noise issue; 'custom' cars are not far behind.

Behaviour at events. This does not imply that people at events 'misbehave', but activities that accompany events - camping, massive transporters, discos, etc., will increasingly make the motor sport event itself less acceptable in the local community.

Frequency of events. Noise is more acceptable if it happens less often in the same place.

Visual character of sites. If when an event has left a site there is less 'visual intrusion', then that event is both more likely to be welcomed back, and more able to make noise without generating complaints. Some disciplines have a bigger 'visual footprint' than others. Should/could motor sport slowly shift towards 'shallow footprint' disciplines?

More self-regulation of activities. This may seem contradictory, but more self-regulation often means less imposed regulation. If more/all motor sport and recreation participants are 'licensed', or are regulated in the sense of being 'permitted' for every instance of activity, the various authorities are more likely to accept such regulation as being adequate. An erosion of freedoms, yes, but a safeguard of some freedom.

If all of these 'conflict areas' are addressed by motor sport and recreation pro-actively, and not just as a response to a national or local threat, then recreational motoring becomes a harder target to hit for those people who simply do not like it and are not going to be tolerant at any price. In some ways, they are not the problem; the problem is when 'ordinary people' badger their councillors, MPs and police because some aspect of recreational motoring - usually noise or trespass - is, in their view, blighting their lives. Cure this level and type of problem, and motor sport and recreation has a more predictable future, even if it has to change from what it now is, and give up some of what it currently 'possesses'.

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