

FORMER PRESIDENT ALAN DOMVILLE CONTINUES HIS REMINISCENCES AS A MOTORING WRITER & LIFELONG GROUP FRIEND.....

I am not a particularly enthusiastic "pet person" though I shed gallons of tears when our Lassie went to doggie heaven many years ago. But there is one creature with whom I have endured a relationship for half of my life - and my job as a motoring correspondent is to blame.

It came about when I attended an event in Barnsley organised by the motoring correspondent and then editor of that town's newspaper, the Chronicle, Don Booker. Barnsley boasts a number of local heroes including TV celebrity Michael Parkinson, the test cricket umpire Dickie Bird, landscape painter Ashley Jackson, actor Stan Richards and footballer "Skinner" Normanton along with Don himself. Colourful characters all - but there were none more "off the wall" than a chap called Reg Mellor.

Dapper, brylcreamed and with a Poirot-style waxed moustache, Reg was the self-styled "king of the ferret-leggers" and for the Barnsley event it was he who was selected to be the "turn."

I am certain the mischievous character of Compo in the long-running television series "Last of the Summer Wine" was partly based on Reg for he delighted in having several sharp-toothed ferrets running up and down inside his trousers. He apparently held the world record for holding one of his ferrets "within" for more than five hours at the Holmfirth country show where "Summer Wine" was filmed.

And one or two journalists were drawn from the audience to participate in the ferret experience - happily not I - and, catastrophe, one of them bit a photographer. But that wasn't to be the end of it. For Reg became so attached to the Northern Group of Motoring Writers that he would be invited to subsequent events.

He proudly took to wearing the group tie even pointing it out what it was during a television interview on Australian television during one of his world tours. Then came the crunch. Reg presented to the group a not-so attractive snarling stuffed ferret which for many years would be on display at each of our bi-monthly meetings and even our annual dinners.

As chairman I would have custody of our little mascot - who was confined to our garage between group events. Then came the time when Renault kindly offered to have him totally refurbished by a taxidermist and placed on a new plinth within a glass case and it was my wife and I who had to travel to North Lancashire and collect him after the project had been completed.

Succeeding chairmen have treated the ferret with considerably more respect, giving him pride of place in their homes. Reg, the member who was never proposed nor seconded, died some years ago and group tie went with him to his grave.