

Kevin Ash

THE MOST OUTSPOKEN MAN IN MOTORCYCLING



Roland Sands

Custom guru and racer



Delicious irony in the big speed camera turn-off

So is this the beginning of the end for speed cameras, following news that many local authorities are switching off the detested money-raising devices in a move to cut costs? I doubt we'll see the day when the curtain comes down on the very last nasty grey and yellow roadside box – indeed, I do believe a handful of them are genuinely useful, even if it's only a very tiny proportion of the 6000-plus infesting our highways and byways. But it does look like the end of their beginning, with numbers now falling for the first time since their introduction.

Many road users, though, will be finding the reasoning rather enigmatic, aware that the cameras have been raising something more than £100 million a year (one in four households now can boast a camera-convicted driver). The cameras are being switched off, we're told, because of road safety budget cuts of 40%. So how can that be, if they've been raising such vast funds?

The answer is a beautiful twist, a deliciously ironic payback for the greed upon greed which fuelled their proliferation in the first place. At one stage, speed cameras were self-funding, the idea being that the revenue they generated would be sufficient to cover their running costs and pay for new ones where needed.

But they proved to be such a cash cow, such a draconically effective extractor of funds simply supported by road-safety nonsense which branded any opponent an irresponsible killer, the previous government decided it wanted not just a slice of the cake, but the whole bloated gâteau. So speed camera revenue was redirected to the 'Treasury's consolidated fund', civil-service-speak for the government's own coffers. Local authorities spent (and kept doing so, persuaded by their own propaganda), government raked in the wonga. Perfect.

Central government, of course, claimed that around £100 million was being given back to local authorities to spend on road safety. But in the new system, out of that amount they were having to spend on speed cameras rather than profit from them, while the government had been providing this level of funding for road safety anyway, before the cash cameras had become widespread.

In practice, then, this was £100 million a year to the government... for nothing. No



Road safety budget cuts are cited as the reason speed cameras are being switched off – but the true story is a real case of poetic justice



The greed which had the government elbowing councils from the camera dosh trough is forcing the cameras' shutdown

wonder the camera propaganda was so well funded! Then the economy bit back, taking massive chunks out of the money available to local authorities – and making speed cameras a drain on resources. So naturally they're first in line to be cut.

The very greed which had the government elbowing local authorities away from the camera-dosh trough is now forcing the shutdown of cameras and reducing

government income – sweet justice.

See how far I've gone without bringing road casualties into the argument? That's because they were never there in the first place – and this is conclusive proof of that. Already Swindon had been switching off its cameras and reporting no change in casualty rates; and now cost has become the central issue rather than ideology or income, those arguments about the money saved through accident reduction are evaporating like morning mist.

If cameras were conclusively saving lives and if all those fines were really in the name of safety rather than revenue raising, then there would be no question – genuine safety would come first and speed-camera funds, like the NHS, would be ring-fenced.

Yet they're not, they're the first to go, and that, you doubters, is proof of the whole scandalous lie.

Next on the list: funding for global warming projects...

Riding gets better as you get older

A message popped up on my phone the other day from a motoring journalist who's just travelled 2000 miles touring the Alps on a BMW GS. I'll quote it: "Why is it that even after 30 years, motorcycling just keeps on getting better?" I'm not sure I can answer that – I thought maybe it's because we're

getting older and are worrying less about what we ought to be doing on bikes and are happier getting on with what we want to be doing. As impressionable youth we'd go for sports bikes because they proved we were cool and virile. Now we're older, know our own minds better and go for touring

and sports touring bikes more as we love going places, rather like being comfortable and realise even these are plenty fast enough. But whatever it is, he's right. I'm immersed in bikes and I love all of it more than I ever did. As James May said in MCN a couple of weeks ago, it's the last thing I'll give up.



Motorcycling: it just gets better

GUEST WRITERS



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Shares his views on BSB and life after retiring from racing



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Red Dwarf's Cat on bike racing and biking in London



CHARLEY BOORMAN
Globe-trotter's latest bike-based exploits

Crossing the pond to race US bike in UK

I've been in the UK since Tuesday and it's been a lot of fun. We tested the Shaw Racing bike I've been riding on Wednesday at Mallory and it went well – we got down to a 58-second lap in the two dry sessions we got.

The bike was good – it turned well, brakes well and it's real flickable. It weaves a bit, but I had an inch of width cut off the bars, so every movement didn't feel so big. It's great to ride – it's hard to believe Harley built it. Shaw built me a great bike that was fun to ride.

We had a party on Thursday night at a bar in Brighton called The Honey Club which was fun – we had my bike there plus some cool bikes Shaw built – they're really doing some cool stuff here in the UK. I met a load of UK riders and drank some beer, but I had to be up early to get to Brands Hatch for practice so I had to have an early night!

Steve from Shaw still had to drive like a maniac up the motorway to get us there for sign-in that morning, and I crashed at the third corner (Graham Hill bend – Ed). I just misjudged it, I thought it was faster than it was and I went in kinda hot and lost the front, but I was OK.

I got a 10th in race one and a sixth in race two, which was awesome – it was my first race meeting in eight years and I've had fun making a comeback, but it's still not making me want to race full-time again – my life is different now. I came here and just wanted to have some fun and get home in one piece to my family. I've achieved that, so I'm happy!

Next I'm working on Mission 200 – it's a Victory Vegas-based speed-record bike that we put a fairing on and did some other stuff to try and get it to 200mph. We've tested it with a standard engine – now we're going to turbocharge it to give it the power it needs.



Sands in BSB support race at Brands

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