

ALL CHANGE AT THE TOP



Bob Black stepped down from the Club's longest-ever Chairmanship, to the general acclaim of the meeting

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

THIS YEAR'S Annual Members' Meeting was a momentous occasion in which the Club's longest-ever serving Chairman, Bob Black, stood down after 17 years; Grenville Chamberlain was elected to take his place; and Professor Cedric Milner was newly elected to the position of Vice Chairman.

Members also voted in favour of increasing the minimum age of Club membership from 17 to 18 in anticipation of the Government implementing that part of the 3rd EU Driving Licence Directive that would make 18 the minimum driving age.

It was almost 'standing room only' at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, where members came from all over the British Isles to wish Bob Black well and witness the election of Grenville Chamberlain as the Club's 23rd Chairman.



Bob Black delivers his final speech as Club Chairman

Bob Black opened the proceedings by welcoming the Club President, Viscount Coke; two of the Vice Presidents, Lord Cadman and Lord



Professor Cedric Milner becomes a Club Vice Chairman

Wise; and two Honorary Life Members: Blon Hayes and Ken Dolton. Honorary Life Membership is the greatest gift the Club can bestow, and later in the day



Viscount Coke was re-elected as President of the Club

the incoming Chairman was able to tell his predecessor that he too would be joining this elite group. In his final speech as Chairman,

Bob Black said the time since his first one, in 1991, had flown by; but he was glad to see some things still held true – record membership, increased business and positive PR coverage.

Reporting on 2006, Mr Black said the touring market had been steady but the motor caravan market had shown 3% growth. The website had become the biggest source of recruitment to the Club, with 57,000 new member families in 2006; and membership retention was above target.

A new exhibition stand, a member booklet full of special offers and the launch of insurance cover for pets were improvements during the year. Bath University research into the effects of electronic stability control systems in cars enabled the Club to provide valuable advice to members. More and more members were downloading technical information leaflets from the website, but phone calls and letters had diminished only slightly, showing that traditional methods needed to be maintained.

The *Club Magazine* was thriving, with bigger issues, more advertising revenue and increased circulation, and January 2007 had seen publication of the first full-colour *Sites Directory & Handbook*, with 48 more pages than the previous edition.

Site occupancy was above budget in 2006, the Chairman continued, and though membership growth put pressure on the network, the Club had opened four new sites. Help was offered to CL owners with an offer to upgrade their website entry with a photo and major selling points, and over 300 had taken advantage of the offer. Useful meetings had been held with the owners of Affiliated Sites, and potential new AS locations identified.

A new 'Boosting Biodiversity' initiative launched in 2006 now covered 23 Club sites and would continue to expand.

Efforts to increase the uptake of rallying had been successful too, and Mr Black made particular reference to sterling efforts of East and West Surrey Centres, Bedfordshire, Berkshire and Hertfordshire. Rallies they had run in conjunction with the Royal Garden Party had enticed many members to try this kind of caravanning for the first time and would no doubt encourage them to continue. Many letters of appreciation had been received. The number of members registered with a Centre currently stood at 49,000 – the highest number for 15 years.

Turning to PR activities, Mr Black said the Club had achieved record coverage on national and regional TV,



Derek Preedy was critical of the way in which the Club Magazine has covered Centre events in 2007

newspapers and radio; and its first-ever podcast was recorded to publicise our presence at the NEC show. PR and the Insurance & Financial Services departments had jointly organised a police conference, attended by over 350 officers and designed to help fight caravan crime. It was pleasing to report that caravan theft had decreased significantly during the year –

influenced by work carried out by the industry and government and attributable partly to the Club's efforts.

Members can now obtain caravan insurance online, the Chairman reminded everyone, and 'e-commerce' had become a vital tool. Nearly half of all member households are registered with the members-only area of the website – an increase of

60% over the previous year – and a new 'Ask a Question' facility is proving very successful.

A Wardens' Conference was held in March last year at the Ferry Meadows site, with a combination of information and training sessions.

"Mine is not the only retirement this year", said Bob Black, drawing attention to the early retirement of one

GRENVILLE CHAMBERLAIN COMMENTS

ON ELECTION to the post of Club Chairman, Grenville Chamberlain said "I never imagined 26 years ago that I would be standing here. Now I can begin to pay back everything the Club and its members have given me."

The first time he had met Bob was in his very early rallying days. "Bob and Janette were on their way to Hungary, a trip of 3000 miles. I was nervous at the thought of meeting a member of the Executive Committee, but they immediately put me at my ease."

He reminded members at the Annual Members' Meeting that when Bob Black took the Chair, the Club had 277,000 members and a turnover of £31 million. Now the turnover is almost £100 million and there are another 100,000 members.

Among the many milestones in the outgoing Chairman's term of office were his chairmanship of the FICC



International Rally Working Party (Lincoln, 1999), launch of the 'Balls of Steel' advertising campaign and guidance of the Club through the Foot & Mouth outbreak in 2001.

"The rural economy was really struggling at that time", said Mr Chamberlain, "but under Bob's

guidance we helped save many rural enterprises. What could be more appropriate than his award of an MBE for services to caravanning and tourism?"

"His support for volunteer-run sites has saved many of them from closure", he continued. "And now 2007 has been the Club's greatest-ever year. It's a glorious end to an astounding year."

The new Chairman said it was impossible to calculate the amount of time Bob and Janette Black had spent in furthering the Club and caravanning in general. Turning to Mr Black, he said "The greatest gift the Club can bestow is Honorary Membership, and I am pleased to tell you that the Executive Committee has recommended that this should be extended to you."

In accepting, Bob Black said he was "overwhelmed by the honour."

BEARERS OF OFFICE

The following members were elected to office during the Annual Members' Meeting:

PRESIDENT

Viscount Coke was re-elected by acclaim.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Lord Wise was elected by acclaim.

CHAIRMAN

Mr G J Chamberlain was selected by acclaim for a one-year term.

VICE-CHAIRMEN

Mr E O Holt was re-selected by acclaim for a one-year term.

Professor C Milner was selected by acclaim for a three-year term.

HONORARY TREASURER

Mr J D Bence was re-selected by acclaim for a one-year term.

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Mr W H Martin was re-selected, and Mr C Macgowan and Mr B R Gibson were elected to the Executive Committee, all by acclaim.

MEMBERS OF THE CLUB COUNCIL

Mr D Amess MP, Mr N Cairns, Mr R Dean, Mr G Davey, Mr N Haynes, Mr M Hinder, Mr M Howitt, Mr E Illsley MP, Mr P Johnson, Mr R Lambert, Mrs J Moore, Mr T O'Neill, Mr H Owen JP, Mr D Preedy, Mr R Radford, and Rev Canon S Roberts were approved by acclaim.

NOTE: Mrs Janet Moore and Mr Rodney Lambert were co-opted to the Executive Committee at a subsequent meeting.

of the key personnel at the Club's East Grinstead headquarters. Trish Robson, the Head of Membership Services Operations, is leaving at the end of 2007 after 18 years' service. Mr Black wished her well and pointed out that her passion for motor caravanning would no doubt keep her in touch with the Club Sites network.

On a sad note, he reported the tragic loss of Mike Rogers, a member of the Executive Committee, who had died very suddenly at the age of just 60.

Mr Black continued with a round-up of the activities organised by the Club to celebrate its Centenary year. The celebrations had been planned over a long period, and after an initial launch with Towcar of the Year Awards in September 2006, they

would continue into early 2008 with the burying of a time capsule at the Club's Centenary Site, a "fantastic new development" at Bransgore in the New Forest.

The Club has rarely been out of the news this year, he said, what with the National Rally at Blenheim Palace, a Centenary Ball at Grosvenor House, a banquet for business partners, parties across the Club Sites network and, of course, the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. The Garden Party had been reported in countries as far away as Australia and the United States.

Bob Black concluded his final Chairman's Report by saying that it had been a privilege and a pleasure to work with so many good people. "This has been one of the most exciting and rewarding periods of my life", he said,

"and I wouldn't have changed one minute." In confessing that he set high standards and didn't suffer fools gladly, he said "The staff at East Grinstead House are second to none".

He thanked Ken Dolton (his immediate predecessor) and Mrs Barbara Dolton for their help in the past and gave incoming Chairman, Grenville Chamberlain, his best wishes for the future. "You are taking on a tremendous responsibility", he said, "but if you have half as much success as I have you will have been amply rewarded".

Mr Black thanked the audience and all members for their friendship over the years but saved his final thanks for his wife. "I could not have done any of this without Janette's companionship and support."

financial resources to support members' interests, grasp opportunities when they occur and withstand downturns and adverse circumstances outside its control.

Mr Bence congratulated Divisions and Centres on raising £61,000 for charitable causes and thanked Club members for their generosity in raising £10,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support in a raffle at the Centenary Ball. The prize was a Swift Challenger 560 caravan very kindly donated by the Swift Group.

Turning to 2007, Mr Bence said the Club was continuing to build on its

success and maintaining the loyalty of its members. It will be another successful year, he said, despite absorbing the costs of Centenary celebrations and some of the costs associated with a major upgrade of computer systems.

The Executive Committee, he said, is in the fortunate position of being able to approve its highest-ever expenditure budget: £20 million to acquire more sites, develop existing sites and improve the Club's infrastructure. The aim was to provide members with enhanced facilities and services now and in the future – and

without recourse to loans, mortgages or pledges on Club assets.

Mr Bence finished his report with some personal remarks about colleagues. He thanked his fellow Executive Committee member, Keith Hilton, who retired at this year's AMM, for his friendship and humour. He spoke with sadness about the untimely death of Mike Rogers, who had been a friend for 24 years. And finally he spoke warmly about the outgoing Chairman. "Bob Black and I have worked together for 19 years, and I thank him for his guidance and support."

NEW CLUB BYE-LAW

The Executive Committee recommended that the minimum age for Full, Joint and Family membership of The Caravan Club should be raised from 17 to 18 years. The amendment was carried by acclaim.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Derek Preedy criticised *Club Magazine* coverage of Centre Events in the past year, at the expense of more general features. Nick Lomas, the Director of Marketing, pointed out that the *Magazine* has to appeal to a broad spectrum of membership.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Morgan Hinder said he had been proud to be a member during Bob Black's Chairmanship, following which the audience gave Mr Black a standing ovation.

TREASURER'S REPORT

HONORARY TREASURER, John Bence, said he was pleased to report another satisfactory year for the Club in 2006. At the year end, membership stood at 359,700 families and represented nearly 1,000,000 caravanners, motor caravanners and trailer tenters.

Revenue grew by over £6 million to over £90 million and the increase in reported surplus was almost £2 million, despite previous warnings that the figure might be adversely affected by pension accounting changes.

Producing a surplus, he reminded everyone, is essential to enable the Club to invest in its sites network. In 2006 the investment had totalled £12.6 million and included the acquisition of Burrs Country Park,



Club Treasurer John Bence reported record turnover in 2006

Seacroft and Grafham Water as well as further sites that would open in 2007/08. Major improvements were completed or under way on 27 sites, and grading inspections carried out by EnjoyEngland saw nearly 90% of Club sites awarded a four or five-star rating.

Sites revenue grew by just over £3 million during the year but costs rose too, with the result that the year-end surplus of £156,000 was about half that achieved in the year before.

The Club's caravan insurance scheme makes a considerable contribution to its surplus, he said, but things were less rosy in the Travel Service. Fierce competition in the ferry market meant that margins were slim and revenue had decreased despite the higher number of bookings. Whatever the numbers, the Travel Service remained a valuable service to members, he said.

The Club's high national profile was

a deliberate attempt to promote the role of caravanning, continued Mr Bence, explaining that the £4 million spend on marketing was an increase of about 10% on the previous year. The expenditure covers such things as exhibitions, PR, advertising and market research, but in 2006 it included building the prototype of the winning 'Caravan of the Future' and preparation for the Centenary, including launch of a new logo and revamped website.

By the end of 2006 there were 161,144 registered users of the website, and this had increased to over 191,000 by the beginning of September 2007.

Club Magazine circulation continues to grow with membership and remains at a level where it outstrips all the other caravanning magazines put together. Costs have risen during the year due to higher production and postal charges, but the net cost to members was about 25p a copy and is "still excellent value for money", he said.

Net cost of running Club events (National Rally, Towcar of the Year, Design & Drive, Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards and Caravan Design Awards) increased slightly in 2006, to just under £460,000.

Rounding up the financial report, Mr Bence said the Club's balance sheet had strengthened by £7.2 million to give a net worth of around £95 million, underpinned by fixed assets and investments. The Club has the

DIRECTOR GENERAL'S REPORT

TREVOR WATSON, the Director General, reminded everyone that the outstanding success of the Club's Centenary had been the result of long-term planning. It began with the launch of its 'Balls of Steel' advertising campaign in 2002.

"I said then that we would raise the profile of the Club and caravanning, and it worked."

However, he went on, "We must not regard 2007 as the pinnacle. We must move on to a higher level."

Mr Watson reminded the audience that, as Director General since 1995, he had worked with only one Chairman. Bob Black had always given him tremendous support and shown complete commitment to the job, and for that he thanked him sincerely.



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

The Chairman and Executive Committee of The Caravan Club wish all Club members and staff everywhere a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. The Club will not be sending Christmas cards this year but will be making a donation to local charities.

