



Long way up

In the first of a series of guest editorials exploring multiple different Learning Curves, Francis Sanders ruminates on motorcycling and environmental guilt.

As an avid motorcyclist, I was naturally drawn to the relatively recent sequel series from Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman. Although this is not strictly “eye”-related, it did highlight a couple of issues that I often find myself mulling over in my internal monologue.

The first bone of contention is overtly related to the content of the programme where they ride approximately 11,500 miles from Ushuaia in Argentina to Los Angeles. What this provoked was thoughts about all those patients we advise that likely don’t meet the legal limit for driving. Now, in my experience, the vast majority of them are perfectly obliging and give off the impression that they will absolutely refrain from driving and inform the DVLA of their affliction. In spite of this, I often have the nagging feeling that there must be a plethora of people cruising around in their various vehicles without the required vision to drive safely. This worries me, not only for my personal safety, but for other unsuspecting pedestrians and road users.

Although some will make it perfectly obvious, other individuals who choose to carry on driving are a more difficult bunch to identify. There’s the small number of suspicious characters who utter the typical phrase: “Oh I only drive a short way, you know, to Tesco and that.” (other supermarkets are available). These perhaps are the more headstrong

individuals who may continue to do their “short trips” because they “know” the roads. The real quandary is: how does one accurately identify these people on follow-up when they have enough nous to deny driving whenever they see us in the future?

I doubt there is a solution in all reality. There will always be those who choose to ignore what is not only a legal requirement but also just seems like sensible advice for their safety and the safety of others. The allure of retaining independence is overwhelming, especially for those in more remote locations.

Here, I think is a good juncture to discuss the second thought provoked by this lengthy motorcycle journey. Boorman and McGregor undertake this journey on electric motorbikes, battling with a lack of infrastructure and attempting to prove the adequacy of electric vehicles to eventually supplant the gas-guzzling internal combustion engine. The continual nagging guilt of our dependence on carbon-intensive sources of energy is something I am often pondering in the early hours while staring at the bedroom ceiling.

The environmental guilt is not limited to transport, but is also stimulated by the continual wastage on “disposable” items in the clinic. I often think of the sheer number of small plastic minims that end up either being incinerated or in some dump somewhere. This reliance on non-reusable items, to a simpleton

like myself, seems like something that cannot be sustainable in any way. In our clinical practice, this isn’t just limited to throwaway products, but also to the gases used in vitreoretinal surgery that are definitively damaging to our planet through being extremely potent greenhouse gases.

Although I am not being particularly helpful in providing any solutions whatsoever, I do hope there are much wiser people than myself that might eventually solve these issues. Maybe driverless cars will help? Maybe someone will pioneer a less damaging alternative to hexafluoroethane? Whatever may happen it may help our collective conscience if we could address these issues more definitively.

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