

**Thursday 26 June 2025**

### **Always Ahead – The AA celebrates 120 years of motoring assistance**

- The AA officially formed 120 years ago today to warn drivers of speed traps
- Memorable adverts, iconic yellow vans, campaigning, and support for drivers throughout their lifetime
- “The world class customer care our Patrols and employees give our members everyday fills me with pride” says AA CEO

The Automobile Association (AA) celebrate its 120th anniversary today<sup>1</sup>, cementing itself as a beacon of UK motoring excellence. While initially created with rebel intentions to warn drivers of speed traps, The AA has grown into a national institution with its iconic fleet of yellow breakdown recovery vehicles as the jewel in the crown.

As well as being the UK’s number one breakdown provider<sup>2</sup>, it also provides multiple services throughout the driver’s life such as driving lessons and education, insurance, car care, and vehicle sales.

One of the longest serving aspects of the AA stable is its signs business, first started in 1906 as many local authorities didn’t consider it their responsibility. As well as signing the way, The AA has created signs for the World Cup in 1966, the 2012 Olympics, as well as Royal weddings and funerals. Today the team regularly supports high profile events such as The All England Lawn Tennis Championships at Wimbledon and Glastonbury festival.

The AA has also embraced new vehicle technology with its connected car product, Vixa, which can help monitor vehicle health and pre-warn drivers of potential faults.

To showcase the company’s anniversary, a video has been produced to showcase the length and breadth of The AA today<sup>3</sup>.

### **Badges, salutes, vans and ‘a very nice man’**

Throughout it’s 120 year history, The AA has played a significant role for both members and drivers as well as creating long-lasting motoring infrastructure. As well as creating and running the first fuel station in the country<sup>4</sup>, The AA also manned several Sentry Boxes, often dubbed ‘AA Telephone Boxes’ of which several still survive today. Not forgetting an AA badge affixed to the front grille of a car, which still remains a symbol of British driving.

Similarly, Patrols saluting, and mainly not saluting members was also a key aspect of driving life. From 1911, if a Patrol failed to salute a member, drivers were asked to stop and find out information from the Patrol. They were often told about an impending speed trap ahead.



The salute was dropped completely in 1962, when the first batch of yellow AA vans made their introduction on the roads. The Minivan took over from the motorcycle and sidecar assistance vehicles used to help stranded drivers and broken down cars.

A series of much loved and often quoted adverts followed such as; ‘a very nice man’<sup>5</sup>, helping launch Olivia Coleman’s career with ‘Bev & Kev’, becoming the ‘Fourth Emergency Service’, Tukker the dog and more recently ‘It’s OK’<sup>6</sup>.

Since the beginning, The AA has provided confidence for drivers now and for the future through campaigning and providing the services drivers need. As the automotive industry evolves, the company has invested in technology such as the freewheeling hub to help tow electric and 4x4 vehicles<sup>7</sup>, EV training rigs and AI to help boost back office productivity.

### **Key AA Milestones**

1. **Founding of The AA (1905)**
  - Formed on 29 June 1905 by a group of motorists to help drivers avoid police speed traps. Originally called the Motorists’ Mutual Association, it quickly became The Automobile Association
2. **The AA Salute and Speed Trap Warnings (1906–1911)**
  - AA patrols used a salute system to discreetly warn members of police speed traps. This practice became iconic and symbolized the AA’s early advocacy for motorists
3. **Introduction of AA Hotel Star Ratings (1912)**
  - The AA began inspecting and classifying hotels, introducing the now-famous star rating system, which remains a trusted standard in UK hospitality
4. **Deployment of AA Sentry Boxes (1920s)**
  - Over 600 sentry boxes were installed across the UK, offering members shelter, supplies, and a direct line to AA headquarters. These became a symbol of roadside assistance
5. **First Roadside Petrol Pumps (1920)**
  - The AA pioneered the installation of roadside petrol pumps, making refuelling more accessible for early motorists
6. **Royal Endorsement and Presidency (1951)**
  - HRH The Duke of Edinburgh became AA President, marking the beginning of a long-standing relationship with the Royal Family. The AA owned BSM driving school even taught Queen Elizabeth II to drive
7. **Introduction of Four-Wheeled Patrol Vans (1961)**
  - The iconic yellow AA Minivans replaced motorcycles, enhancing the efficiency and comfort of roadside patrols
8. **Launch of the AA Relay Service (1973)**
  - A major innovation in breakdown recovery, the Relay service allowed vehicles to be transported anywhere in the UK, not just repaired on the spot

#### 9. **Command and Control centre goes paperless (1986)**

- Breakdown calls taken at AA operation centre begins digital transition as computers help improve the speed of patrol attendance. System is a precursor to the modern 'AAHELP' systems used today

#### 10. **Online Route Planner Launch (1999)**

- The AA brought its route planning services online, revolutionizing how drivers navigated the UK. It served over 1 million routes within six months

#### 11. **Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020)**

- AA patrols supported ambulance services across the UK, ensuring emergency vehicles stayed operational during a national crisis

#### 12. **Launch of electric vehicle fleet (2024)**

- AA breakdown services and driving schools begin using electric vehicles across the fleet to help rescue drivers at the roadside, while preparing new drivers to the changing automotive landscape

**Jakob Pfaudler, AA CEO**, said; “It is an honour to lead The AA as it celebrates its 120th anniversary. The world class customer care our Patrols and employees give our members everyday fills me with pride.

“We are immensely proud of our past but are always looking ahead to propel ourselves forward. It is our deep heritage, and the ambition to remain always ahead, which helps us to give confidence to drivers both now and in the future.

“As the UK automotive sector evolves with electric vehicles, connected cars and autonomous technology, The AA and our Patrols will always be needed to keep people on the road.”

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#### NOTES TO EDITORS

1. [History timeline | AA](#)

2. [Why we're best for breakdown | The AA](#)

3. Four minute video here - [Celebrating 120 years of The AA on Vimeo](#)

Two minute video here - [Celebrating 120 years of The AA - short edit on Vimeo](#)

4. From 4.14 to 5.00 [Early history of the AA](#)

5. [AA advert - I know a man who can](#)

6. [It's OK I'm with The AA Advert | 2024 | Sticky](#)

7. [The AA Freewheeling Hub | AA](#)

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### About The AA

*The AA is the UK's leading provider of roadside assistance serving 14 million members with approximately 2,700 patrols attending an average of 9,000 breakdowns daily and is rated by drivers as the first choice for electric vehicle breakdown.*

*The AA's mission is to create confidence for drivers now and for the future – anticipating drivers' needs since 1905 and striving to be always ahead. The AA provides services across its roadside businesses from AA Driving School and BSM, to DriveTech, the leader in driver education. In addition, AA Smart Care provides bookings for MOTs, maintenance, service and repair in AA certified garages. AA Cars is a trusted vendor of used cars with free history checks and breakdown cover. The AA's insurance broker offers motor and home policies, operating a diverse panel of underwriters including the AA's in-house underwriter, plus AA Financial Services and Accident Assist. The AA continues to invest in connected car innovation and digital services.*

Ends all