

Good afternoon everyone. I'm delighted to see so many of you here today.

I'd like to start by saying what an honour it has been to be the Chaiman of this great club for the last year. And what a wonderful group it is. Over the years, you have all helped to build something very special, a community where friendships thrive, and memories are made.

This year has once again seen us enjoy a wonderful rally programme. We've had more than 20 rallies in 2024 so far. The locations we've visited have spanned across West Sussex and beyond, creating endless opportunities for people to enjoy themselves. I think it says a lot that many of these rallies have been so popular that they've been fully booked.

I must confess, I haven't been on the field as many times as I'd have liked or anticipated – but more on that later. Despite this, I've enjoyed seeing all the Facebook posts after each rally, as they paint a vivid picture of just how much fun everyone has been having. We all know that this must be true, as you never, ever, ever, get fake news on Facebook!

Of course, I'd be lying if I said that the last year has been completely smooth sailing for our Centre.

We've faced numerous challenges, particularly the dwindling number of rally sites due to owners changing or owners deciding to sell their land. This year, the unpredictability of site availability and last-minute cancellations of rallies due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, have thrown a spanner or two in the works. But Carol and the Committee have been heroes, navigating through these setbacks and keeping the show on the road. I'm pleased to say that we have another 20 rallies booked in our calendar for 2025.

We are, however, grappling with the difficulty in finding enough rally officers to run rallies. You may have seen the recent posts calling for extra volunteers, as this is a real problem, and we don't want to have to drop events from the calendar.

You may have noticed that there hasn't been a Chairman's rally this year. This was traditionally held as a way of saying thank you to rally officers by offering them an invite to attend the rally for free. Instead of that, this year we're going to issue a voucher to those that have run rallies. This will entitle them to a free place at a two-night rally of their choosing, to be taken at any point in the next 12 months. We've got the vouchers to hand out for anyone who is here today.

Thanks again to all of you that have helped. And if anyone can assist next year and they haven't already stepped forward, it would be greatly appreciated if you could lend a helping hand.

There have been many other challenges in 2024, such as the age-old problem of attracting new members, especially families. We've also had to try to balance the diverse expectations of all generations in this increasingly tech-driven world.

Our Committee has been tireless in battling these difficulties by trying new approaches and coming up with alternatives. We're committed to ensuring our Centre's survival by making rallying easier and more enjoyable for everyone involved, so these improvements are continuously ongoing as we test things, learning and adapting as we go along. As an example, this year we significantly updated our website and the booking process, but we already know we need to change this again next year, as it didn't work well for everyone.

You may have seen that some Centres haven't been so resilient and have unfortunately folded under these pressures. But not us. The bottom line is that we have no choice but to modernise and move with the times, this really does give us the best chance of success going forward.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the Committee for their hard work. Many of you here understand just how demanding being on a committee can be, especially when juggling this with working lives. Yet, you've all done an outstanding job, showing resilience and commitment to the cause. You've been able to get the right equipment onto it to the rally field, and you've ensured that the Centre remains in a strong financial position. Thank you to each of you.

Now, as for why I haven't been rallying as much this year – as many of you know, Jo, Georgie, and I are emigrating to Australia at the end of December. Preparing for this has taken up quite a lot of our time, and as a result we haven't used our van anywhere near as much as previous years. It's been a huge decision for us, but the timing feels right. There are so many exciting new things awaiting us – endless sunshine, beautiful beaches, properly chilled beer, the joy of throwing another prawn on the barbie, or perhaps the thrill of discovering a really huge spider hiding in our shoes! So, nothing but good times ahead!

But there are also many things I'll miss dearly as I leave them behind. Over the past eight years, I've made so many friends in the West Sussex Centre, enjoyed endless laughter, a fair quantity of rain, a lot of moderately chilled beer, occasional sunshine, but above all, a tremendous amount of fun. I'll miss all of it, apart from the rain!

The list doesn't end there. There's also the sense of community, the shared love of the outdoors, the helping hands, and the wonderful memories – all of this is priceless, and I hope to find it again down under. And be in no doubt, I'm really going to miss those camp doughnuts at the family rally. Committee, I assume that I can count on one of you to send me a food parcel!

Seriously though, we've all been incredibly fortunate to enjoy what we have here. This Centre has thrived for the last 56 years, and I'm sure it will continue to do so, for many more. I wish you all the best as you carry on the fun. While I won't be here to enjoy it with you in person, I'll certainly be here in spirit.

Good luck, best wishes – and I hope to see you on the rally field next weekend for my final rally.