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French driving standards 'a delight'

I AM a New Zealander and was bemused by the Connexion Point topic of "lousy French driving."

The writer has clearly not been to New Zealand.

I have been delighted with the standard of driving in France. My advice to anyone who finds someone tail-gating them is: get over and let them pass. My philosophy is if someone wants to go faster than you, let them. You will be rewarded by a wave or warning-light blinks and both of you continue at your own pace. I was tickled by motorbike riders dropping their foot as a "thank you" for passing safely and am impressed by the trucks who stay in the far right lane on motorways

instead of taking up all three.

Here you are not plagued by foreign students who buy powerful Japanese imports just after passing their licence - then cause horrific crashes.

You do not have adults driving for the first time erratically in our busy cities causing nose-to-tails in rush hour.

You do not have "boy racers" in suped-up, noisy cars causing havoc on Friday and Saturday nights, leaving oil-slick roads, broken letterboxes and smashed bottles, with residents calling hapless police.

Driving is the least of one's problems in this great country - just don't get me started on French administration.

HEIDI DOBBIE
By email

It is true that to learn to drive in France you have to go through a registered driving school and take a minimum amount of lessons but from the age of 16, a young person can register, take the written code and a few lessons (decided with the driving school and the person) and then do *conduite accompagnée* with any adult over a certain age who holds a current driving licence. The person must do 3000 kilometres in a year until he or she is at least 18 and can take the test after having completed the regulated number of lessons. The advantage of this is that the insurance companies take the experience into account and the premiums can be lower and the number of paid lessons over and above the minimum required will be fewer.

ANNABEL COURAGE
Paris

NHS diagnosed 'polyps,' but French found tumour

I WAS interested to read your headline: "Cancer survival rate is one of best in the world." A free paper from East Midlands airport had a headline: "Too young for smear test at 24". A mother who fears she may have cervical cancer has been told she is too young. There is a history of cervical cancer in her family but recently NHS rules have changed. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in young women.

My experience is that I was

diagnosed in the NHS with polyps in my nose and depression. I retired early to France and collapsed. I was then diagnosed with a cancerous tumour pressing on my brain. The French surgeons wanted to see my scans and were amazed I never had one in the UK. I am now in full remission.

I cannot praise the French system enough. They saved my life.

GEOFF HORSEFALL
Marthon, Charente

France's closest offers to the UK pay-as-you-go

CONCERNING the mobile phone problems reported in the Money section in September, I can only advise on what suited us. We also suffered problems in seeking an equivalent to the UK's pay-as-you-go scheme in France.

We are pensioners and decided we only required an emergencies-only scheme.

We eventually found the best solution for us.

We bought a French mobile from France Telecom and took out their cheapest monthly contract at around €7 a month plus the cost of the few calls we make.

This way, at an affordable monthly *prélèvement* (direct

debit) cost to us, we no longer have to worry that the phone will run-out of money and it is always available for use.

OLGA SWAN
Tarn et Garonne

REGARDING pay-as-you-go mobiles: E.Leclerc market a close resemblance to the UK pay-as-you-go. There is a €1.50 monthly charge, but this would better than the present French pay-as-you-go.

ROBERT CHETWYND
By email

Thank you also to Narguesse Stevens and to Martin Robiette who wrote in with this suggestion.

Who will rid us of this troublesome beast?



DEMANDING: Make *fouines* (beech martens) their own *gîte* and they will leave you alone

THE letter about *fouines* in last issue has aroused my sympathy for "D.F." as we have had the same problem.

Ours didn't party all night - they are supposed to go out hunting - but they do bring their prey back, hence the smell, which adds significantly to their natural odour.

The solution that worked for us is ultrasound.

They are called *Pest Repeller Ultimate AT* and have three different and simultaneous methods of deterrent. We have four of these and you

have to site them so that there are no thick stone walls between the device and the intended target. They can be ordered with a European two-pin plug. It is best, in fact I would say essential, to use the mains version, with a long extension if necessary which can be of lighting grade.

Departed

The battery one is called *Guardian* but I don't think it does the same job. Our *fouines* departed very rapidly,

and we were left with some mice and a slight odour in one small roof space.

Previously the odour had been strong when the *fouines* and their decaying prey had been there. When I moved device number four up to ceiling level the mice departed rapidly.

The smell has now gone entirely, though we can still sometimes detect a faint whiff when there is a strong westerly wind, so it seems there must still be some residue in the roof. The device is harm-

less to cats and apparently dogs as well, as it operates at a very high frequency. Our cats have been known to go to sleep within a few feet of one of them. There is more info at www.eurogoodlife.com

ROBIN MATSON
Miramont-Sensacq
Landes

WE HAVE persuaded our *fouines* to leave, at least for the summer, by throwing mothballs around and playing France Musique non-stop, but naturally they will be eyeing our roofspace up again as the winter approaches.

We don't want to lose yet more insulation and be subjected to the horrible smell but we're happy to provide a shelter for them in our garden as Mme Reynaud suggests.

What kind should it be?
DAPHNE AND EDDIE FRANKLIN
By email

■ *The Association pour la Protection des Animaux Sauvages (Aspas)* says providing a purpose-built "gîte" for *fouines* (beech martens) in your garden is the best way of stopping them from colonising your loft. Connexion has a detailed illustrated plan (in French) from Aspas which shows how to build one of these from planks of wood.

*The completed box should be filled with straw and placed under a pile of wood or earth or between bales of straw - you should leave a few *fouine* droppings outside the entrance, with food like eggs or fruit. Email us if you would like the plans, or contact www.aspas-nature.org Tel: 04 75 25 10 00*

Influence of the Communist Party in France is overstated

IN SAYING "The far left still plays a major role in French politics," I believe you overstate the case - 724 Parti Communiste Français (PCF) mayors out of 36,000 is a little less than one in 50 - in line with Marie-George Buffet's 1.9% score in the last presidential election. The fact that Besancenot (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) got more than double indicates the PCF is withering on the political vine.

During World War II the PCF remained on the sidelines until Hitler invaded Russia in 1941.

Only then, did they take to the *maquis* in great numbers, joining (and frequently taking control of by violence) established groups of *résistants*. De Gaulle had no option but to include them in the provisional government.

Post-war PCF leaders refused to acknowledge incontrovertible evidence of the nature of Stalin's regime and toed the Moscow line to the bitter end.

François Mitterrand used the PCF votes to gain power in 1981 and then sidelined them in short order.

Currently they have a leader whose charisma could be concealed behind a blade of grass.

French left-wing politicians are really far more interested in arguing obscure points of political doctrine, like medieval monks debating the sexual attributes of angels, than in running the country, which in any case they are totally unqualified to do.

Schemes to change the name of the LCR and its image by making an alliance with the extreme-greens are unlikely to bear much rural electoral fruit, since everyone and his dog flourishes their green credential these days - and after two centuries of intermittent revolutionary activity enthusiasm for it has waned in France.

Sure, from time to time they can bring people out on the streets to protest about this or that, and they win some local elections, but that is not "a major role in French politics," I am happy to say.

JONATHAN WARD-HAYNE
Albi (81)

Thanks for support

THANK you for publishing your recent article about our problems with the shooting club next door.

The letters and phone calls of support we received from French, English and American readers has been a surprise and we would like to thank those that contacted us.

We were shocked to read the owner of the shooting club told you that it was a shame that we had not contacted him to discuss the issue, when we tried to do so on numerous occasions since January last year.

The situation is unbearably stressful and we are amazed the authorities are still not taking any action, particularly when there is a risk to the village from tonnes of lead shot and from falling clay pigeons.

The kindness and support of your readers gives us the strength to carry on our campaign to provide safety for our neighbours, ourselves, our village and our two little girls.

Your article has meant that the authorities in this department can no longer continue to hide the issue. We apologise if we are unable to answer all support letters at the moment, due to the large number. We would ask people to send emails to taylor@nerdshack.com and we will give updates.

AMANDA TAYLOR
By email

Disappointed not to be called *Martiens*

REGARDING the article about place name adjectives, when my husband and I moved from Scotland to Mars, Ardèche we were hoping to be called *Martiens*. We were disappointed to find out that we were *Marsois*.

I made Christmas cards the first year we were here, saying "Greetings from Mars."

The village calls itself "*La Planète Mars*" on occasion and Nasa astronauts came here for a conference in 2001. I also want to send a belated thank you for all of your journalistic help during the CMU coverage controversy which

was a true mental-health lifesaver to us.

We were among those who would have been rejected. The knowledge gained from your articles got us through this very worrisome period.

CHARLENE WOODS
Finistère, Brittany

■ *Residents of Vantoux near Metz this month voted to change their name which meant 'vandals' to Vantousiens meaning 'from Vantoux'. Mayor Claude Bellei said: "It's a matter of principle. Too many visitors come here expecting to meet the wrong kind of people."*

Tax guide led to €402 saving

A CHEQUE for €402 came from the tax office. Thanks for making the process so much easier with your guide.

JACK CROMPTON
By email

■ *The tax declaration guide is still available for download (priced €5) on our website www.connexionfrance.com*