

Letter from Scotland



Don't drink and drive in the new Scotland

Our new leader Nicola Sturgeon may not yet have declared Scottish independence but we are setting out on a different road from the rest of the United Kingdom in one important respect – drinking and driving. Amid all the [comings and goings at Holyrood](#) this week, a quiet reformation was under way. MSPs give final approval for the drink driving limit to be reduced from 80mg of alcohol to 50mg per 100ml of blood. It means just one drink could put you over the limit.

In effect, we now have a no-alcohol policy on the roads in Scotland. Warning signs are going up next week and the new law comes into effect on 5 December 2014. Scotland's infamous relationship with alcohol will have to change. Out goes the old Burns-inspired jolly camaraderie with the demon drink and in comes the new European code of sobriety. Not "one for the road" but none for the road. It should cut road deaths by 10 per cent and lead to new traditions.

Less alcoholic drinking perhaps. Or one person in the party staying sober to drive everyone else home. Or the bus or taxi becoming the common mode of transport for a night out. It may even send out a message that a car is a dangerous thing, not to be driven recklessly, while under the influence of drink or drugs or while suffering from a serious illness, sudden blackouts or simple old age.

There have been two shocking court cases involving unforgivable driving this month. One was a 93 year-old woman in Caithness, with a history of blackouts, who drove into a young couple from England enjoying a cycling holiday. One was killed and the other seriously injured. Another involved a middle-aged man in Glasgow, who failed to disclose his

blackouts, but continued to drive his Range Rover around the city and killed two female students. Scotland's whole relationship with cars needs to change.

We've been changing our relationship with our first minister this week. Alex Salmond bowed out with a gracious speech in parliament saying it had been "the privilege of my life" to serve as First Minister for the past seven and a half years. His last duty was to watch Scotland being beaten by England 3-1 at a "friendly" match at Celtic Park. But he was confident that better times lie ahead.

On Wednesday Nicola Sturgeon was formally elected as First Minister and on Thursday she took the oath of office in front of a row of judges in splendid red gowns at the Court of Session. Her first outing at First Minister's Questions followed immediately afterwards when she went out of her way to be kind and considerate to her opponents. Nothing was too much trouble. Yes, she would meet the relatives of cancer patients who had been caught in a postcode lottery of costly drugs. Yes, she would listen to ideas from all sides about police reforms or prison policy. She wanted to be First Minister for the whole of Scotland, not just SNP supporters.

It will have to be a careful balancing act because it won't be easy to satisfy everybody – even over the next few weeks. Today she appointed [her new cabinet](#). Next week the Smith Commission on further devolution is due to make its first report. Then she'll be outlining her programme for government, and early next year there's the budget and the UK general election campaign.

This week there also emerged another difficult balancing act for Scotland: do we allow fracking for shale gas? Ineos, the owners of the Grangemouth refinery, have announced plans for a £640m investment in fracking in the UK to supply its new shale gas facility. It's already been awarded two licences to begin prospecting for shale gas in Central Scotland. But there's a

cross-border issue here with licences being awarded by the UK government and planning permission decided by the Scottish government. Will this be part of the Smith Commission negotiations ? And which side – in the fracking debate – will the Sturgeon government come down on ?

Balancing is not easy for any first lady, as Judy Murray (Andy's mother) found out last weekend. Scotland's first lady of tennis tumbled out of Strictly Come Dancing. Her waltz to "Let's Go Fly a Kite" just wasn't good enough to save her from the judges' final verdict.

So it was left to a mere man to show that Scotland could still excel in the art of balancing. The stunt cyclist Danny MacAskill, fresh from his ride over the Cuillin ridge, did a loop-the-loop in a giant ring set up on a barge in the River Thames. From a distance, it was to show him apparently riding around the London Eye.

You'd need a few drinks to appreciate that...but please don't try to drive home !