

FOLLOWING THE *DRIVING* DREAM

DRIVING through the streets of Banbury, Chris Morris conducts himself extraordinarily, looking almost effortless as he faces oncoming traffic down an excruciatingly tight lane. Flashback ten months ago and Chris has come an awful long way.

Dressed immaculately in his best suit, it is noticeable from the off that this is something Chris has long wanted to do. Since he was a young child, he has been brought up in a family surrounded by cars, bikes and machinery. His father was a driving instructor and also worked in the car factories of Oxford's thriving industry. When Chris came back from boarding school, he would spend the majority of time in his father's car picking up advice and having many memorable conversations. It is clear driving is very close to his heart.

Ever since his father passed away, Chris, who has cerebral palsy, which severely limits the use of the right side of his body, has wanted to prove people wrong by learning to drive. Told by many a professional he would never have the ability, let alone courage to go on to drive, he has fought the constant barriers that have come before him.

It has been a long journey to where he is today, after going through many checks, safety assessments and application forms. Yet he has never lost his determination to succeed and will never give up his dream to drive his own car.

"I have always wanted to drive and my father's inspiration has kept me interested and determined to push on and gain a licence," said Chris, who is supported by the Trust's North Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities (CTPLD).

"Some of my fondest memories of my father were in the car where I would spend all my time on return from school. When I left school and lived in Oxford, a neighbour gave me a three wheeled disabled car, a Robin Reliant. Sadly I couldn't take up this offer because I suffered a seizure having been free for many years.

"After a practical test at the Regional Driving Assessment Centre in Eynsham and completing paperwork including health checks and a GP report, the DVLA gave me my provisional licence in late Spring last year, more than 35 years later than when I intended to first learn."

After a good start with his first instructor, a local Banbury man, Chris transferred to the BSM Driving School. After contacting the driving school's headquarters in London, they were able to find a suitable local instructor equipped with an adapted car. David Ryman, who has now been teaching Chris for more than three months, also knows his background and family well, having been taught by his father. Sensibly Chris has arranged for David to take him on the motorway when he has passed his test and has had some experience on his own.

The car is incredibly well equipped and filled with gadgetry which Chris says is "worthy of the best James Bond cars." It has a left foot accelerator, automatic gearbox, a foot guard to keep Chris's right leg from wandering and a steering ball on the wheel which allows for one handed steering. To complete this is an infra-red control system which operates the wipers, lights, hazards and horn. As Chris continues to take us for a spin round the backstreets of Banbury, he remains in control and independent at all times. His space perception is nigh on perfect, he is very assertive and there is little instruction or advice needed. It is clear, without tempting fate; he is ready for his driving test.

He has a long standing tradition of overcoming the odds and an array of stories to go with this. Twelve years ago, as well as his cerebral palsy affecting his right hand side, his left hand side was also badly affected after a neurological episode. Due to his determination Chris almost fully recovered from this. It did, however, mean that he now uses an outdoor powered wheelchair and this is what he will use to access the new adapted car he will purchase through his Mobility Allowance when he passes his test.



James Bond type gadgets



Words By ALEX JACKSON
Photos by IAIN GARRETT

I always told my mother, my next vehicle would not be another wheelchair, but a car.

Chris happy at the wheel

"I've had a whole range of problems with my chairs. One day when driving through the town centre passing market stalls, one of my chair's wheels got stuck in a culvert. I ended up driving on three wheels down the road."

"For me driving will be a way of gaining so much more independence and freedom. Not only that, but every time I am out driving on the road it feels like my father is sitting besides me in the car encouraging me along. It feels wonderful."

An hour or two in the company of the fantastically charismatic and inspiring gentleman is a privilege in itself. He is an entertainer, with a burning passion, steely determination and has more witty anecdotes than the best comedians on stage. He has a host of photographs scattered around the home which shows his love for classic cars and motoring. Then there are his handmade wood carved houses, tanks and boats which prop up the shelves.

"Chris has been working really hard and without putting too much pressure on him, I fully expect him to pass," said David, BSM Driving Instructor.

"We work well as a team and he has got to know and feel comfortable with me in the car. It is highly rewarding and challenging to teach people with all different disabilities, yet it makes such a difference when they are as enthusiastic as Chris. He definitely keeps me on my toes and we have built up such a good rapport."

With just a matter of weeks to go before his theory test, Chris has been meeting with his OT Assistant, Helen Tustian, who works for the North Community Team, to work on his theory. She meets Chris at the library every week to use the computers there. Chris is also spending an hour every night reading the Highway Code to keep it fresh in his mind.

Chris is a familiar face in Banbury and many of the local organisations have played a big role in getting him through his lessons. The Rotary Club has donated £500, Banbury Lions £105 and Banbury Charities £895, which has helped pay for the lessons and will go towards his adapted car, when he passes his test.

As Chris completes our tour of the town, it is clear he is a man with a natural ability and the will power to follow in the footsteps of his father no matter what obstacles are put in front of him. All that's left to see is his bronze lighter which he holds up with pride stating: "Drive Forever Chris. First started learning to drive 17-06-10." And with that, we wish him all the luck for his forthcoming test day.

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For further information BSM Driving School
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The master of Anecdotes

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES

Below is a selection of the hottest properties on the market currently being trialled throughout the community teams across Oxfordshire, with so far successful results.



FINGERPRINT LOCKING SYSTEM, £400 - £1,300

The biggest and most expensive gadget of the bunch fits to your door and is a very specialist piece of equipment which allows people who may forget their keys to access their home by registering their fingerprints.



LOC8TOR, £99,

Loc8tor is a fob system which helps you avoid frustration and constant rummaging, bleeping when you mislay your valuables.



BUDDI, £269

Buddi is a discreet GPS tracking device which encourages independent living and works by using an online system which can locate the buddi wearer in the community and also set boundaries.



JUST CHECKING SYSTEM

Just Checking helps people to live independently in their own home, while monitoring their movement and generating a chart of activity, on-line.

SIMPLAPHONE, £99-£160

The SimplaPhone touch screen home phone allows you to dial by photo and see who is calling, as well as create your own photo directory.



Contact for further details

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