

Driving thoughts: opening up about mental health

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22/09/2021 The state of society's mental health has never been bigger news, which is why the British petrolhead hotspot Caffeine and Machine has launched I Love You, Man – an event aimed at getting people to open up. Automotive journalist Alex Goy, who has been involved from the off, reports as part of Newsroom's Driving Thoughts series.

Mental health has never been more in the spotlight. The more that people open up about their experiences, the more society is willing to have open and honest conversations about the illnesses that can't be seen. But while the associated stigma is slowly being eroded, poor mental health remains one of the biggest issues affecting society today.

A number of organisations in the automotive world are combining cars with mental health support. Australia's Drive Against Depression, for example, supports mental wellness through the freedom of

driving, with regular events designed to get people talking. Face-to-face contact with likeminded people, which has been a little tricky since the outbreak of COVID-19, is a proven way to help lift the fug; car meets such as Luftgekühlt – which began in Los Angeles in 2014 – may not only benefit attendees' brains by way of the air-cooled wonders on display, but could also spike dopamine levels in other ways.

In the UK, petrolhead hotspot Caffeine and Machine hosts a monthly evening where special guests talk about their dealings with the stresses and strains of everyday life, open up about particular struggles, and take questions from a live audience. Dubbed 'I Love You, Man,' the events are not recorded for broadcast, they're not scripted, and they don't encourage holding back.

Hotspot Caffeine and Machine

Phil McGovern, co-founder of the Warwickshire venue, started the events for a number of reasons: "It was driven by COVID-19 and by two years spent building-up Caffeine and Machine and not really talking to my business partner, Dan," he says. "It was also driven by landing in the UK four years ago, having been based in the Middle East, and tearing up my family's life. And then it was my eldest [child] coming out to me as being primarily transgender, but now subsequently non-binary, and the travails they're going through."

There's a personal reason behind it too: loneliness. "I tend to find, personally, that I don't get deep enough with people. I never have, and I still struggle with it. I get to a point where I'm about to go deep and then I run a million miles away and sit like a social butterfly in the background. I built Caffeine and Machine for a reason: I was lonely. And then I found I was in front of it, when it's full of hundreds and hundreds of people … and I'm not actually *talking* to any of them."

Events during Lockdown

The events, started while England was manoeuvring through various stages of lockdown, seem to have come at the right time, with attendees praising the venue for offering something that few others do. McGovern thinks the evening resonates because people are becoming more aware of their feelings – and more aware that others feel similarly.

"A guest brought up the subject of anti-depressants and I thought "Hold on, who's been there?". I asked the audience and 90 per cent or thereabouts put their hands up. Even people I would have never thought would be on them. If a C-suite executive of a huge listed company puts their hand up, who else out there might be really struggling?" While the event could easily spin into a monthly excuse to bring in a celebrity guest, McGovern hopes the focus will remain instead on personal stories. Speakers so far have included a double leg amputee, a TV presenter and a CEO – each with their own tales to tell and crosses to bear.

More people seek help

According to the mental health charity Mind, while more people are seeking help when they feel their mental health declining, the number who have dark, or suicidal thoughts is rising. A study published by the organisation partly blames image issues and social media. Indeed, less time spent 'doom-scrolling' and more time spent outside exercising or talking to friends has been shown to be a huge mood booster.

Dr Daniel Mauss, Head of Health Management at Porsche AG, has developed the Allostatic Load Index, an award-winning metric used to help catch and treat mental health issues early. It works by measuring various physical markers to avoid ailments, but Dr Mauss notes that people need to pay attention to their own wellbeing to ensure it's effective: "We pay attention to every little control and warning light in our cars. We pay attention to the oil level and the state of charge of the battery. Our body also gives us warning signals such as headache, neck and back pain, tension, high blood pressure, heart rhythm or sleep disorders. We usually ignore them. The Allostatic Load Index can help to make physical warning signals measurable at an early stage."

In the UK, far from the physical metrics, Caffeine and Machine's I Love You, Man events are leading the way in the automotive community. They promote honesty, openness, and communication to those present, and because it goes unrecorded, they must be present in every sense.

Alex Goy

Alex Goy is a British motoring journalist who has written for the likes of The Sunday Times, Road and Track, and Business Insider. He's also covered mental health for GQ Online, and has been a guest on Caffeine and Machine's *I Love You, Man* sofa. He's a fan of fast cars, loud engines, and, most of all, tea.

Info

Newsroom's new Driving Thoughts series asks leading thinkers from across the globe to shed light on the latest ideas, technology and debates shaping the wider automotive world.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Consumption data

718 Cayman (WLTP)*: Fuel consumption combined: 9.7 – 8.9 l/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 220 – 201 g/km; CO_2 class: G

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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Title: Dr Daniel Mauss, Head of Health Management at Porsche AG, 2021, Porsche AG
Subline: Dr Daniel Mauss, Head of Health Management at Porsche AG

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