



# Biblical Awe Atop the Mt. Sinai of Clubs

by Lew Toulmin

Near my home in suburban Maryland is an outpost of the American Automobile Association, the AAA. It is a small office in a low-rent high-rise beside a down-at-the-heels shopping mall. Every few years the AAA jump-starts my car or gives me a tow, and I am grateful. But I am not in awe.

By contrast, the Royal Automobile Club in Britain is so astoundingly impressive that it inspires the kind of awe that Moses must have felt when he ascended Mt. Sinai and met God.

In fear and trembling and awe, we ascended Mt. RAC in September 2017, for dinner and a tour.

*You came and stood at the foot of the mountain, which burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens... (Deuteronomy 4:11)*



## HISTORY

The RAC was founded in 1897 by Frederick Richard Simms, to promote the motor car and its place in society. The Club introduced the 1000 Mile Trial in 1900 and the Tourist Trophy in 1905. This Trophy is now the oldest competitive motor sports event. In 1907 King Edward VII awarded the Club its “Royal” designation, in honor of its status as Britain’s oldest and most influential motoring organization.

A major early accomplishment of the Club was changing the national speed limit of 14 mph under the “Locomotives on Highways Act of 1896” to a blistering 20 mph under the “Motor Car Act of 1903.”

In World War I the Club sent 25 of its members (including the Duke of Westminster) and their vehicles to serve as messengers for the General Staff of the British Expeditionary Force – they were called the RAC Corps of Volunteer Motor Drivers.

*The King sent documents by couriers on fast horses, bred from the royal racing mares... (Esther 8:11)*

Between the World Wars, the Club promoted the first British Grand Prix, helped create driving licenses, and campaigned for the rights of motorists.

In 1999 the Club spun off its regulatory functions into the now-separate Motor Sports Association. It also spun off its roadside service division, which became the for-profit RAC, Ltd. The Club motto and purpose is that it is the “spiritual home of motoring” – i.e., the Mt. Sinai of automobiles.

The Club’s many remaining functions, events and two large clubhouses currently require over 500 staffers.



## **MEMBERSHIP**

Full membership in the RAC is open to women and men, and is based on at least two letters of nomination from persons who have been Full Members for over a year. The name of the nominee is placed on a waiting list, where typically the nominee waits for about twelve months. The Elections Committee then announces its decision.

There are about 17,000 members in the RAC – compared to 55.6 million members of the American Automobile Association in the US and Canada, and 3.3 million members in the

Automobile Association (AA) of Britain, a for-profit firm listed on the London Stock Exchange.<sup>1</sup>

Annual RAC fees in 2017 were 1612 pounds for members over 31 years of age, with a one-time entrance fee of a substantial 3677 pounds. These amounts are reduced for younger and senior members, with young persons 18-23 paying 479 per year with an entrance fee of 1102 pounds, and seniors over 70 with 25 years of membership paying 967 pounds per year. Overseas and out of town (more than 150 miles from HQ) members pay no entrance fee and a yearly subscription of 1215 pounds.

*Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto the Lord the things which are the Lord's... (Mark 12:17)*

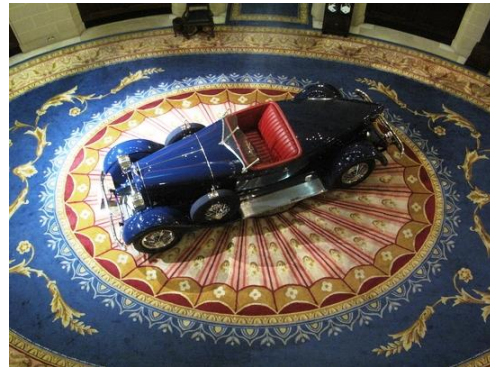
## LOCATION

Mt. RAC is in historic Pall Mall, in a terrific location in the heart of “club land,” near the Travellers Club, Reform Club and Oxford and Cambridge Club. The Club’s address is 81-91 Pall Mall, and it is close to the National Gallery, Sotheby’s, Piccadilly, shopping on Jermyn Street, etc. Piccadilly Circus tube station on the Piccadilly Line is the closest tube. At Piccadilly there are stairs, while at Green Park station, slightly further away, there are where elevators available all the way down to the tracks. Both tube stations are on the Piccadilly Line to Heathrow Airport.

*They tunnel through the rock; their eyes see all its treasures... (Job 28:10)*

## FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

The RAC HQ has 228 feet of frontage on Pall Mall and a center depth of 140 feet. It is the largest club in terms of square footage in London and one of the largest in the world. Its building was part of the old War Office complex, and was constructed in the late French Renaissance style. The building has magnificent public rooms, including a glorious Rotunda room that always sports one or two historic motor cars on display (photo right).



The RAC has 22 different activity groups ranging from backgammon to bridge to choir to cycling to golf to squash to scuba diving. The Club holds over 200 events per year, including the Epsom Derby, the Mid-Summer Drive-In, and the November Fireworks. Various trophies and medals are awarded by the RAC each year, including the Segrave

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<sup>1</sup> The AA is worthy of an article in itself. It started out as a service-oriented non-profit, but became a for-profit, listed firm via IPO in 2014. In August 2017 its CEO was summarily dismissed for “gross misconduct,” reportedly related to mental health issues and a bar fight. Shares dropped thirteen percent. In contrast to the RAC HQ, the AA headquarters is a non-descript 16-story office building in Basingstoke.



Trophy for the most outstanding achievement in land, air or water transport; the British Grand Prix Trophy; the Tourist Trophy (founded in 1905 and first won racing at an average speed of 34 mph); and various technical and publishing awards.

The Rally of the Tests for classic cars is sponsored by the RAC, and includes regularity (time/speed/distance) components on open scenic roads, and also timed speed elements, held on race tracks or closed roads. The Rally (photo right) takes three days and covers about 700 miles.



*King Darius gave the order and they searched in the Library of Babylon... (Ezra 6:1)*

The Club library and separate Archive hold 30,000 manuscripts and 6,000 publications and books related to motorsport. Other facilities at the Club HQ include three restaurants, two bars, two squash courts, a business center, Turkish bath, spa, post

office, florist, snooker room, bowling alley, rifle range, and a huge swimming pool with six lanes.

The RAC has about 80 reciprocal clubs around the world, a rather middling number.

## DRESS CODE AND RULES

The dress code has three levels for various days of the week, times of day, and locations in the club. A complex map is provided on the club website to help the uninitiated navigate. “Smart” dress is jacket and tie, and is required in the Great Gallery, library, cocktail bar, and drawing room on weekdays, and only in the Great Gallery on weekends. “Smart casual” dress means jacket and long business-style pants but no tie required; this is appropriate in most other spaces on weekdays. “Casual” means that neither jacket or tie is required, although a business shirt and long pants are. This is suitable in most spaces on weekends. At each level there is a vague equivalent for women.

*She lusted after the Assyrians—governors and commanders, warriors in full dress... (Ezekiel 23:12)*

## BED ROOM DESCRIPTION AND RATES

*They hid in the bedroom, and Delilah said unto him, “The Philistines are here, Samson!” (Judges 16:9)*

There are 109 bedrooms at the Club HQ in Pall Mall, and 22 at Woodcote Park in Surry. Reservations for reciprocals can only be made up to three months in advance. All rooms have air conditioning and have been upgraded and refurbished. We visited several rooms and found them to be very attractive (better than the Travellers) and reasonably

spacious (better than the Oxford-Cambridge Club). But prices are high, at 295 pounds for a double or twin during the week, and 220 pounds on the weekend; or 390/390 pounds for a studio suite during the week/weekend; up to 460/460 for a suite. Singles are much cheaper, at 220/118. All rates include VAT. Prices also include visits to the gym and pool, and in-room Continental breakfast or a full English breakfast in the Brooklands Room.



## FOOD

In 2017 we ate Sunday dinner in the Brooklands Room (two photos below) which is less formal than the Great Gallery.

*Come, eat of my food and drink of my wine which I have mixed. Forsake your folly and live... (Proverbs 9:5-6)*

Our meal started with warm asparagus with Hollandaise, which we rated a “B” at a cost of 7.50 pounds. My wife had a main course of a black leg chicken with tagliatelle and mushrooms for 18.50 pounds, which she rated as a “B.” My fish and chips were so-so, 14 pounds, a “B-.” Other main courses ranged from 32 pounds for a 200 gram fillet steak down to a pea and broad bean risotto for 9.50 pounds. We skipped dessert. Our total bill including a water and three Cokes was 51.20 pounds, including VAT (and no tipping allowed).





## BEDROOMS







## OTHER PHOTOS



The RAC building is so large that it is virtually impossible to get it all into one shot. Here about one quarter, on the left, is missing.







Photos above: various cars from the RAC fleet or members, on show in the central Rotunda room



Getting cars into the Rotunda is not easy

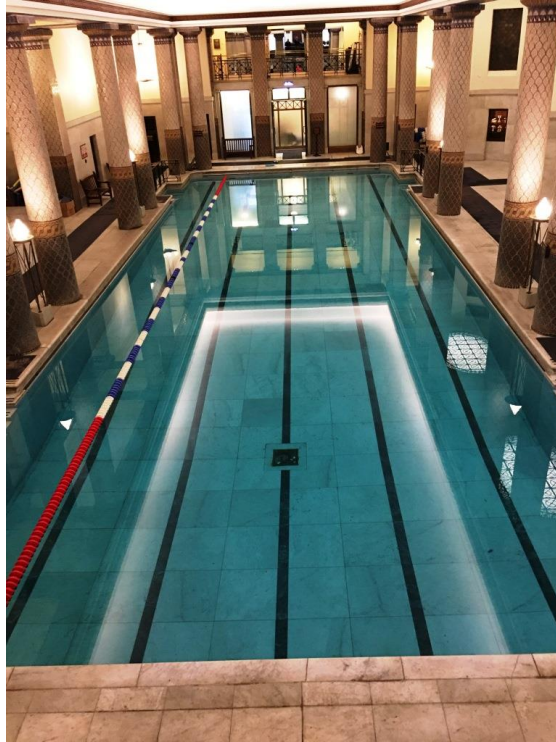




The Long Bar in the basement







Above and below: The huge RAC country facility at Woodcote Park, Surrey, open to reciprocals



*The end has come! The end has come! (Ezekiel 7:6)*