

## Wycombe By Roger Salvi

Before going on any away trip, I always check with the road atlas to see which roads to take and keep a note of them on the dashboard. So, on the Wednesday morning I checked the map and decided that the best route (taking into account that I was leaving straight from work in Wellingborough) would be down the A509 to the M1 and round the M25 following signs for Wycombe. However, instead of joining the M40, I decided I would leave the M25 at junction 18 and arrive at the ground via the A404. I contacted the ground and they were kind enough to give me directions, although the young lady I spoke to did ask why I was such an awkward sod?!!

I had arranged to meet my brother in the ground. He works in London and lives in Stansted. I keep him posted with all the latest news by saving him the cuttings from the local Evening Telegraph. What a night this was going to be - in more ways than one!

It was about 3pm when I rang my brother to check whether he still wanted to go. "Ofcourse. Why, don't you?", he enquired. It was then that I broke the news to him that Kettering Town boss Peter Morris was dropping goalkeeper Kevin Shoemake for Paul Bastock. I had to hold

the phone away from my ear as he instantly uttered an uncountable number of expletives directed at Peter Morris! Unfortunately, Bastock wasn't too popular with us at the time, so when I left at 4.30pm, I spent all the journey wondering what Morris was up to.

Although it was only 4.30, it was a dark November evening but I expected to arrive at the ground easily by 7pm. That was the plan - this is what happened!

I got on to the M1, no problem. Traffic had been heavy, but that was expected, that's why I had left early. I'd been driving for about an hour, trying hard not to imagine Bastock letting no more than four or five in. Our performances against Wycombe had been quite good. However, Kettering's form so far this season was up and down, so it was worrying going to play against the 'Chairboys' with our recent results, the last of which was a home league defeat by Slough.

But, this was the FA Cup, and Wycombe had held us at Rockingham Road, and looked the better side, but you never know. There were other replays on tonight, so I decided to tune in to Radio Five. Well, that was mistake number one. It was whilst tuning the radio that I missed my exit for the M25. Never mind, it was still early, I'd just go down to the next exit, turn around and come back. Easier said than done, because anyone will tell you that driving northbound on the M1, heading for the M25 is like, well, waiting in a car park for someone to move their car that's blocking the exit! Whilst crawling along, I began fiddling with the radio and checking the map at the same time. Mistake number two! Yes, I missed my exit for a second time!

With the fear of being stuck on the M1 between junctions 6 and 8, I decided to take the next exit and tackle the drive 'cross country'. Mistake number three! As anyone knows who lives in Hemel Hempstead, it is the sort of town you avoid during the rush hour, especially when you've absolutely no idea where you're going! It was too dark to read the map, and the only signs I saw were for hospitals and car parks and local hamlets

with silly sounding names. Traffic was too congested, there was no place to stop and time was getting on. There was only one thing for it - navigate using my local knowledge of towns.

This turned out to be mistake number four, as my only knowledge of any towns in the area were Aylesbury and Slough. I knew Slough was further south, but I was convinced I had read once before about a local derby between Wycombe and Aylesbury.

It was whilst in Berkhamsted that I realised I hadn't seen anything indicating the direction to Wycombe. I pulled over and checked the map. I couldn't believe it. I was way off course, and it was nearly seven.

I eventually found the right road, and it was whilst driving through Chesham that I began to think of Paul Bastock again. I wondered whether it was really worthwhile to travel all this way to see the Poppies lose. Was going to the match to be mistake number five?

No, mistake number five was to follow the instructions given to me by the young lady from the club earlier that day. It was nearly kick-off time when I finally reached High Wycombe - and I still had to find the ground and park somewhere. These instructions followed the same route as my own - namely out of the window. I stopped at a garage and asked for directions. What a surprise! I was completely on the wrong side of town! Luckily enough it was fairly straight forward to get back on track.

About a quarter of a mile or so from the ground I saw the glow of what appeared to be floodlights, and judging by the number of police, I guessed I was fairly close. Driving along looking for somewhere to park, I remembered what my neighbour had told me about not parking next to the ground. "Access to Adams Park is minimal", he said. "Park next to the ground and it will take you hours to get out". All the spaces were full, and it was whilst heading directly up towards the ground, praying that kick-off time had been delayed, that I nearly ran a policewoman over. "Don't you look where you're going?", she bellowed. I explained to

her that I was from the press, and that it was very important that I should get as close to the ground as possible. "If you're from the press, I'm Joan Collins!", she replied. Well, she wasn't quite as old as Ms Collins, but being afraid to cross her I explained who I really was and where I was heading. "Tough", she said. "It's full up there, you'll have to go back".

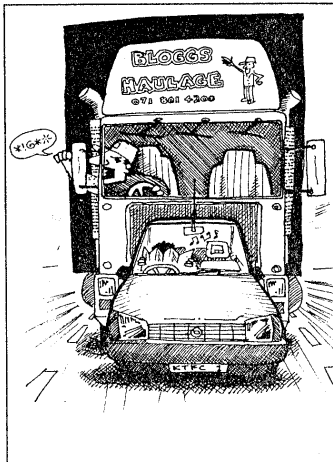
Well, there was plenty of back streets, so I picked the first one I found and I couldn't believe it, 2 or 3 good sized parking spaces - no drives or police cones. I started to park when a young lady tapped on my window. "Are you here for the game?", she asked. "Yes", I replied. "Residents only, I'm afraid", she answered.

Off I went again, and at the bottom of her road I thought, well, it's gone 7.50pm, surely the police wouldn't still be there. It was worth a try, and bingo, no sign of them, so off I sped as quick as I dared and managed to park behind a factory unit next to the ground. Who cares if it would take hours to get out.

I finally got into Adams Park a minute or so before eight o'clock, only to find that there was no score and yes, Bastock was in goal! I found my brother, who then gave me a severe verbal bashing for missing the kick-off. He didn't seem to care much that I'd been doing my own personal mini tour of Buckinghamshire!

Kettering came out in the second half to play superbly, making up for the previous season's humiliating 5 goal hammering, and secured a place in the Second Round of the FA Cup.

The drive home was much simpler. It did take a while to get out of the car park and industrial estate, but I didn't need my sandwiches and flask of coffee that my neighbour had advised me to take just in case I did park at the ground! We even had time to stop for a drink in Wycombe and savour those two magical goals that ensured a trip to our former Conference rivals, Maidstone United. And Bastock? Well, he did allright. He didn't have too much to do thanks to the magnificent performance from our defence.



Mistake number 2 - fiddling with the radio and checking the map...