The pen is mightier than the gearstick

Many might not see a career in journalism as being possible with a degree in Engineering. However, Matt Prior believes that there is a definite connection between studying cars and writing about them. ‘There was a time when a genuine technical understanding was essential for a car writer. It doesn’t seem to be these days, but I find it a distinct advantage. Besides technical knowledge, some engineering processes are similar to what I do: you arrange a test, conduct it, draw conclusions and present them. I put more jokes in the report, but the framework is the same.’

In his role as Road Test Editor at Autocar, Matt is responsible for all car reviewing activities. His focus is on editorial content, and means that he’s either testing cars, writing about them or planning future stories.

Working in journalism

Matt actually got into journalism through a fellow graduate. ‘My first boss, a local freelance car journalist, studied engineering at the University when it was Hatfield Polytechnic. He put up details of a six-week summer job on the noticeboard for a picture researcher. I got the job and stayed for three years.’

In 2000, Matt decided to move role and joined Channel 4’s motoring website where he stayed for five years. In 2005 his editor left to work for Autocar and asked him to join him at the magazine.

Motoring to success

For those looking to get into journalism, Matt advises approaching work experience as a way to learn about the role. ‘We get a lot of people in on work experience and those who ask “What exciting things have you got going on this week – are there any fast cars you can take me out in?” never stick around. The fact is that we’ve got something exciting going on every week: we’re producing one of the best motoring magazines and websites on the planet and it’s exciting.’

Matt stresses that to succeed you have to have a passion for journalism, sub-editing, design and telling a story. ‘Your passion can’t be for messing around in cars. That’s an enjoyable result of the hard work – not the aim of the job in itself.’