

Meet the families keeping motorists moving at Christmas

Spending Christmas Day with the family has a bit of a twist for one married couple, a father and son and a mother and son who are among the team of traffic officers that will be at work this year.

While many people tuck into Christmas dinner, they'll be patrolling England's motorways or in the control room helping drivers have safe journeys. Last Christmas Day traffic officers attended over 600 incidents around the country.

Angela Fenne who will be at work with husband Greg on Christmas Day, patrolling the A38 and M5 in Devon, says:

Christmas Day may be a bit unusual for us but we want everyone to have safe Christmas journeys and we can celebrate later!

And our Christmas message to anyone driving is to check your vehicle before you set off – to help ensure you get to your destination safely.

Also making it a family affair in Nottingham are father and son Nick and Phil Shaw who will be in the control room monitoring the motorways and major A roads across the East Midlands.

And in the South West control room near Bristol, mother Beverley Mears and son Tom Daw will be keeping eyes on the region's roads to handle any incidents and maintain traffic flows.

Beverley Mears and Tom Daw will be manning the control room.

Christmas Day was the quietest day for incidents on the motorway network last year, but Highways England's traffic officers still dealt with 611 incidents including 343 breakdowns, 24 collisions and 17 instances of animals on the motorway last year.

Highways England's dedicated team of traffic officers work 24/7, 365 days a year to keep traffic flowing, which means adapting the Christmas celebrations for many families.

Based at the Pridhamsleigh Outstation in Devon, Angela and Greg have worked together for the more than 10 years at Highways England and will start their Christmas Day shift at 2pm.

Deputy Team Manager Angela said:

It's better that we both work the Christmas Day shift. We'll pop into see our daughter en route to work and although we won't finish until some time after 10pm, we'll get to enjoy our Christmas Day lunch with the family a few days later on our day off.

Clocking on at 2pm with his father, Nick, is Phil who said:

We asked to work the same shift. I have a two-year-old so the late shift works out quite well for me. I will be there to watch him open his presents. We will eat before the shift starts then Dad and I will go to work.

Nick, who has worked for Highways England since 2015, said:

I was in the police for 30 years so I am used to it and Phil has grown up knowing Dad was going to have to go to work. Christmas was not normal in the Shaw household but you adapt to it. We are going to celebrate on Christmas Eve, we won't miss out.

South West Operations Manager Beverley said:

It's the first time Tom and I will have worked the Christmas Day shift. We'll be up at 4.30am for our shift, and we'll get in a little earlier to ensure our night duty team can get back and get some sleep before enjoying their Christmas.

I usually prepare dinner for my family and parents, Tom included, but this year the preparations will be done a little earlier and the celebration will just be a little later – it'll also mean an early night as we're both back in for the Boxing Day shift.

It's certainly going to be a family affair on Christmas Day as my husband, Andy, has promised to bring in bacon butties for all the control room operators.

The traffic officers are urging motorists to carry out simple checks to their vehicles – and to make sure they have plenty of fuel – to avoid spending Christmas Day on a motorway verge. Phil said:

Prevention is better than cure. By preparing for the journey, checking tyres, oil and so forth, it will make sure people don't break down in the first place and everyone has a happy Christmas.

Angela added:

We're here to help get things moving if there's a problem but to avoid spending Christmas Day on a roadside verge or hard shoulder we do suggest making a few simple vehicle checks before setting off on your journey.

Nick and Phil Shaw, pictured at a family wedding, who will be working Christmas Day together.

Last year, traffic officers responded to 310 collisions on England's motorways during the four days before Christmas Day – almost half of the total number of collisions during the 12-day festive season as people made their way across the country to see friends and family.

The Friday and Saturday before Christmas were also the most common days for motorway breakdowns, with traffic officers helping 610 drivers whose vehicles experienced faults during the two days.

Highways England has issued five tips to avoid a breakdown while you are driving home for Christmas:

- **Lights:** Ask someone to help you check all your lights, including your brake and reverse lights, are working properly before setting off.
- **Oil:** Use a dipstick to check you have enough oil and prevent your engine from seizing up.
- **Fuel:** Always keep your fuel tank at least a quarter full and fill it up to the top ahead of a long journey.
- **Tyres:** Check the pressure and tread depth of your tyres to make sure they are safe and roadworthy.
- **Screen wash:** Keep your screen wash container topped up so you can clear dirt off your windscreen.

Highways England is advising drivers to pay attention to messages on the overhead electronic signs and listen for radio updates in the event of severe weather over the festive season.

Further information can be found by visiting www.trafficengland.com following [@HighwaysEngland](https://twitter.com/HighwaysEngland) on Twitter or calling the Highways England Information Line on 0300 123 5000. The latest weather forecast can be seen online at www.metoffice.gov.uk.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.