



# KENT ON SUNDAY



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**FREE**

GALE ATTACKS COMPENSATION OVERHAUL AND FRANCHISE EXTENSION

# 'Useless' train payout plan blast by Tory MP

By **MARIJKE COX**

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A NEW payout scheme to compensate delayed Southeastern passengers has been branded "worse than useless" by a senior backbencher.

North Thanet MP Roger Gale attacked the new 'delay repay' initiative, due to be rolled out in the summer, despite other Kent MPs and campaigners welcoming the overhaul.

The new system will allow passengers delayed by 30 minutes or more to apply for compensation immediately on an individual basis, rather than wait for annual performance statistics.

But Mr Gale, who also said he was disappointed the company had been granted a two-year extension on its franchise agreement, said it would be of no benefit to commuters.

"This scheme is worse than useless," he said. "They are talking about a delay of half an hour on a journey of one-and-a-half to two hours. That's a huge percentage of the journey.

"How many people are they actually going to pay? Delayed trains are often 20 to 25 minutes late. And will they pay out if trains are cancelled? If a train is cancelled and I have to wait for another one and I miss an appointment, I'm not going to get compensated."

A Southeastern official said if a passenger was to turn up at a station and a train was cancelled, and the replacement was 35 minutes late, they would receive compensation.

But Mr Gale said he was not convinced Southeastern would pay out when it came to cancelled rather than delayed trains.

Currently, payouts are based on the average annual performance and punctuality of the

Continued on page two



Picture: PAUL JERRIAT

## DAME JUDI'S CASTLE BOND

For full details see inside

## Tsunami heroes

A FIREFIGHTER who spent the week after Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami helping in the search for survivors has spoken of the horror – and the dignity – he saw there.

John Mazzei, of Kent's specialist search and rescue team, spent three days in the devastated towns of Ofunato and Kamaishi, where tens of thousands of people were missing.

**STORY - SEE PAGES 8-9**

## Friends and foes

KENT-based soldiers have been involved in a bloody firefight with Afghan insurgents.

The troops were ambushed by Afghan fighters and the resulting battle saw insurgents injured and killed. The troops are due back on Canterbury in April after a seven-month tour of duty, but there was still time renew old acquaintances from across the pond.

**STORY - SEE PAGES 20-21**

## Twenty20 setback

KENT cricket boss Jamie Clifford has voiced his disappointment at the decision to reduce the number of Twenty20 games from 16 to 10 after this season.

Clifford says the move is a "backward step" and believes the shorter programme will hit the club hard at a time when the St Lawrence Ground is being redeveloped to make the most of the 20-over format.

**FULL STORY - SEE SPORT**

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# THE INTERVIEW



BY ED HILL

## Louise driving for the top

LOUISE COOK never imagined when she was a young girl driving around in her toy buggy that it would lead to a career in motorsport.

But then the 23-year-old from Maidstone stepped into a rally car in a competition to be a female rally driver.

She said: "I'm not from a motorsport background, but my dad used to take me to car shows and to Brands Hatch, so I think he passed on his passion to me.

"There was a competition to get more ladies into rallying and the prize was the organisers paying for a season's rallying.

"I didn't win, but I came second out of 1,000 entries and that gave me the confidence to get my rallying licence. I then spent my student loan on my first rally."

Louise managed to come 51st out of 105 entries in that first event.

She said: "It was doing so well with so little experience that led to me catching the bug."

Taking part in one race may have been easy, but putting together a campaign for a full season is a more difficult prospect. Rallying is an expensive business, and if you want to be competitive there is a constant hunt for sponsorship.

Louise said: "I came up with the idea of getting 500 companies to give me £50 each, for a chance of getting sponsorship on the car. That paid for most of my first year."

In her first season, Louise achieved her goal of finishing in the top 10 of the British Rally Championship Challenge.

She has now stepped up a category, meaning she can reconnoitre courses before the rally and prepare her own pace notes. The preparation means faster times, but harder battles with other drivers.

Louise competes in the N class category. Her Ford Fiesta is relatively close to the road car that most of us might drive, although she has rebuilt the engine to improve its performance.

She said: "I am really excited about competing this season. The main difficulty is getting the money, because it is about double the budget compared with last year.



AMBITION: Louise Cook, pictured above and left in action, is aiming to be the first woman world rally champion

Picture: JAKOB EBREY

"I have to do it so I can make it to the World Rally Championship Academy, which is the junior world championship for under-25s."

The former council receptionist knows she has to improve to get to the top, and spends some of the winter in Sweden, driving on ice to improve her skills.

"You can refine everything," she said. "My car control has massively improved. Any little mistake and the car reacts and punishes you, because there is hardly any grip."

She is not fazed by being one of the very few women who have tried to make it in the male-dominated world of motorsport: "You have to be thick-skinned if you are going to put yourself in a situation where you stand out, but it is such a competitive sport that I would have to put up with stick anyway.

"All the guys take the mick out of each other and play psychological games. They treat me no different, and it's not like tennis, where you win less prize money as a female."

Louise is well aware that being a woman

driver does help her to get noticed.

"It is a selling point, and people know I am going to get more media attention, but it's still a struggle," she said. "I would like to find one big sponsor."

She is determined to achieve her ambition of being the first woman world rally champion, and her next race is the Bulldog Rally in Wales on Saturday, April 2.

She said: "I never thought I would be in the British Rally Championship in my second season. It has been a fast learning curve."

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