

Roads come under the spotlight

A new BBC2 documentary – *The Motorway: Life in the Fast Lane* – is shining a light on the hidden world of the M6, including its most famous structure, Spaghetti Junction

“It’s like a cathedral,” says Steve Wood, staring up at the interweaving arches of Spaghetti Junction’s dark grey concrete above.

There are no stained glass windows, and no steeple – just 13,000 tonnes of steel reinforcement and 134,000m³ of concrete.

But for Steve, who has worked on the Gravelly Hill Interchange for the past eight years, the pillars, supports and asphalt around him are as beautiful and interesting as any Renaissance fresco.

Some may argue that this complex junction, linking the arterial M6 with the venous network of roads leading north and south from the Midlands, is more like a road to hell than a religious mecca.

But for Steve, and countless highways staff working on motorways and major A-roads around the country, this is a devout way of life.

Steve’s work is featured in a new BBC documentary exploring life on the M6.

Whereas past shows like *Motorway Cops* have focused on life above the asphalt, *The Motorway: Life in the Fast Lane* takes a truly in-depth look beneath the pock-marked black surface – following the ‘army’ of workers who keep this busy road alive and flowing.

At Spaghetti Junction – where Steve currently still works for Amey (although the management contract has now passed to EM Highway Services) – the Highways Agency is leading the world when it comes to investment and maintenance in the road network.

Investing in roads

Over the next 12 months, the Agency will invest almost £13.5m in the roads around the Gravelly Hill area, including using cathodic protection techniques designed to prolong the life of Spaghetti Junction by another 50 years.

Cathodic protection involves wrapping the concrete in a titanium mesh – a sort of ‘electric blanket’ – and sending an electric current into the steel support beams within the concrete structures. The two milliamp current helps protect the steel from corrosion from salt chlorides within the road surface, and removes the need for ongoing, time-intensive repairs to the pillars themselves.

A delegation of engineers from Japan, whose road network is a similar age to the UK’s and faces similar challenges, have already travelled to the UK to learn from the Agency about the techniques used to keep the country’s road network

safe, well maintained and open for all road users.

The documentary gives the Agency a chance to share this knowledge and expertise with the wider country. It provides a platform for the Agency to explain its work, and help the public understand the magnitude of the task involved in keeping busy roads open, safe and operational.

Split into four parts, each episode looks at a different area of motorway management and maintenance.

The highways crews featured include traffic officers, regional control centres, and contractors carrying out improvements, repairs and maintenance, including environmental and litter teams. The cameras also went out with motorway police groups, breakdown patrols, and chatted with local residents. 🚧

The BBC documentary explores life on the M6

For further information visit:
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04hfvcv or www.highways.gov.uk/about-us/the-motorway/





Episodes

The first show aired on 9 September, and ran on Tuesdays on BBC2 throughout the month.

Episode one, Weight of Traffic: featured resurfacing work on the M6, meetings with local residents, and traffic management on a live carriageway. Footage showed several HGVs narrowly squeezing through to avoid the diversion, while the crews explained they have just nine seconds to cross the motorway whilst carrying a large sign.

Episode two, Keeping the Show on the Road: focused on last winter, and the Agency's response to the severe floods in February 2014, and showed on-road team manager Sioux Hine commanding the Army on the M50. It included footage with salt spreading crews, and staff from Amey battling to clear fallen trees from the M6. Elsewhere, this episode featured ongoing work to maintain Spaghetti Junction.

Episode three, The Need for Speed: went into the Regional Control Centre at Quinton, and featured traffic officers dealing with incidents. This episode put a strong emphasis on the Agency's efforts to keep traffic moving. It also featured Amey staff repairing potholes in rolling roadblocks in under three minutes, and police colleagues dealing with potential suicides.

The final episode, No Such Thing as an Accident: looked at the Agency's work to improve Catthorpe junction in Leicestershire, along with partners from Skanska. This episode also looked at environmental protection schemes, police dealing with RTCs, HGV recovery operations and DVSA vehicle inspections.

An artist's impression of Catthorpe junction in Leicestershire - improvement works here were the focus of the final episode

