



South African Guild of Motoring Journalists

CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

PREAMBLE

The following is the SAGMJ's Code of Good Practice. It serves as a directive for all members of the Guild, and will become an instrument of the organisation's constitution.

The Code recognises that the executive committee of the SAGMJ is not empowered to prescribe to members how to conduct their business, but it urges responsibility and accountability in actions that carry the risk of damaging the good name of the Guild and its members.

INTRODUCTION

The South African Guild of Motoring Journalists recognises that its members share a common and essential interest in protecting the organisation's integrity, as well as that of the newspapers, magazines, websites, television and radio stations for which they work.

The Guild pledges to treat its members and others with whom it comes into contact fairly and openly, and to be seen to be doing so. The reputation of the Guild rests upon such perceptions, as do the professional reputations of its members.

Conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may arise from time, emerging from the relationships of Guild members with readers of newspapers, magazines or web sites, industry sources, advocacy groups or advertisers, with one another, or with media owners.

The Guild requires that in carrying out their duties, its members are bound to ensure that the highest standards of professional journalism are employed during the research, writing, scripting and editing of reports, and that what is published or broadcast is an accurate and fair presentation of salient facts.

The Guild sees its members as professional people whose ability to create motoring journalism outputs is the basis of their livelihoods. In this context, the Guild recognises its members should be free to do creative, civic and personal work and to earn extra income in ways separate from their day-to-day journalistic activities.

Before committing to such outside work, however, members should exercise mature professional judgment and consider the stake each member has in the Guild's irreplaceable good name. Guild members are advised to carefully scrutinise all aspects of all the work they do to ensure that there is no conflict with the good practices which the Guild advocates.

To assist its members in these processes, the Guild has established detailed Guidelines of Good Practice which can be applied to all members whose journalistic activities directly affect the content of newspapers, magazines, websites, television and radio stations for which they work. These Guidelines will be reviewed and revised from time to time to ensure they remain topical and match the circumstances of the day.

GUIDELINES

Members of the Guild are regarded as professional journalists or photographers and are expected to honour these guidelines when carrying out assignments for the media for which they work.

1. Be Honest, Accurate and Fair

Journalists and photographers who are Guild members should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

They should:

- 1.1 Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- 1.2 Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photographs, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- 1.3 Never distort the content of photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is permissible.
- 1.4 Never plagiarise.
- 1.5 Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labelled so as not to misrepresent fact or context.
- 1.6 Distinguish news from advertising.
- 1.7 Recognise a special obligation to ensure that the reader's right to know is conducted in the open.
- 1.8 Never misuse the power of press or threaten negative publicity in pursuit of personal gain.

2. Act Independently

Guild members who are journalists or photographers should be free of obligation to any vested interest which could force them to support inaccuracies.

They should:

- 2.1 Avoid personal conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- 2.2 Always have clear definition of the brief for work to be performed, in terms of its accuracy and influence on their obligations to impart true, professional opinions.
- 2.3 Refuse secondary employment if it compromises their journalistic integrity.
- 2.4 Deny favoured treatment to advertisers and special interest groups and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.

3. Be Accountable

- 3.1 Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other. Guild members should:
 - 3.2 Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
 - 3.3 Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
 - 3.4 Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
 - 3.5 Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

4. Hospitality, Gifts, Review Material, Travel, Test Cars

Generally, Guild members who are journalists or photographers are assigned to cover an event for one specific reason – to report on that event. While the Guild recommends that its members act as independently as possible, it recognises the following:

- 4.1 Invitations that include travel and accommodation expenses for groups of journalists and photographers, extended on a professional level, are acceptable in the interests of obtaining reports for publication or broadcast. Where invitations have been extended on a non-professional basis, the Guild recommends that they be declined.
- 4.2 In working situations where food and drinks are served, or in hospitality rooms where members could find it awkward either to pay their own way or decline to eat, they should accept the host's hospitality in moderation.
- 4.3 Acceptance of invitations to product launches or Guild functions is binding. If circumstances prevent attendance, the invitee is bound to let the company or Guild know timeously.
- 4.4 Gifts of more than token value that commemorate an event should be declined. If a Guild member deems it awkward or rude to refuse a gift, it may be accepted on condition that it is donated to charity. In this respect, Guild members are advised to inform the gift giver after the event of the course of action taken.
- 4.5 Books, records, tapes, photographs, CDs or similar materials sent to Guild members for review are to be considered news releases, and they become the property of the publishing or broadcast organisation for which the Guild member works. They cannot be treated as personal items.
- 4.6 Test cars received for review by members of the Guild are to be treated with utmost respect, and conditions of the Guild's Code for the Acceptance of Road Test Vehicles must be followed. This Code includes items such as the vehicles being returned to the lenders in condition similar to that in which they were accepted and that any damage to a vehicle, however minor, should be reported immediately to the lender, with a copy of the report to the Guild. It also requires that test vehicles are returned on the agreed date.
- 4.7 Testing of vehicles should be carried out expeditiously. A reasonable amount of personal use of the vehicle is permissible provided that it contributes meaningfully to the review.

5. Obeying the Law

- 5.1 Guild members are required to obey the law. This applies not only to using legitimate channels in pursuit of news, but also to adhering to the rules of the road when testing vehicles on public thoroughfares.
- 5.2 In terms of road behaviour, it is the duty of Guild members to at all times set a good example to others.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 When in doubt about any ethical policy, Guild members should always be guided by fairness, accuracy, good common sense and their responsibility towards readers, listeners and viewers. Remember that relationships with industry contacts can erode into favouritism, in fact or appearance. Guard against it.
- 6.2 The scrupulous Good Practice advocated by the Guild requires that periodically we step back and take a hard look at whether we have drifted too close to sources we deal with regularly. The acid test of freedom from favouritism is the ability to maintain good working relationships with all parties to a dispute.