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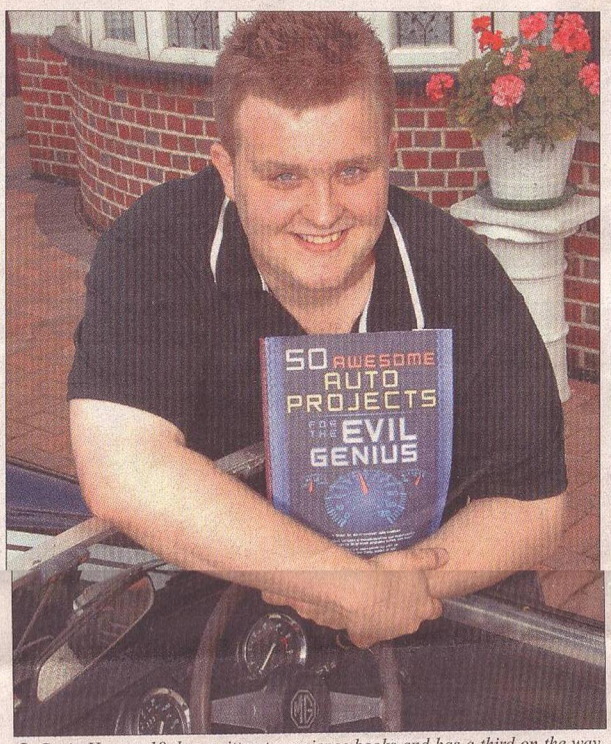
LIFESTYLE

Teenager hooked on rocket science



● *Gavin Harper, 18, has written two science books and has a third on the way.*

By LIZ ALVIS

THERE aren't many teenagers who can say they've written a book about rocket science, but Gavin Harper is not your average teenager.

The 18-year-old, of Fairfield Avenue, Upminster, has already written two books and he has a third on the way.

Added to that, he is a science and engineering ambassador for the organisation SETNET which means that he helps to promote science and technology in schools.

Gavin said: "I think there are a lot of fun aspects to science and I hope I can demonstrate that in my books. Rocket science isn't as hard as you'd think!"

He added: "There is a real downturn in people wanting to study science and technology at the moment. Humanities subjects are flourishing, whereas the sciences are looked on less favourably. I'm not sure why this is.

"It could be because the sciences are harder to study and people may prefer to study something they enjoy more and don't have to apply themselves to so much. I hope I can make people realise that science can be fun."

Gavin's first book, 50 Awesome Auto Projects for the Evil Genius, will be published in September. This will be followed later in the year by his second title, Build Your Own Car PC. He aims to finish his third book, 50 Model Rocket Projects for the Evil Genius by December.

Gavin, a former pupil at Coopers Company and Coborn School, St Mary's Lane, Upminster, has always been interested in science and technology from a young age, when he used to build PCs from different computer parts he had collected.

He is very enthusiastic about the idea of installing computers in cars, but he is keen to stress that they must be used with caution.

He said: "One PC can act as the point of control for all your in-car needs. It can include a multi-media system and navigation system as well as be the means for storing MP3 files and a way of accessing the internet or your mobile phone. It's the one point of control for all these different things.

"The important thing that I want to really stress is that this kind of technology must be used responsibly. For example the navigation system would be useful for the driver, but the games or DVDs should only be used by the passengers."



Gavin's latest book, about rocket science, includes different projects that readers can follow, such as incorporating a digital camera in a rocket so that when it is launched the rocket can take pictures of its flight.

He said: "I started out making rockets when I was younger. They were a bit primitive at first and more like glorified fireworks. Now, technology has become so sophisticated that you can do some really exciting things with rockets. It's great fun experimenting with them."

When he's not busy launching rockets or writing books, Gavin enjoys tinkering with his two cars – a Mini and an MG Midget. But, tinkering is all he can do for the moment as he has not yet managed to pass his driving test, despite having had 70 lessons and five attempts.

He said: "There's a great irony about the fact that I've written two books about cars, but I still haven't managed to pass my driving test! I can understand rocket science but I just can't master the practicalities of driving. It's quite funny really."

Gavin is currently in the second year of an Open University degree in technology and he plans to go on to do a Masters degree with the University of East London, followed by a PhD.

He hopes to go into teaching in the future and has already made some preparation for this by helping out as a teaching assistant at Branfil Junior School, in Upminster. During the next academic term he will also be doing a work placement at Hall Mead School as part of his Open University degree course.

He said: "I really enjoy teaching as it's rewarding. It has always interested me and I hope it's something I will go on to do in the future when I'm in my twenties.

"For the moment though, writing the books is a career dream come true. I'm writing about all the things I enjoy doing which is great fun. I hope to continue doing it for as long as I can."

Gavin's first book, 50 Awesome Auto Projects for the Evil Genius, will be available from the internet bookstore