

Sunday Times Driving website UX case study

BRIEF

Since its launch 4 years ago, the Sunday Times Driving website's main focus has been to get its site visitors to browse over 300K used and new cars with the hope of a sale. It also offers expert news and reviews from columnists including Jeremy Clarkson.

Unfortunately, visiting figures and car sales for the website have been bad and what with a poor user experience and a tired look, then it was high time for a redesign.

New sponsors had been secured for the website relaunch in the shape of car giants, Kia and they wanted the site to take on a more lifestyle approach to its look and content. It would still offer the car-selling wing but that would now be of secondary importance.

I have been brought in as UX/UI Visual designer to design and help lead the overhaul of the site. Working alongside the Creative Director, a UX consultant and 3 developers, I will be working on the visual and interaction design as well as contributing to other areas such as research and usability testing. I would also design a new brand identity for the website

We have a tight deadline of 5 weeks and a whole host of directors, stakeholders, sponsors and editors to please, so let's put our foot down...

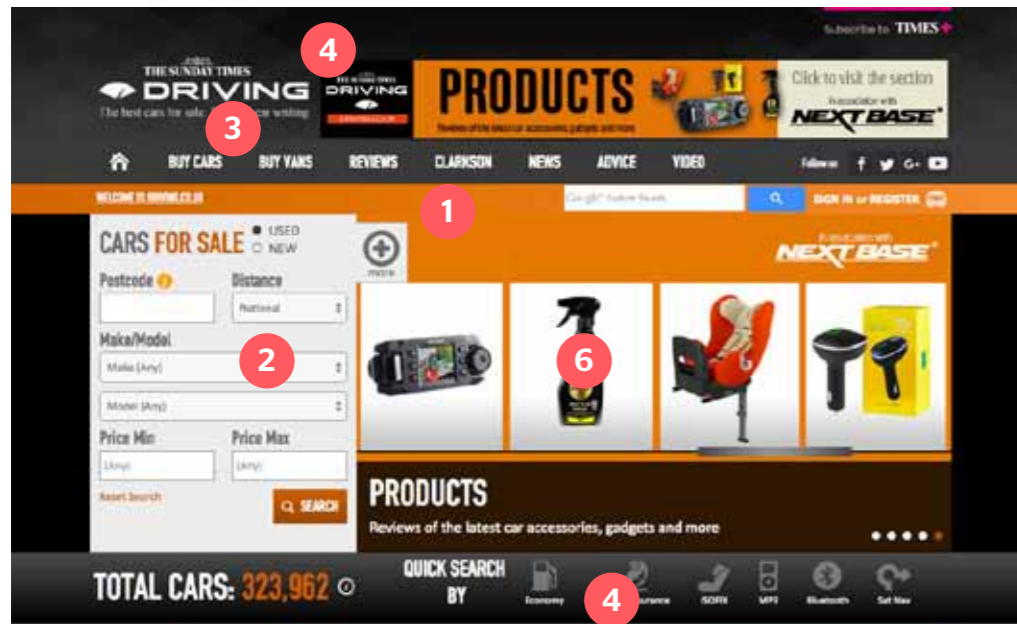
PROJECT DISCIPLINES

Full UX process | UX/UI | Wireframes | Interactive Design | Visual Design | Usability testing | Art Direction | Brand Design

SITE INDEX

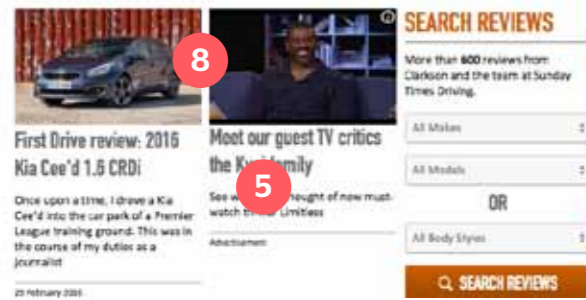
1. *Brief*
2. *UX - Researching current site*
3. *UX - Moodboards*
4. *UX - Research, brainstorm and initial sketch concepts*
5. *UX - Wireframes*
6. *UX - Prototype visuals*
7. *UX - Prototype, testing, tasks and feedback*
8. *UI - Site colour scheme*
9. *UI - Talent treatment*
10. *UI - New logo design*
11. *Homepage*
12. *Hub pages: News*
13. *Article pages: News*
14. *Hub pages: Reviews*
15. *Article pages: Reviews*
16. *Megamenu*
17. *Sponsored content*
18. *Digital advertising*
19. *Testing, testing, testing
Bugs and tweaking*
20. *Final conclusion*

HOME DESKTOP



REVIEWS

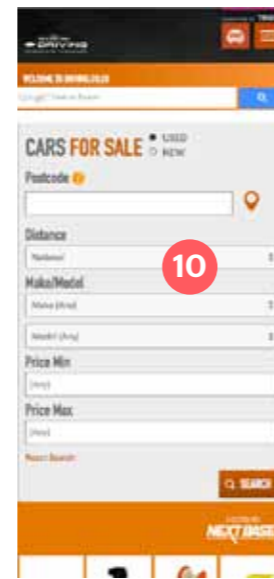
The Clarkson review: 2016 BMW 730Ld M Sport



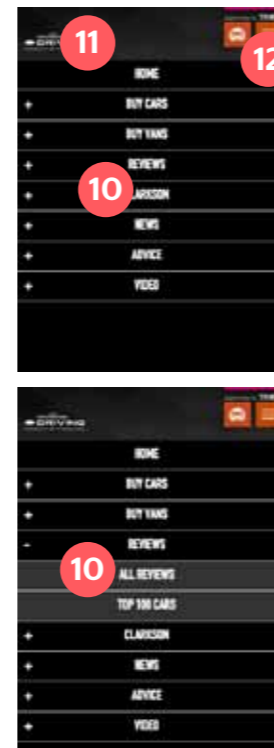
NEWS DESKTOP



HOME MOBILE



MENU MOBILE



BRAND LOGO



DESKTOP PAIN POINTS

- Overall, the site was very confusing to look at - the orange/black colour scheme felt dated and brand guidelines had gone out the window.
- The site was focused to get visitors to buy cars and the site content was of secondary importance. This would need to be reversed.
- The main navigation drove to car selling and the drop-down sub-categories were confusing with names like 'Confused' and 'Car Clinic'.
- Badly designed traffic drivers added to the confusion, with logos sitting next to each other.
- Content lacked consistency, with some headlines 4 lines and others next to it 1 line.
- There was no main visual focus point to the site and no hierarchy - ahhh my eyes.
- The Clarkson content was way down the site.
- Other content looked like it wasn't updated regularly as there was only a few articles visible even after further scrolling.

MOBILE PAIN POINTS

- The car-selling form took up the whole load screen and you really don't feel like there is any content in the site at all.
- The navigation is terrible as you can't even get to the top level category page from the menu. Clicking on the category name doesn't take you to its actual page - it simply closes and opens the sub menu - a really bad experience.
- The logo is almost unreadable as it's that small.
- The Times+ button is so small it's actually unclickable.

BRAND LOGO PAIN POINTS

- Really confusing too! People thought the little icon below the word Driving was a windscreen wiper and not the speedometer that the original designer had hoped for.
- Needs to feel more premium as it is under the Sunday Times family.

SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

2. UX - Researching current site

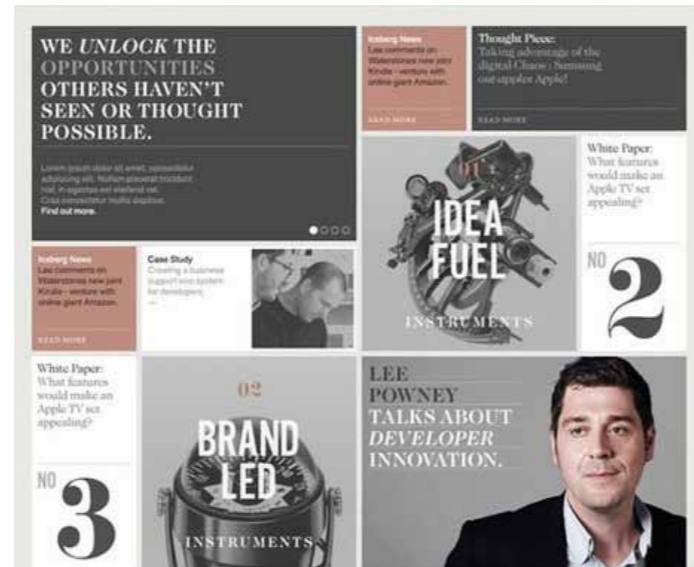
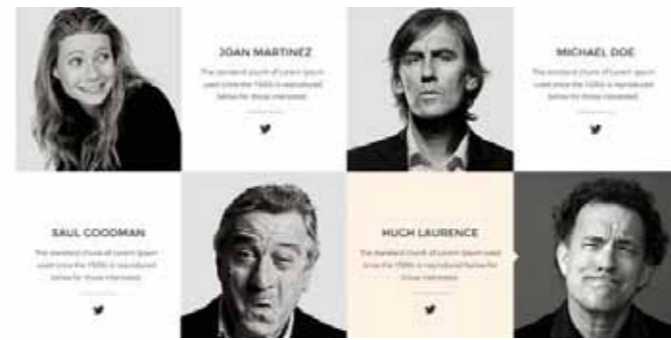
The site had very low visiting numbers and just one look at the homepage would explain why. A poor user experience as well as a disjointed design meant the dwell time was awful and users rarely came back.

By offering a new lifestyle design we could breath new life into the website, but the biggest issue would be how to deliver this new content in an exciting way and also offer clever and clear navigation.

It would be an idea to do some user testing myself and see what other problems needed addressing. I also asked other users in our building what their thoughts were about the site. Look at the pain points to your left to see what I found.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The navigation needed to be clearer as several sub categories had confusing titles. The colour scheme felt very dated. As the site would be more lifestyle driven and less about selling cars then that would need to be reflected in the navigation and site hierarchy. Clarkson needed to be more prominent higher up the homepage. Using Google analytics, we found out that the breakdown of site users were 50% mobile, 33% desktop and 17% tablet, so responsive design and excellent mobile experience was essential.



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

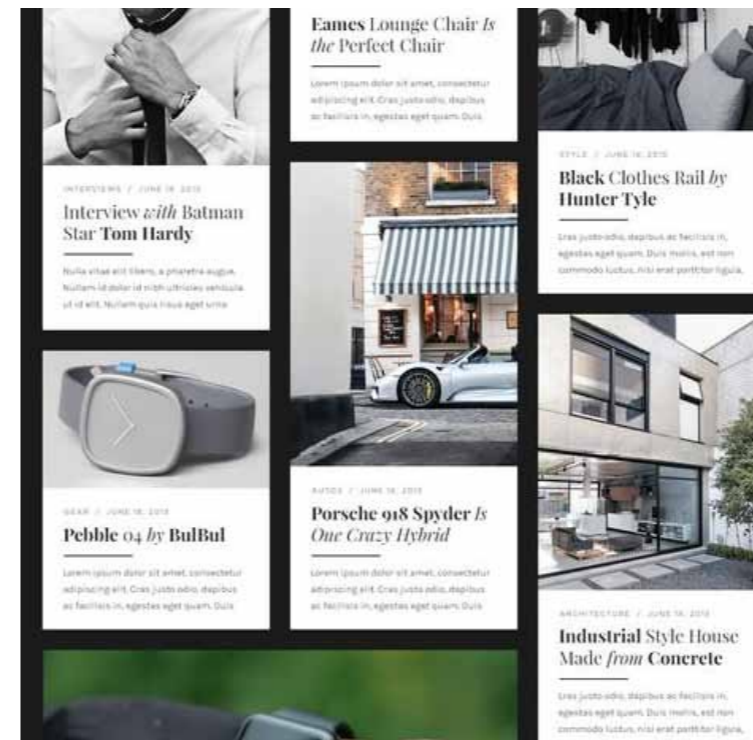
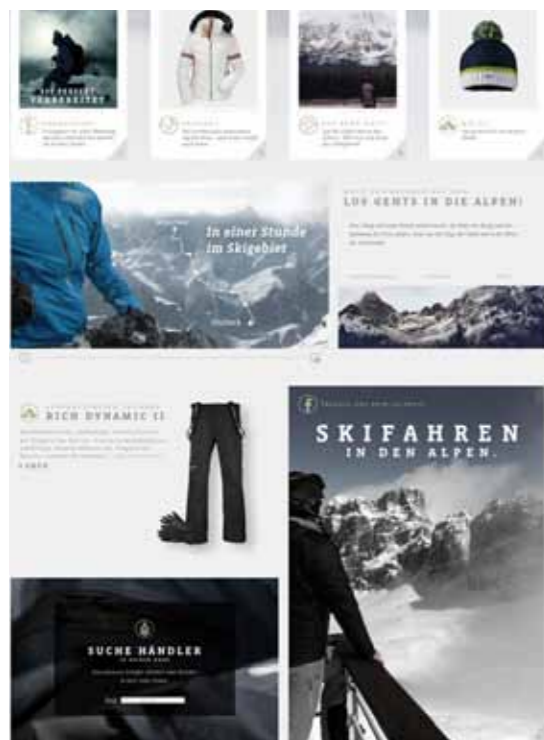
3. UX - Moodboards

Moodboards are an excellent UX tool and allows me the ability to show clients and colleagues a proposed look without investing too much in a failed direction.

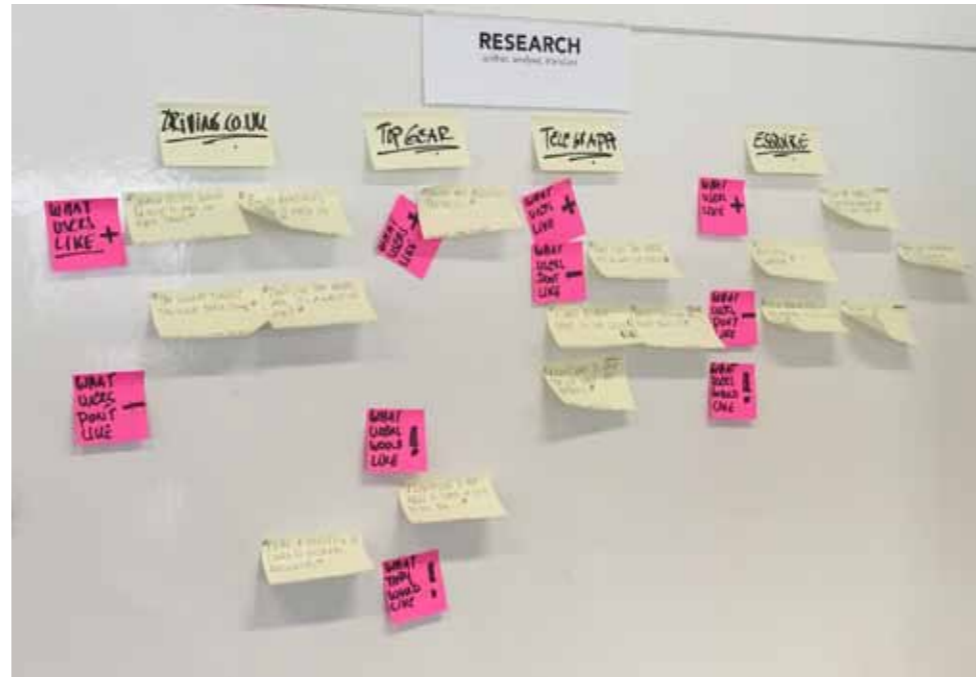
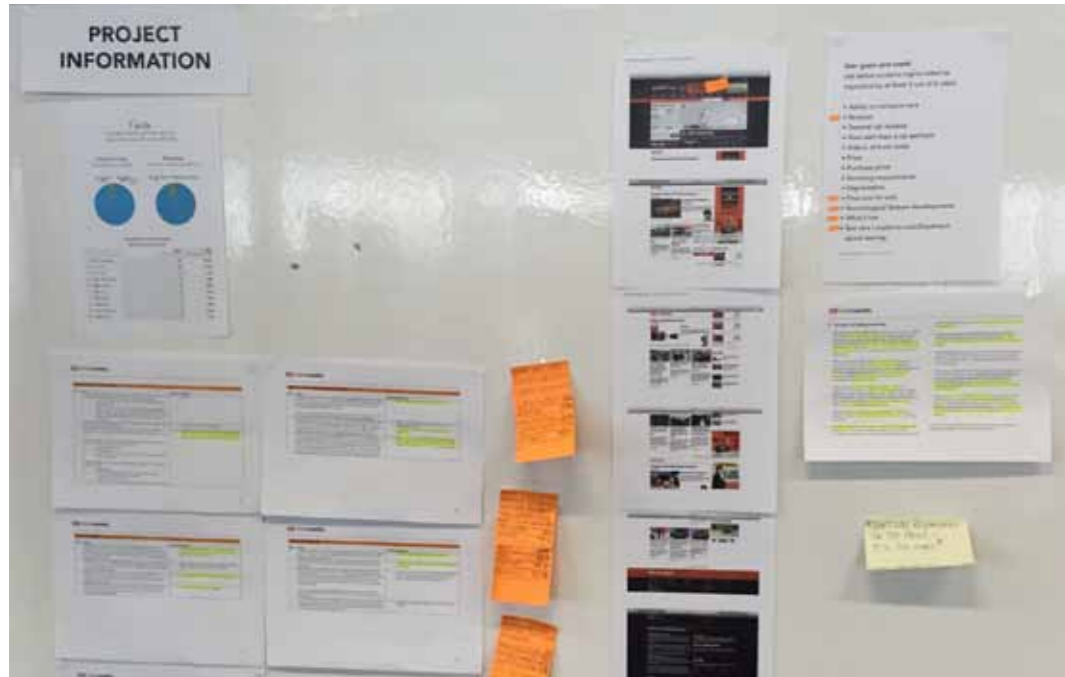
They also help to establish all of the baselines that will eventually go into a style guide: color palettes, typography, layout, image treatments.

As the tiled navigation would offer a more visual way to access content then I thought it would help to research similar styles and design for both desktop and mobile. Pinterest is a great way to build up moodboards and to send them to clients as a collective of ideas to get their opinions on whether you are heading in the right direction from the off.

This is a selection of relevant designs which could possibly influence our lifestyle website.



UX RESEARCH



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

4. UX - Research, brainstorms and initial sketch concepts

UX RESEARCH

Chakeeb, our UX consultant had made a great start on the research after approaching the company, Web Usability to provide us with 6 testers, who all had a keen interest in cars and driving.

They would first user test the experience and functionality of the current Driving website (desktop, tablet and mobile versions), several car website competitors as well as the lifestyle website, Esquire.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

All testers really like car reviews but didn't like the fact the additional car spec and information was at the end of the article. They liked Clarkson reviews and articles as he was a trusted motoring figure. Several testers felt the website imagery was inconsistent and could have been bigger on article pages. They liked video content. They liked the option of searching car reviews. All were wary of registering with the website. Most testers said they'd consider sharing a driving article with Family and friends.

BRAINSTORMS & SKETCHING

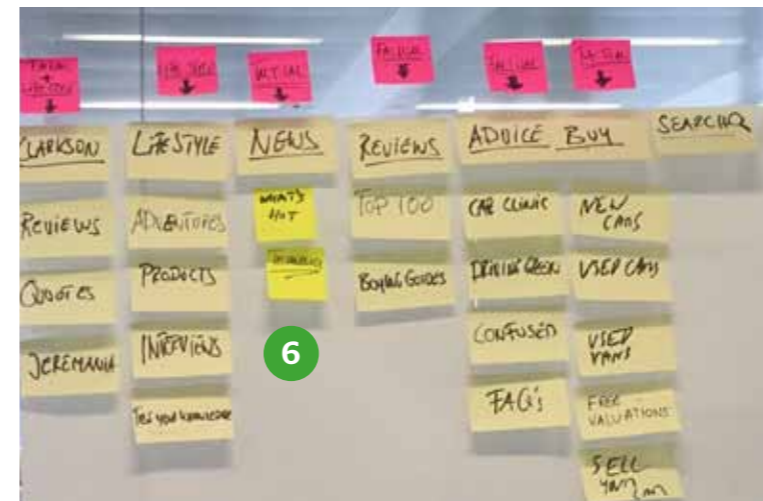
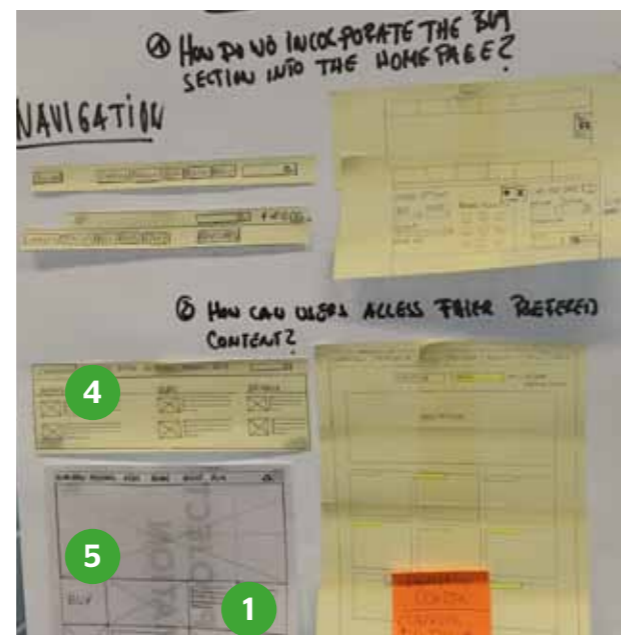
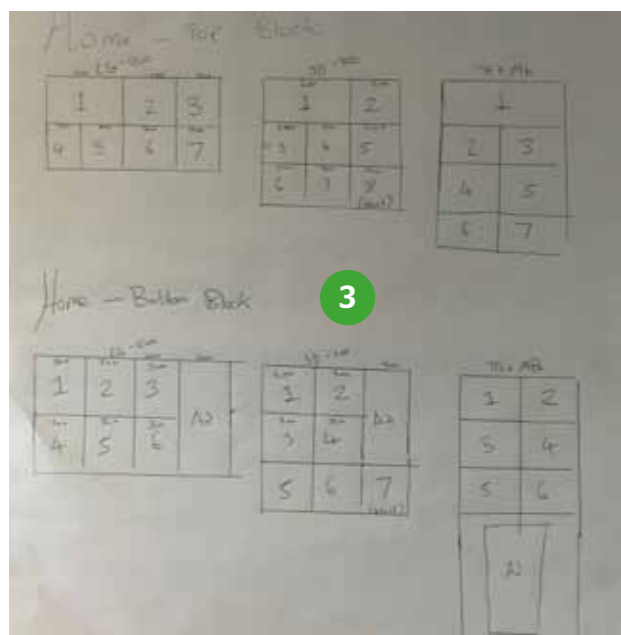
Knowing the brief and key research, we had an understanding of what needs were important to the users, we then held several brainstorm sessions to offer ideas, theories and potential solutions.

Out came the pen and pads to sketch out some rough concepts.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Kia, our new launch sponsors wanted their digital advertising above the fold in 2 forms - a leaderboard and an MPU or double MPU. This offers huge design challenges including making the advertising work on all devices.

SKETCHED CONCEPTS

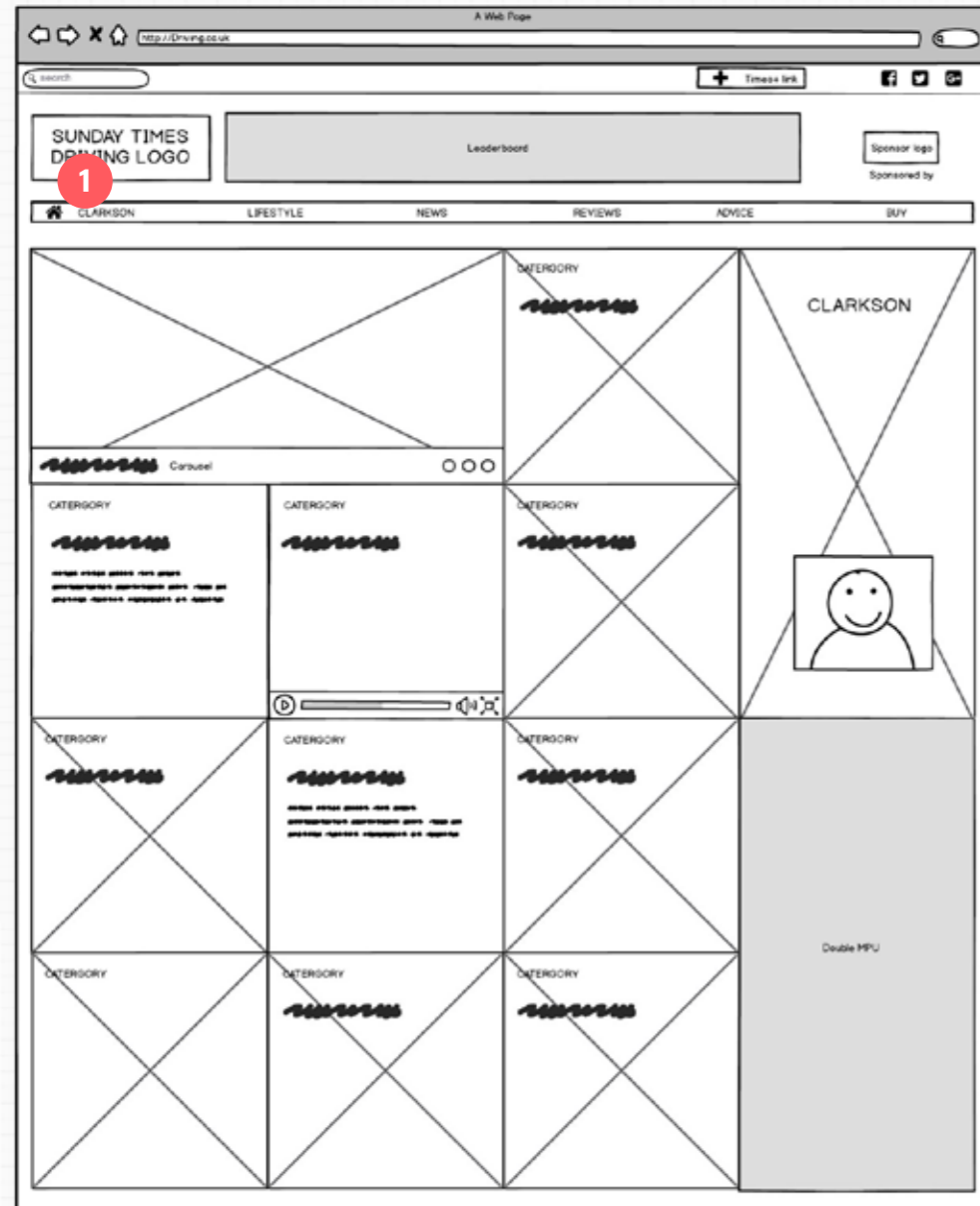


SKETCHED CONCEPT FINDINGS

1. The lifestyle tiled navigation was a strong visual concept offering multi styles of content entry points. Importantly, it also offered a solution to getting in the digital ads above the fold without killing the design.
2. To offer a constantly big impact, our grid would need to incorporate a carousel.
3. The tiled navigation, with its MPU, carousel and lead Clarkson content also needed to work responsively on all devices. Working for half a day with Rob, one of our developers, we finally came up

4. One great solution for a clearer navigation bar was to use a megmenu. That way we could offer more impact to a host of content and also offer explanations of what content certain categories contained.
5. We could make the link to the buy section prominent but not intrusive.
6. Categories and sub-categories in the main nav bar were repositioned to offer a content hierarchy starting with Clarkson, then Lifestyle and News.

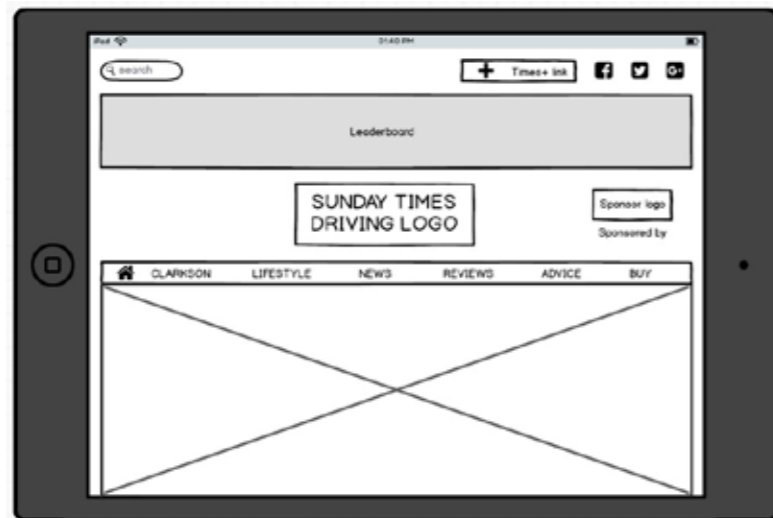
HOME DESKTOP



HOME DESKTOP (MEGAMENU)



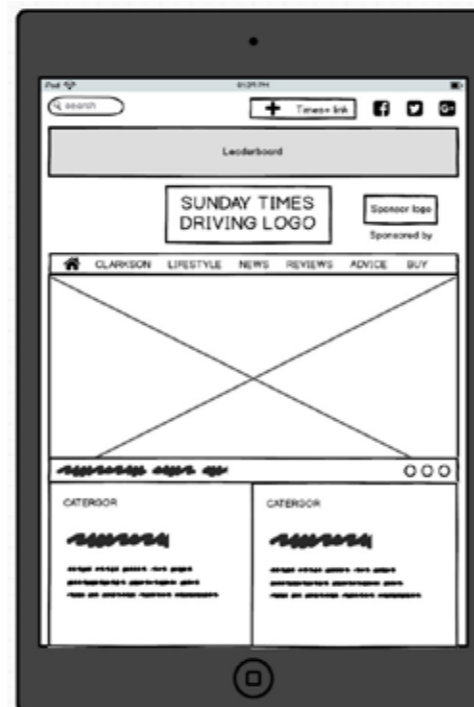
TABLET (LANDSCAPE)



MOBILE



TABLET (PORTRAIT)



WIREFRAME FEEDBACK

After showing clients the wireframe designs, they requested several changes.

1. The Driving logo, although aligning nicely with the leaderboard ad would be feel more prominent if it sat below it and was centred.
2. The search area was ok in it's current position top left, but could it be moved to sit in with the main navigation bar.
3. Can the BUY button be more prominent. They were happy with it's placement.

SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

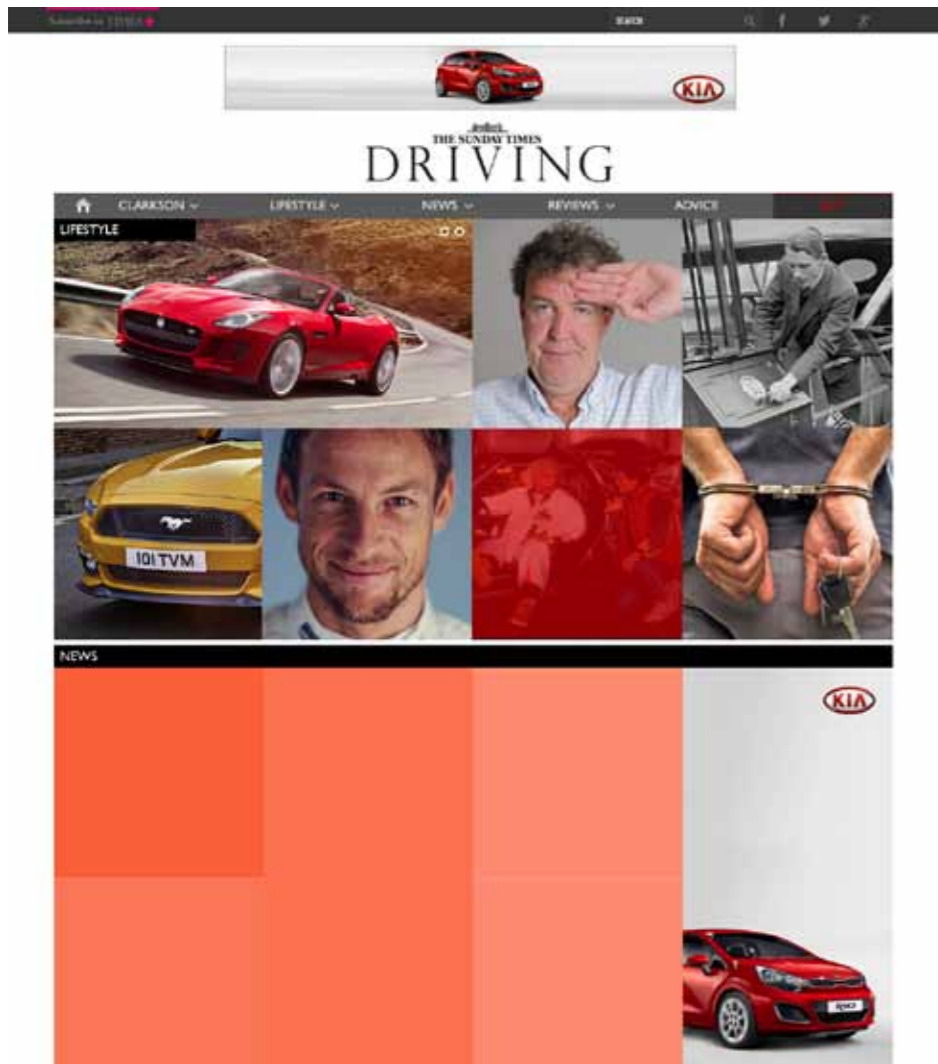
5. UX - Wireframes

I took the initial sketches and using a great tool called Balsamiq, designed a set of responsive wireframes for the homepage, including the tiled navigation and the megamenu. Having tablet and mobile wireframes helped the client understand how homepage would work in several responsive states. The stripped back sketched style meant I could concentrate on getting the concept and interactivity across to the client without getting into any conversations about the look & feel / design style just yet.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The website grid would need to be dictated by the width of the normal or double MPU (300px) as it would be constantly there, but I didn't want it to be overly dominant on the eye. So that made sense that the full website width be 300px x 4 = 1200px.

ORIGINAL HOMEPAGE TILED IMAGES



ORIGINAL HOMEPAGE TILED HEADERS



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

6. UX - Prototype visuals

With the need for a hi-fidelity prototype, I worked on Photoshop visual designs for the homepage including the tiled navigation and the megamenu. With the wireframe references, I also took the following into account.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

DIGITAL ADS

I had control over these as later in the project, I worked on the digital ads so could manage the tone and make sure they worked with the overall website look and feel.

IMAGE TREATMENT

They would be squared images apart from the carousel, which was double the width. I wanted the images to be more closely and cleverly cropped to feel more lifestyle and include a good mix of cars (exterior, interior and detail shots), people, products and even illustrations to get some variety.

COLOUR

I wanted a strong colour palette to replace the current orange and black and felt that red, black and a variety of grey tones suited a motoring website.

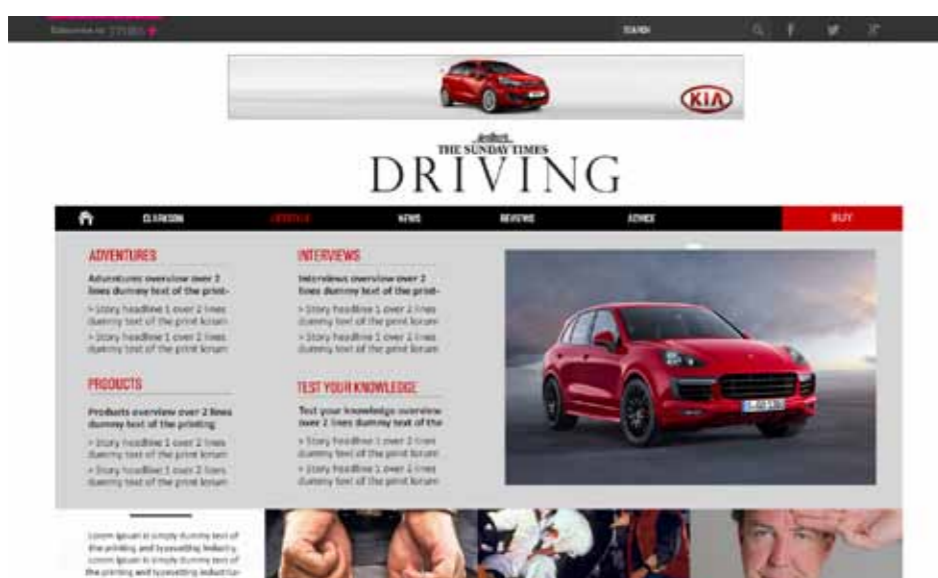
Red being the dominant colour could work well in such things as rollovers and possibly for the BUY button in the top navigation.

FONTS

With a slightly limited choice of fonts, I went with Solido for headlines.

The designs were shown to the Creative Director who was happy to proceed with them for the prototype build.

ORIGINAL MEGAMENU



UX PROTOTYPING (WITH UXPIN)



UX TESTING



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

7. UX - Prototype, testing, tasks and feedback

With initial visual designs signed off, a UX team consisting of Tom (internal Digital Developer), Chakeeb (UX consultant) and myself decided, within our tight timeframe, which key elements / theories would need testing.

The test would be conducted by two observers during the design and prototyping phase. There would be 5 participants using a series of tasks, including searching, sharing, navigating and browsing content.

Usability testing would let us know if the tiled lifestyle navigation as well as the megamenu navigation concepts were fit for purpose. It also allowed us to fix any areas which received negative feedback, open discussions about what was really needed in the final build and what could be removed, saving a large amount of money in later development.

In addition, we wanted to find out how the candidates responded to the new layout and any suggestions they had with regards to the layout or functionality.

Our UX team built the prototype in UXPin using my visuals to offer a polished interactive model ready for testing. It included lives links, red rollovers and a working megamenu.



POSITIVE CANDIDATE FEEDBACK

Modern look and feel
 looked premium
 like that it is visual
 like the format
 HP: clean and clear
 very pretty, very visual and nice to look at
 - what she expects from a lifestyle site
 not a typical car review site - stands out from competitors once you scroll below the nav, not clear on where to go
 assumed the separate blocks were for separate articles
 grid: articles stood out between the contrasting images
 grid: clear what the title was, what the (sub)category was, etc..
 article: liked the snapshot. "good insight" like the embedded ads

nice and clear, glad there's nothing flashing at me!
 found video easily
 like the article page
 like big images
 nice length of homepage as it stands, not too long, hates scrolling forever
 found Interview in Lifestyle easily
 found the article no problem
 video icon clear
 layout of article feels very ST, very clear and clean
 the mega menu, understands the labels fine
 the diff homepage layout, different ways of surfacing content

NEGATIVE CANDIDATE FEEDBACK

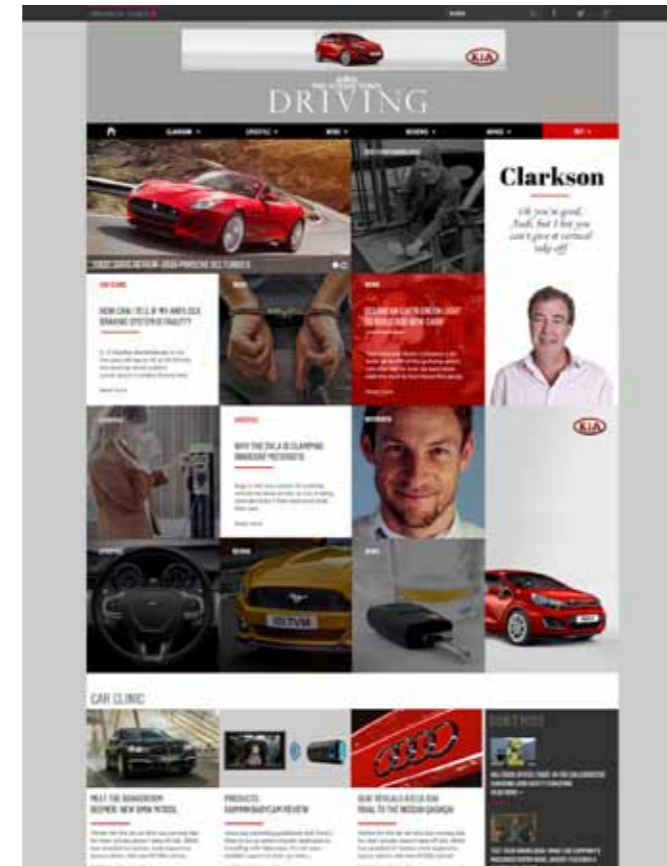
Grid vs subcategories below: looks like two different designs
 videos are difficult to locate, play button should be on image
 subcategory sections below main grid on HP: not sure if you need the bottom part of the homepage
 HP block: do people know that there is a call to action?
 Maybe an article icon is needed to highlight that there is interaction available?
 HP: Clarkson being prominent - "that's what people go there for"
 grid: was convinced that plain image blocks were associated to article blocks
 HP: 'Don't Miss' section should be higher up the page, surely?! perhaps in place of clarkson?

RP: looks clunky
 article rating: got it but, not sure everyone gets it (confusing - looks like sequential chart numbers)
 article tags: thought they were filters - don't really know why you need the Clarkson filter on the Clarkson page
 article: confusion over sharing functionality - entire article vs snapshot info.
 article: "at a glance" copy too plain
 article: what is "Ford | ..."
 site overall: without moving the mouse, seems too static. "Cars are about moving"
 HP: quite a lot is going on
 I think it is quite clear that Clarkson is a key element of the Sunday Times
 bottom tiles feel like a standard car website

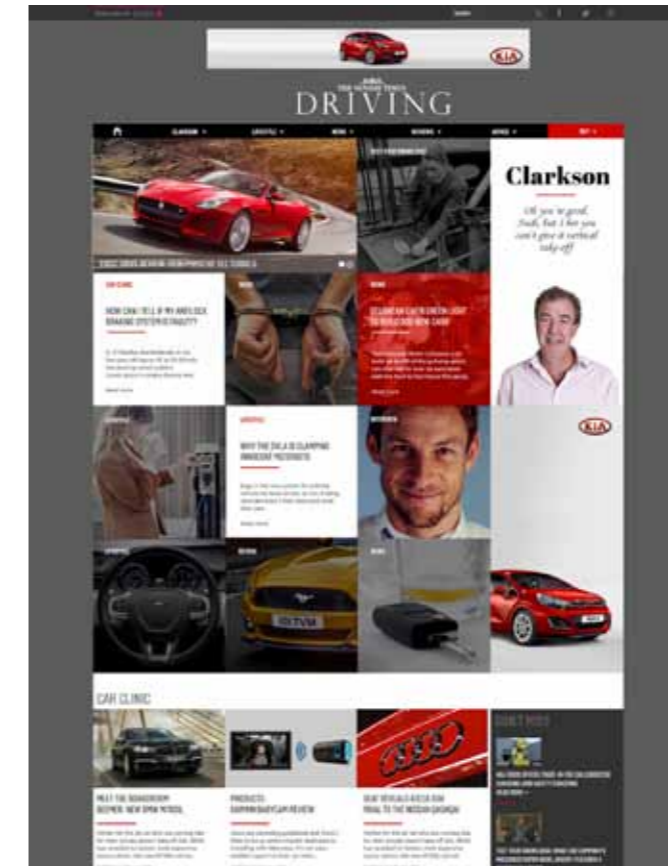
HOME & MEGAMENU (WHITE)



HOME & MEGAMENU (LIGHT GREY)



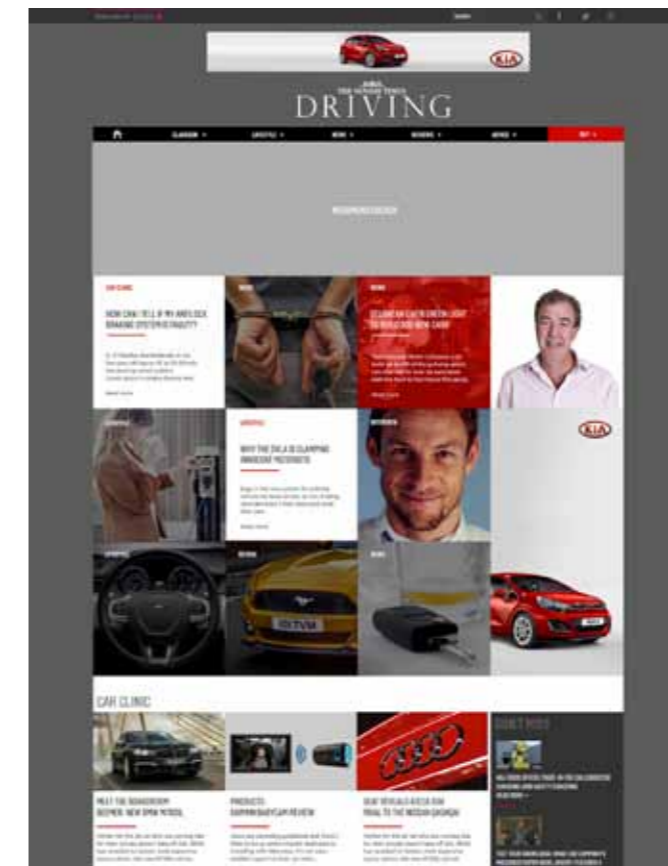
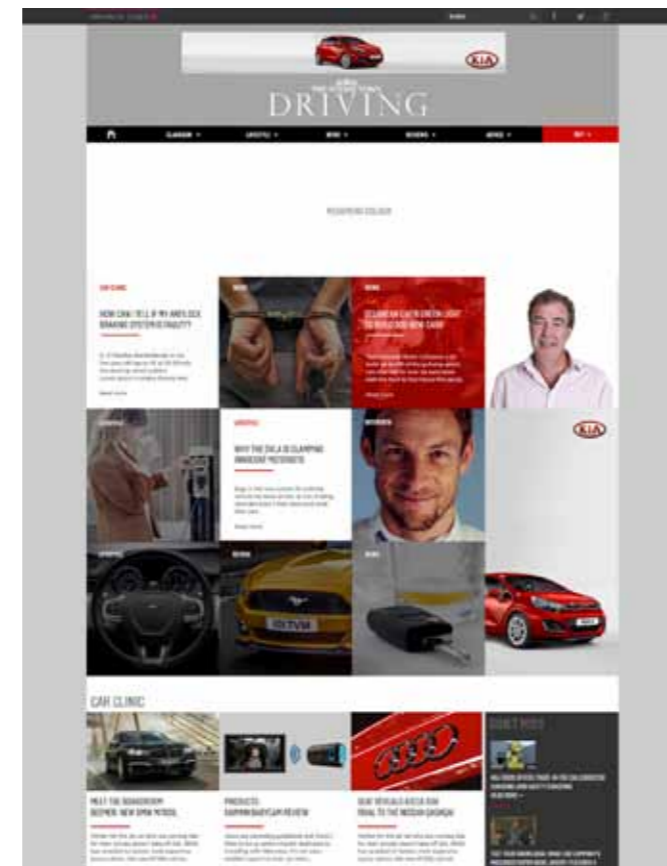
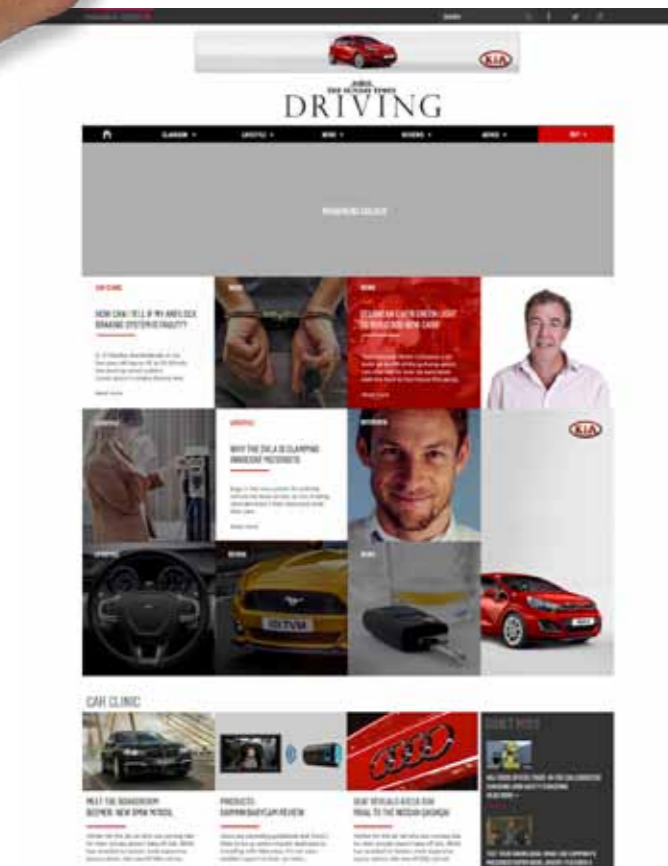
HOME & MEGAMENU (DARK GREY)



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

8. UI - Site colour scheme

The Creative Director asked me to come up with several versions of the websites colour scheme. One would be white, the other a light grey and then a dark grey. The decision was to go with the clean white version.



ORIGINAL



FONT VARIATIONS



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

9. UI - Talent treatment

As Jeremy Clarkson was the main writer / talent for the site and his placement would be much nearer the top of the website, then I felt he needed some bespoke visual treatment to stand out.

The best way to do this would be to illustrate his profile picture, so after some research to find a suitable style which would compliment the new website homepage, I had found just the right person.

I commissioned Jim Spencer to draw then paint Jeremy Clarkson as he offered stunning watercolour illustrations with intense detail. When it arrived, the final artwork was better than I had imagined (and at an excellent price too) and it worked really well with the red, black and grey colour scheme.

I can't recommend Jim highly enough and you yourself can commission him at www.synergart.co.uk/artists/jim-spencer

I then had a play with several Google fonts for the Clarkson header which would really add some punch to the new look.

A. ORIGINAL CONCEPTS



B. LOGO ENVIRONMENT TESTING



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

10. UI - New logo design

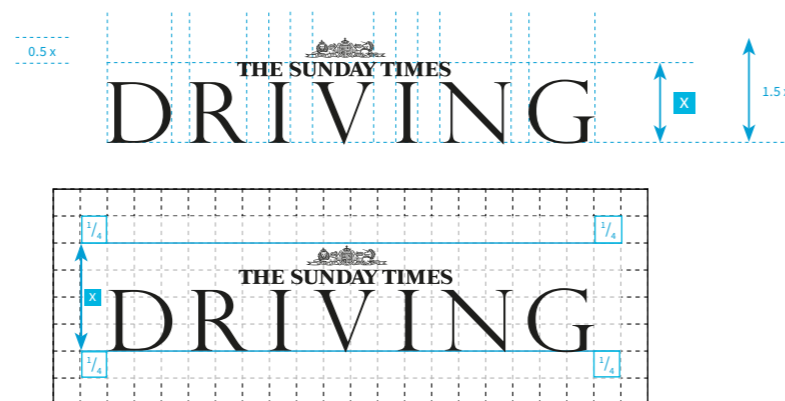


As previously discussed, the current Driving logo was a little confusing and i was asked to design another one which was fitting with the new site and premium enough for The Sunday Times.

C. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT



D. PIXEL PERFECT



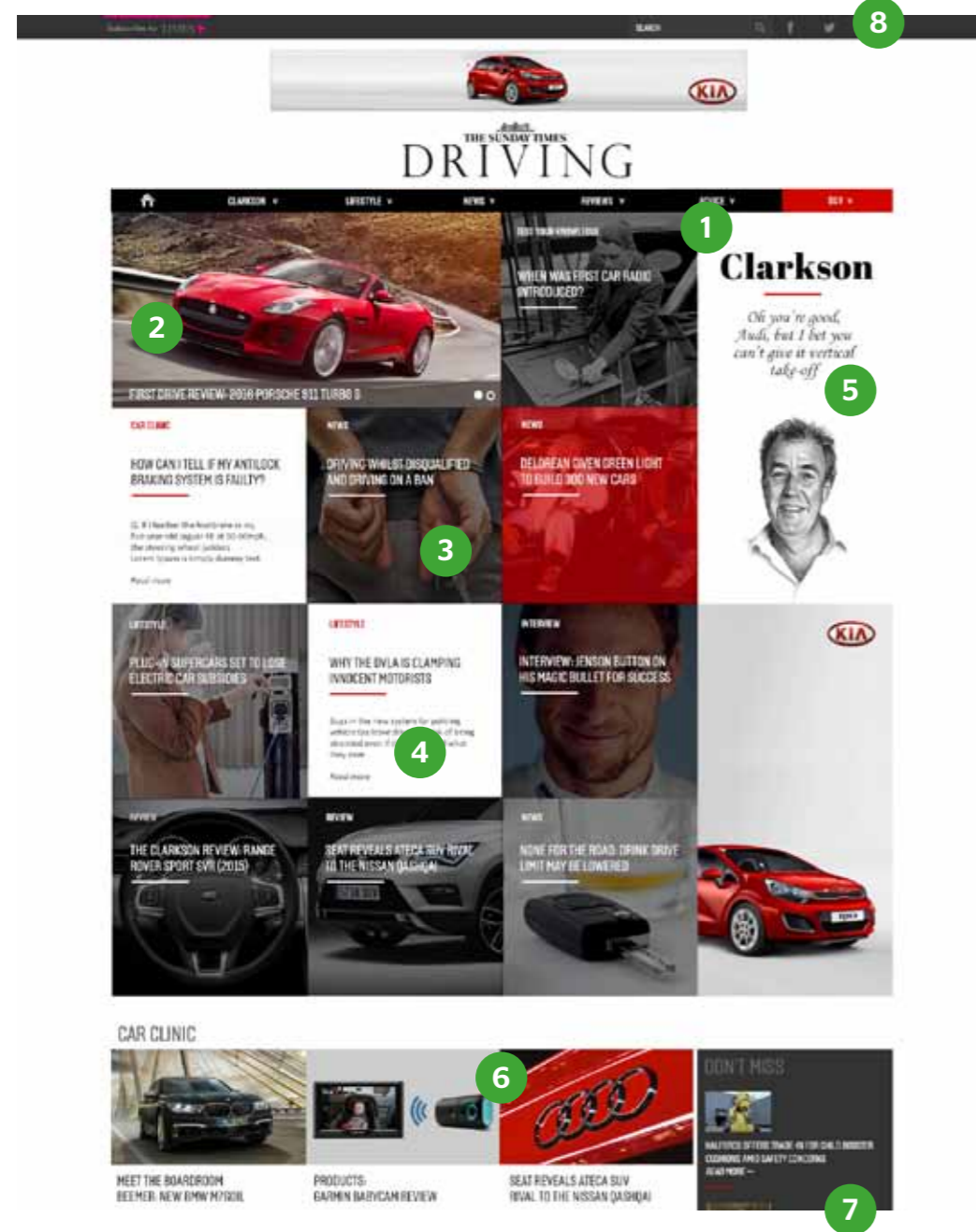
LOGO DEVELOPMENT

A. In illustrator, I came up with as many different concepts for the logo as I could.
 B. I took about 15 of those logo concepts and placed them in the website logo area to see which ones worked and which ones didn't.
 C. After showing my Creative Director, we decided that the best option was one designed using a font called Perpetua. So next step was to develop that concept further. After pushing the design as far as possible then could, we decided on a version with the new Sunday Times (no crest) sitting above it.
 D. Finally, I worked on finessing the logo - making sure each spacing was exact and each detail was pixel perfect. Finally, I designed a style guide to show how to use it properly and what restrictions it has in various contexts. It felt really strong and was positively received by the Driving team as well as The Sunday Times.
 E. The final design in black and white versions.

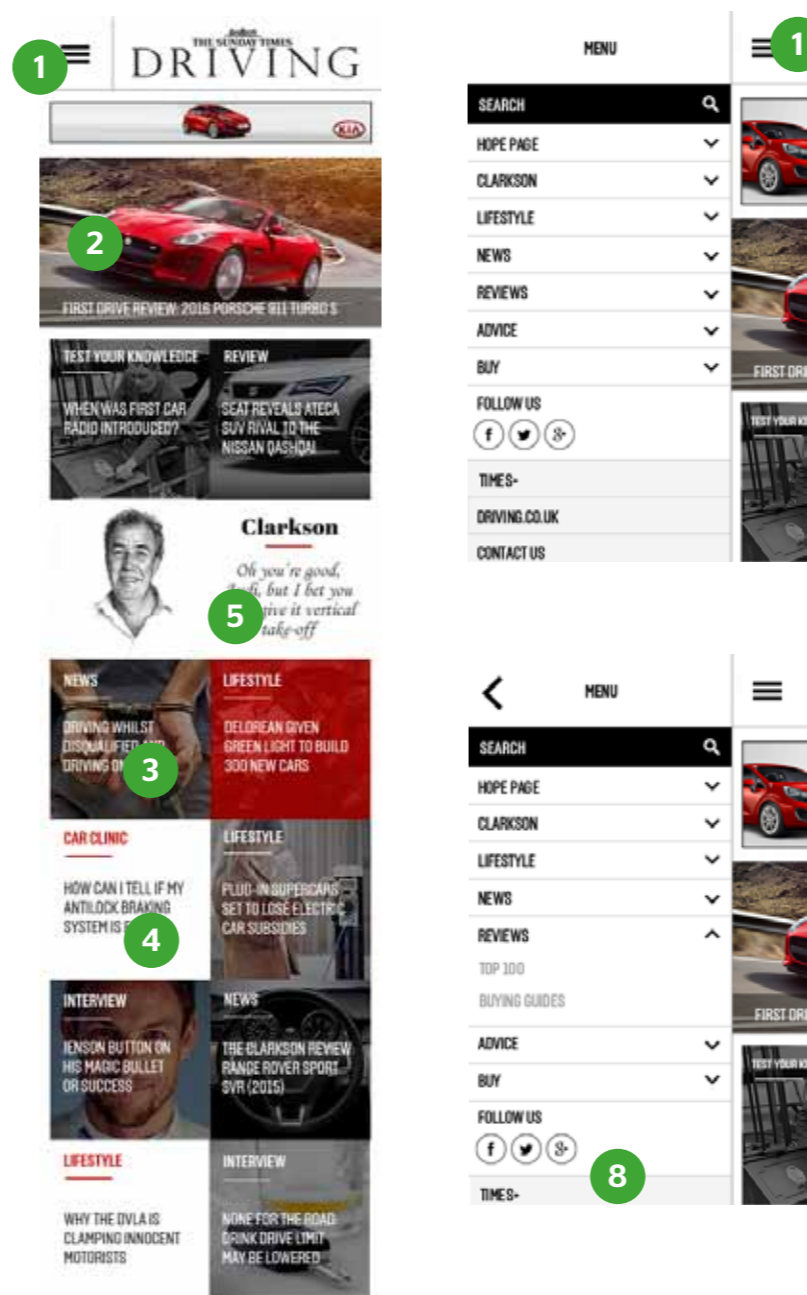
E. FINAL DESIGN



DESKTOP HOME



MOBILE HOME & MENU



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

11. Homepage

The homepage offers a range of content through several types of navigation. The key features are explained on the left.

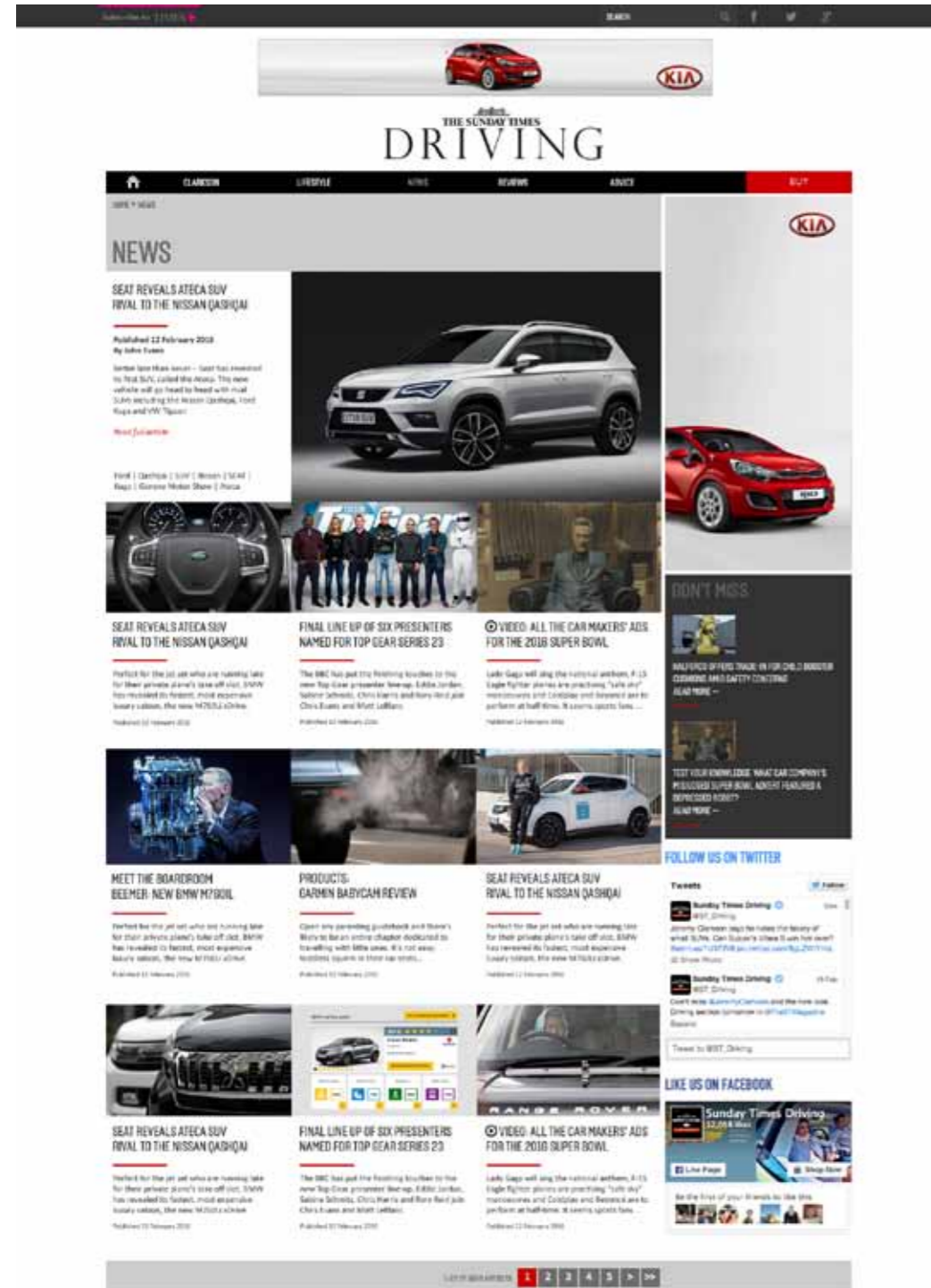
HOMEPAGE EXPLAINED

1. The main navigation has a megamenu included to offer explanations of what the subsections are. On mobile, there is a burger menu which when opened, shows sub-sections using an accordian drop down.
 2. The carousel will showcase the feature articles including breaking news and sponsored content.
 3. The tiled lifestyle area offers visual navigation to the content from all the site sections including Clarkson, Lifestyle, News, Reviews, Advice in that order of prominence. The grid is fixed with mostly image links

and there are two pure text articles to add variety to the design and break up what would be a solid facewall.
 4. These pure text links are positioned in responsive states not to sit directly next to each other so there is no white tiles next to other white tiles. This is the same on mobile with red highlighted on-clicks rather than rollovers on desktop.
 5. Clarkson takes a double space to highlight his importance as main writer. There is also an MPU (normal or single). If it is a single MPU, then there will be

a replacement article placed under it into the grid (Desktop only).
 6. The below content area with more standard images and headlines, offers users the change to read content for specific sub-sections like Car Clinic.
 7. The right hand column also features a 'don't miss' section as well as Twitter and Facebook feeds.
 8. There are social buttons and a link to Times+, an exclusive rewards programme for subscribers to The times website.

DESKTOP NEWS HUB



MOBILE NEWS HUB

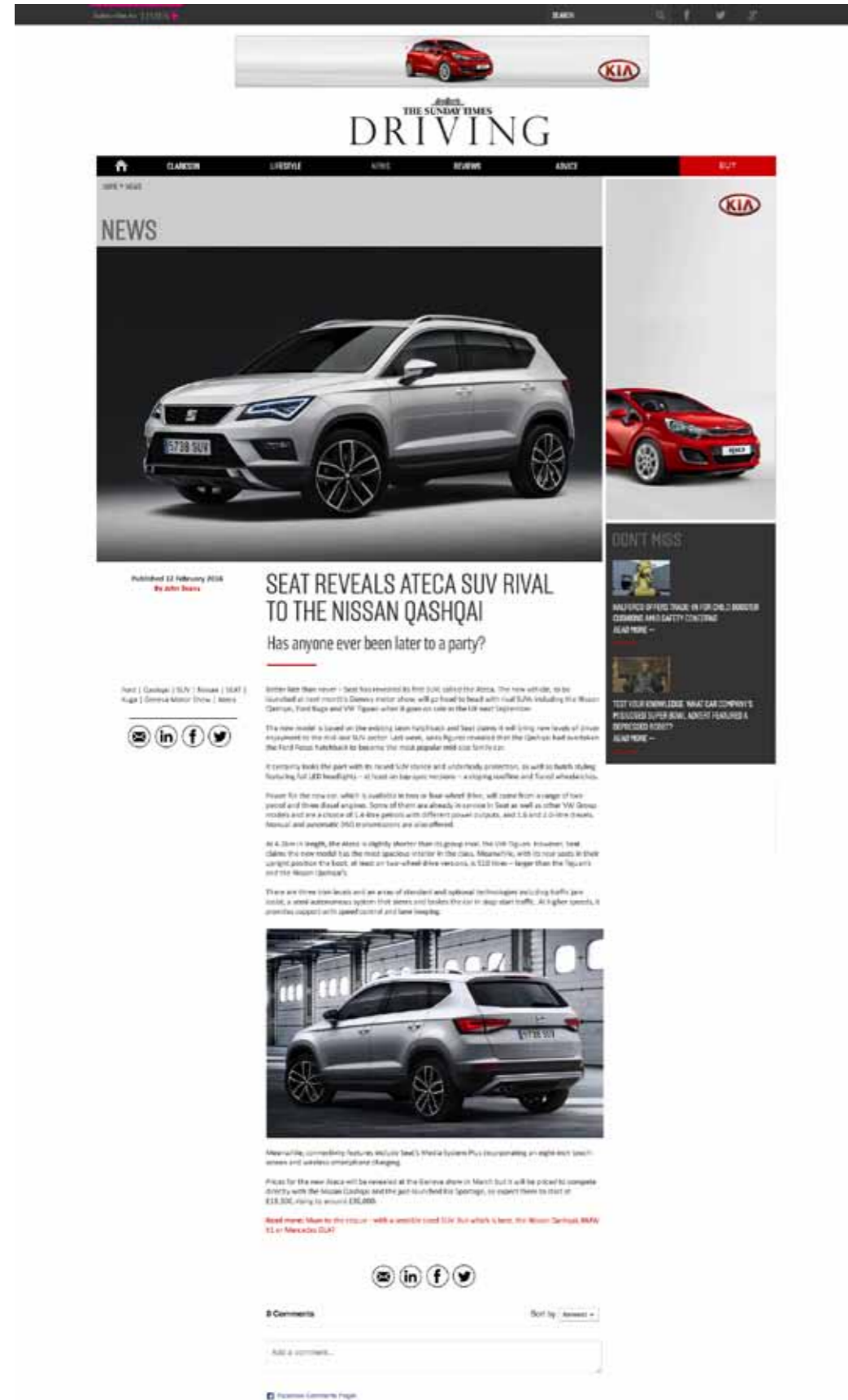


SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

12. Hub pages: News

Hub areas are where all categorised content is grouped and can be found in one place - on this occasion, the category content is News. It now offers a clean and uniformed look unlike the previous chaotic hub areas. The images are bigger and the articles are now more inviting. The mobile version follows the same design.

DESKTOP NEWS ARTICLE



MOBILE NEWS ARTICLE



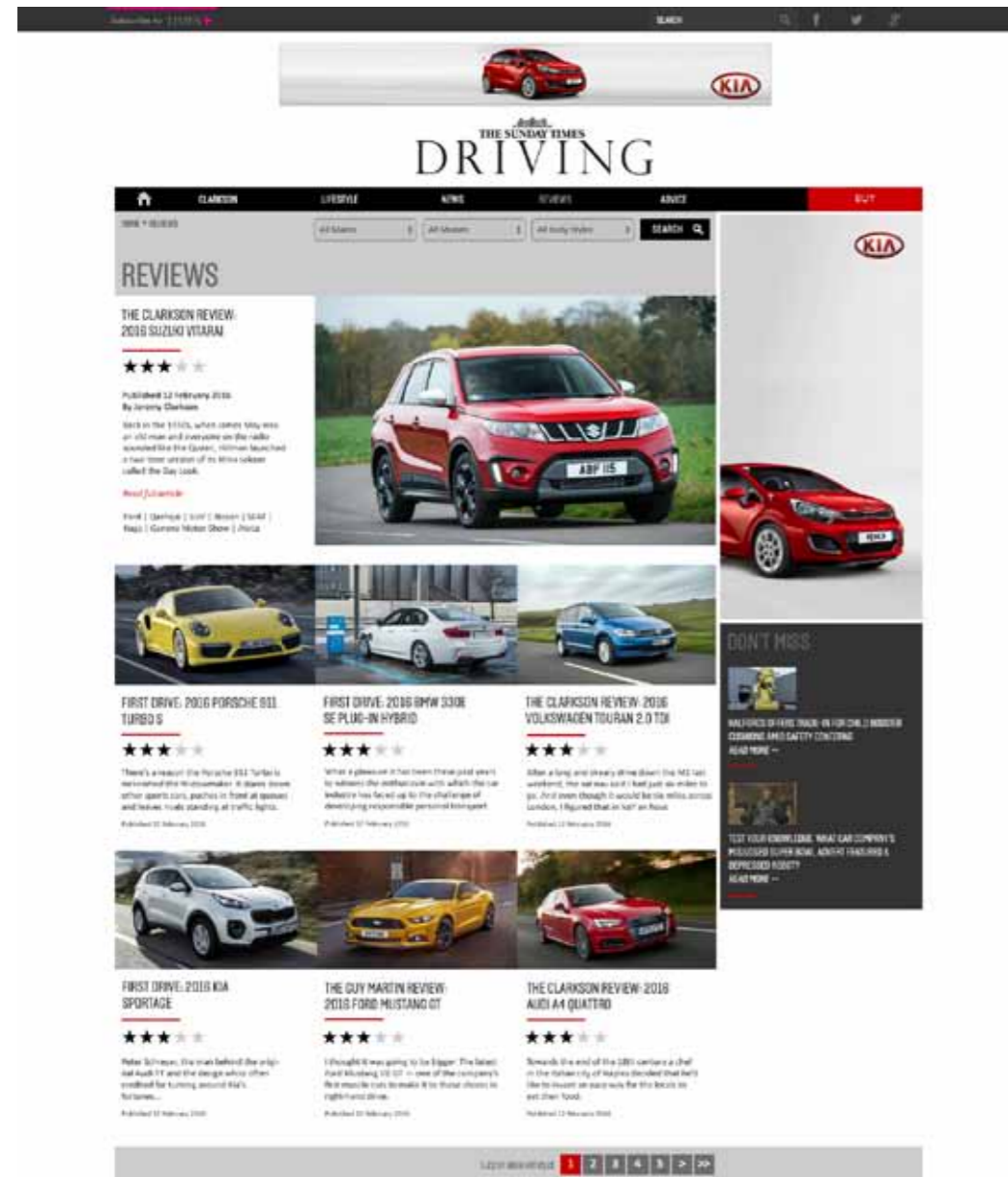
SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

13. Article pages: News

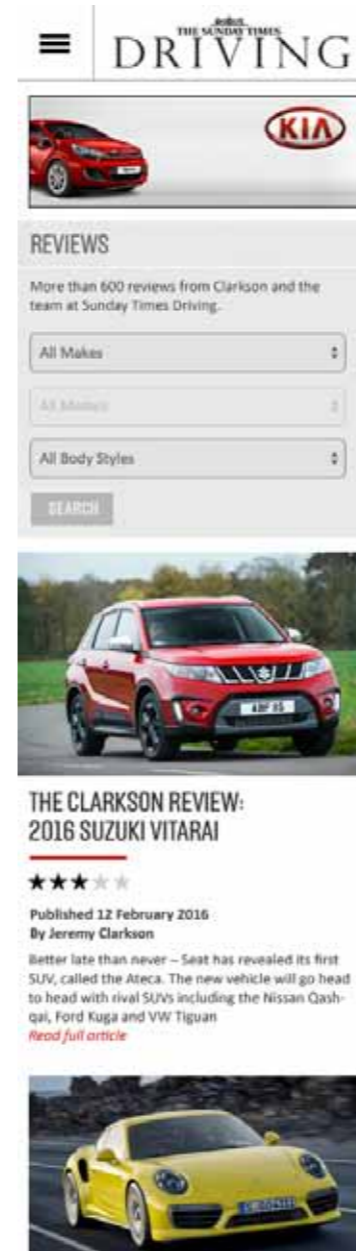
One click from the hub page takes to you an article page which offers a variation of design options. The top of the page area can contain an image, a carousel of images or a video.

The body copy can be broken up with carousels, videos and quotes. In this example, there is a large image which really sets up the article and a big improvement on the old design. The mobile version follows the same design.

DESKTOP REVIEWS HUB



MOBILE REVIEWS HUB



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

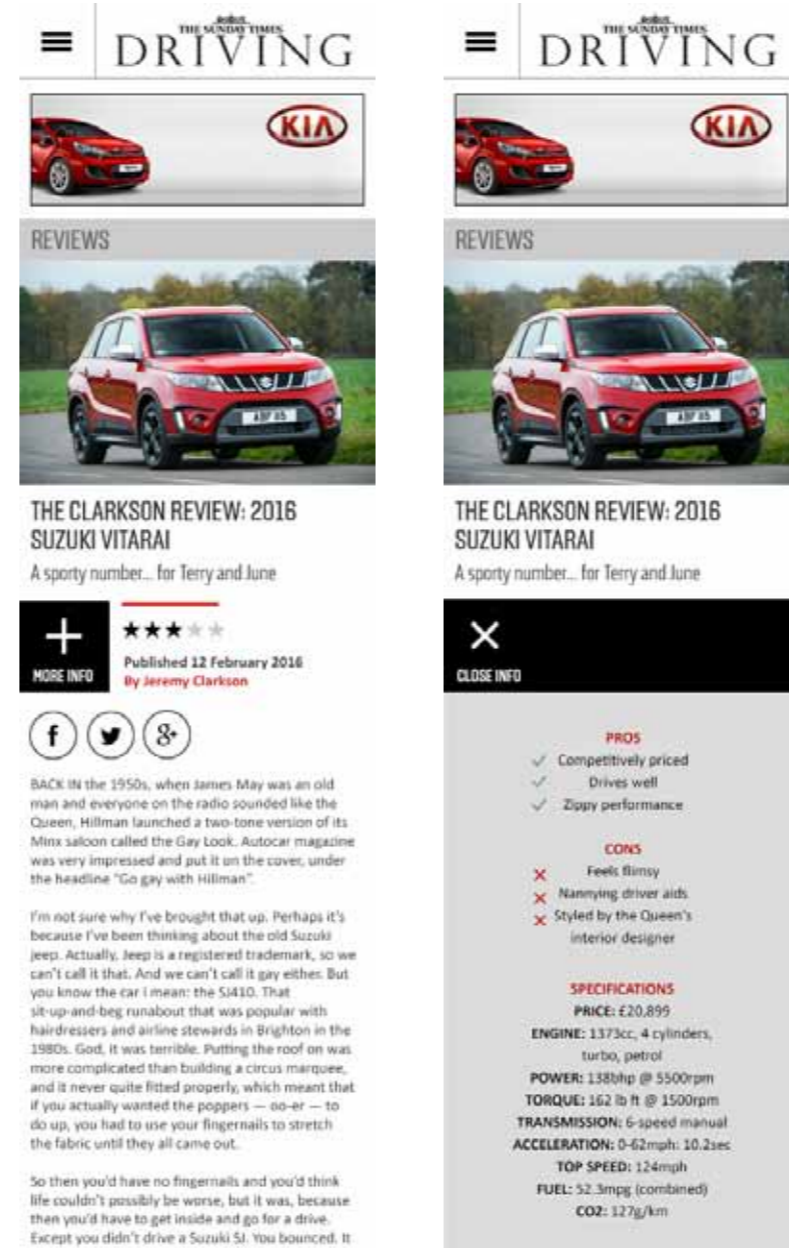
14. Hub pages: Reviews

The review hub follows the same format as News on the previous page but for one clever search function in the heading area. You can search a review for any make or model by using the drop down menu. This function is replaced with an accordion menu for mobile.

DESKTOP REVIEWS ARTICLE



MOBILE REVIEWS ARTICLE



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

15. Article pages: Reviews

The review article format is similar to a news apart from an extra specification panel which sits in the left hand column. This panel is cleverly hidden on mobile but slides out at a press of a button. It is a lovely little interactive touch.

OPTION 1



OPTION 2



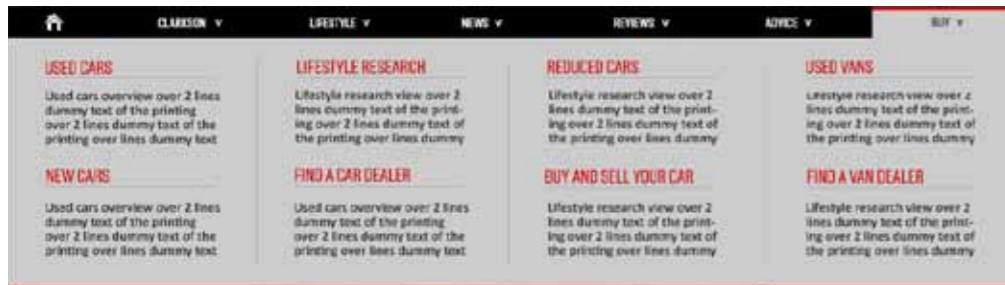
OPTION 3



OPTION 4



OPTION 5



OPTION 6



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

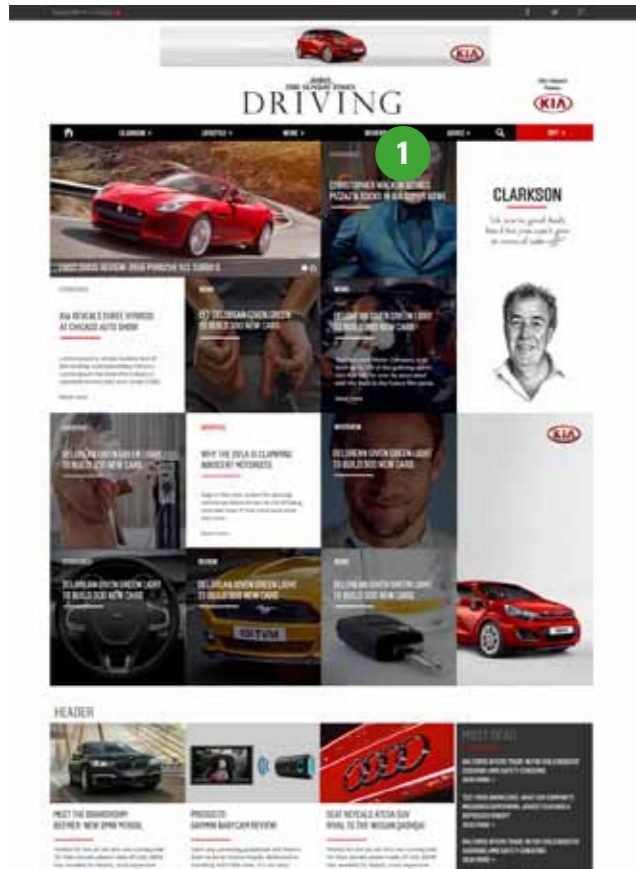
16. Megamenu

The beauty about the megamenu is its simplicity. With a brief summary of each sub-section it makes the website feel a better user experience and more personal. It is also very versatile in its design.

MEGAMENU VARIATIONS

- Option 1. Lifestyle section (4 columns - content, content, image, content)
- Option 2. Clarkson section (4 columns - content, content, double image)
- Option 3. Clarkson section (4 columns - content, content, image, quote)
- Option 4. News section (4 columns - content, double image, content)
- Option 5. Buy section (4 columns - content, content, content, content)
- Option 6. Lifestyle section (3 columns - content, image, content)

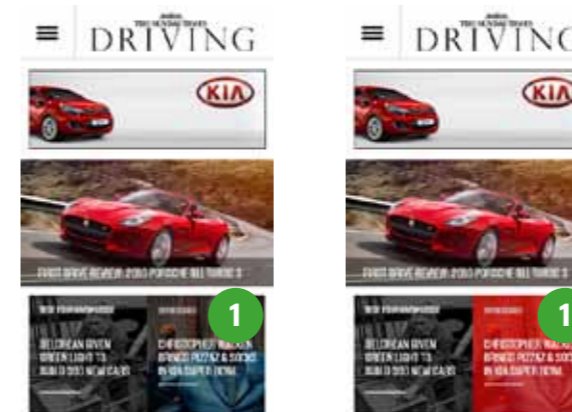
DESKTOP HOME (& ROLLOVER BELOW)



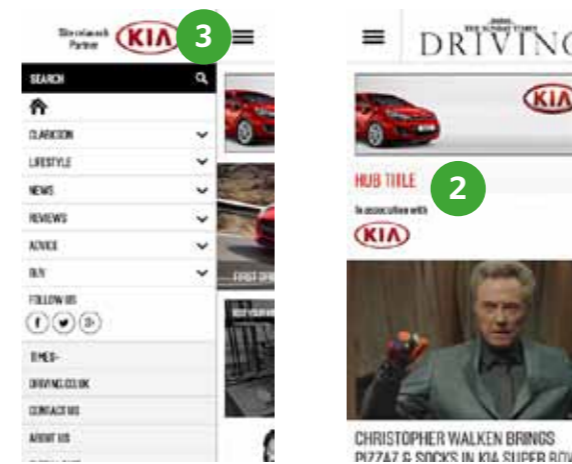
HUB AREA (WITH ARTICLE PAGE BELOW)



MOBILE HOME (& ROLLOVER BELOW)



HOME & MEGAMENU (DARK GREY)



ARTICLE PAGE WITH SPONSOR LOGO



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. The desktop and mobile home page would have a grey SPONSORED category header on its tile or carousel image.
2. Hub areas would have SPONSORED BY in the breadcrumb (desktop only) and the grey banner would take a red headline.
3. The grey banner would take a sponsor logo.

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17. Sponsored content

With Kia being the Driving websites launch partner, then part of that deal would mean that there would be some Kia sponsored content on the site in the form of articles and videos.

To differentiate it from normal or Editorial content then it would need to have a slightly different visual treatment. This treatment would go across all pages from homepage to article pages.

HOME & MEGAMENU (WHITE)



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING
WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

18. Digital advertising

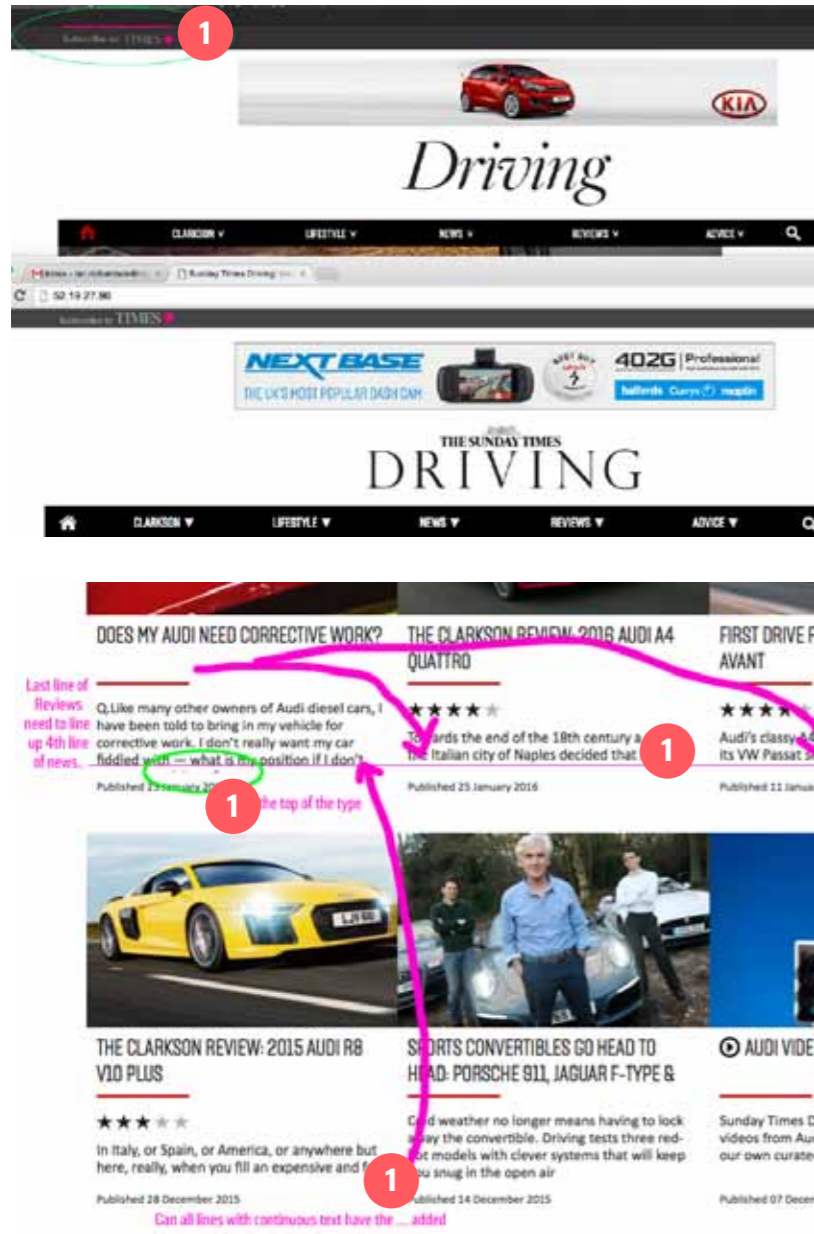
The site would need to host some digital ads to drive traffic to the sponsored Kia content on the site as well to Kia's website. These ads would somethings also sit on The Times website homepage.

Usually the clients would send their own already created ads, but Kia asked me to design several sets for them which was fine byt me as that also meant I could control the tone of them to match that of the new sites.

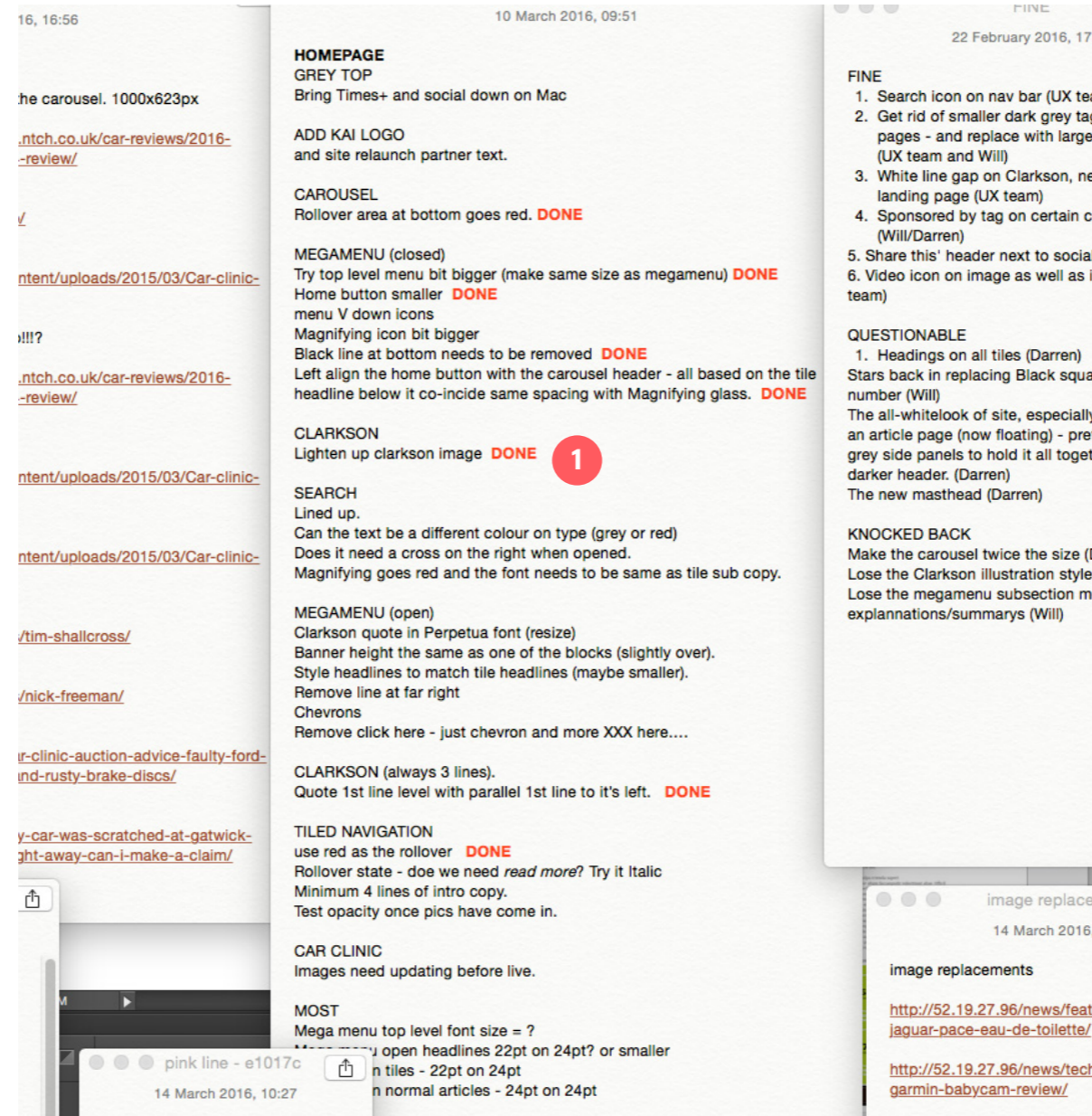
The top set was for a quite generic Kia campaign and the below set highlighted their Pro_Cee GT model.



HOME DESKTOP



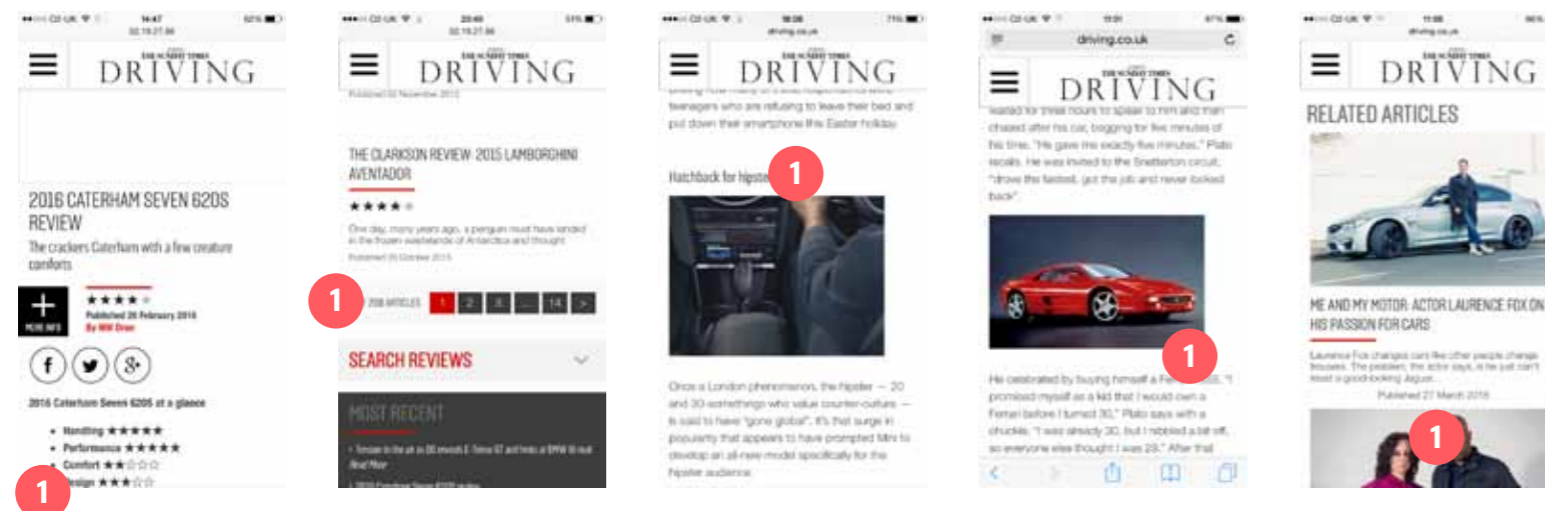
HOME MOBILE



SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

19. Testing, testing, testing. Bugs and tweaking

After a soft launch, we tested the website on many desktop, tablet and mobile devices. There were naturally a lot of little fixes needed and we had a week to iron them all out. This is one of the tasks I really enjoyed - sitting with our development team making sure things were pixel perfect and aligned perfectly.



DESKTOP PAIN POINTS

1. There was a about 100 bugs and tweaks found. Going through the site time after time was the only way we could iron out all the little issues.

SUNDAY TIMES DRIVING WEBSITE REDESIGN & REBRAND

20. Final conclusion

The main question was did the new website answer the brief and I felt it most definitely did. Feedback from sponsors, shareholders, editors, directors and from the users themselves (from social media) was hugely positive.

Site visits increased dramatically and the sponsored content received decent hits and dwell time.

Fundamentally, the main ask was that the site content with now being more lifestyle driven and less about selling cars and that was reflected in the design, the navigation and site hierarchy.

Finally, I designed a styleguide to help the website's editors ensure it always looked as good as it possible could with headline and copy word lengths and a guide to cropping and finding the right images to keep the homepage fresh.

It was a hugely challenging project to work on mainly to the short timeframe, but with such a good team in place, we produce a superb product which really answered the brief.



Drawings by myself and Rob. Starting top left, clockwise. Andy, Me, Rob and Tom.



SITE STRUCTURE

The site map was much clearer with a more lifestyle focused content and navigation hierarchy in place. The BUY section was now clearly highlighted and easy to access on the main nav but didn't feel too intrusive. The balance of the site felt more uniformed with all images headlines and subheadings now consistently lining up. There was the right balance of content across the website and the user experience was much more pleasant.

VISUAL DESIGN

I was extremely happy with so many elements of the final design. The combination of tiled and standard content areas offered users plenty of options when it came to finding (or being suggested) new content. The red, white, black and grey colour scheme was really striking and a huge improvement on the old orange. Unlike the old site, there was now a visual focus point with the carousel.

NAVIGATION

We had added a new dimension to the website with the clever megamenu which now offered users simple explanations to the many sub-categories as well as promoting regularly updated new content. The tiled 'lifestyle content' navigation really brought the homepage to life. Cleverly cropped images really took it away from the dated site and offered a fresh interface which would excite the user. The simplicity filtered down to the Mobile navigation which was a huge improvement and much nice user experience.

CLARKSON

Clarkson, being the main talent for the Driving website needed to be more prominent on the homepage and it now did just that placed below the menu and the mugshot in a new cool illustrated style which showed the site's new confidence and boldness.

MOBILE / TABLET INTERACTIVITY

The mobile / tablet versions of the site were deliciously clean and slick. As well as it's easy-to-use slideout navigation, it also offered lots of clever interactivity including image carousels on homepage, article and review pages, accordion car review search option and extra slide-out car review content). The responsive elements worked really well across all devices after plenty of UX planning and well thoughtout development.

NEW BRAND LOGO

The new Driving logo felt premium, clean and definitely part of the Sunday Times umbrella. It was simple, but strong and sat proudly at the top of the website.

ADVERTISING

The required digital advertising slots were placed above the fold so naturally pleased the sponsors, whilst causing minimum disruption to the overall tone of the website.