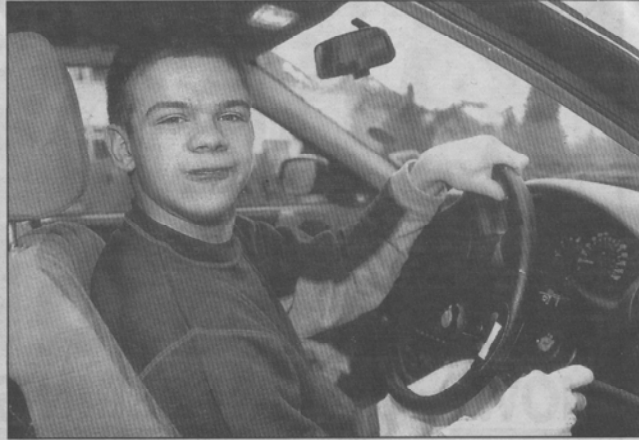
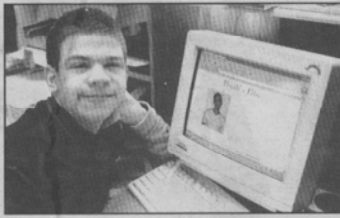


# HE'S GOT HIS OWN CAR, HIS OWN INTERNET SITE, A NEW LIFE AT SCHOOL – ROBERT'S ON TOP OF THE WORLD



**AIN'T NO STOPPIN' US NOW ...** Robert loves cruising into town with his mates on board

## LIFE WAS GREAT NOW IT'S HEAVEN

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By JOSIE SAUNDERS

**ROBERT SOFTLEY** has achieved more in his 17 years than most people have in a lifetime.

His arms and legs jerk uncontrollably, he can't stand upright or walk on his own and his speaking is always slurred.

But never once has Robert let his cerebral palsy – which was caused by a lack of oxygen at birth – get in the way of his life.

It affected his balance and means that he can only move around in a wheelchair or by crawling around on his hands and knees. But Robert is blindingly optimistic about everything he does.

In recognition of his efforts he has just been given a Young Achiever Award by East Dunbartonshire Council.

He has never asked for sympathy, he hates relying on others and he doesn't want to be treated any differently.

But he is starkly honest about what he can and can't do physically.

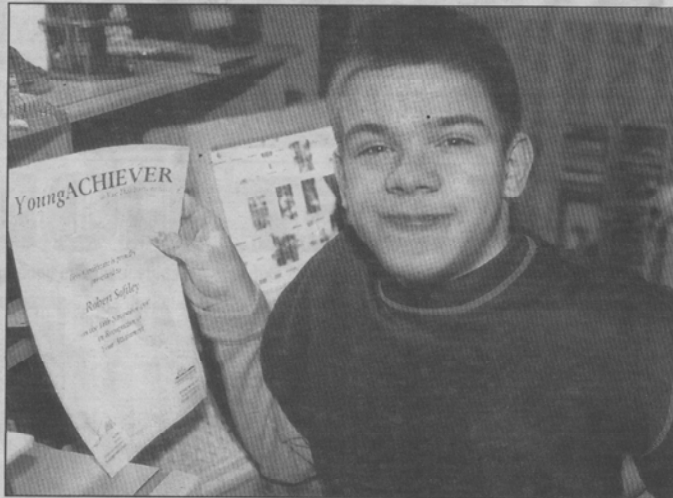
He has battled endlessly to control his erratic movements. Now he can get himself dressed, move swiftly about the house without help and can even use the mouse to operate his computer.

And although his mum, Bet (54), never thought it possible, Robert passed his driving test last July.

### HAPPY

Now he speeds around Glasgow and Kirkintilloch in his hand-operated mobility car.

"My life was great before but now it's heaven," beams Robert, at his home in Adamslie



**HONOURED ...** the Young Achiever award went to a worthy candidate in feisty Robert

Drive, Kirkintilloch.

"I'm the only one of my friends with a car, so we drive into Glasgow and go to clubs and pubs.

"On New Year's Eve we went to the Hogmanay street party in George Square and had a great time.

"Some of my friends had too much to drink and were joking that they could do with a wheelchair to get them home.

But they're brilliant ...they don't treat me as

anyone special.

"To them, I'm just Robert and it's not important how I look ... they forget that I'm in a wheelchair.

"Everyone near my home knows me. People are always saying hello to me in the street and I often haven't got a clue who they are, but I'm a happy person and love talking to people."

Until a year and a half ago he was plodding along at Ashcraig special

needs school in Stepps. He was top of the class but he still felt as though he wasn't learning enough.

**HE MADE UP HIS MIND** to go to a mainstream school and battled against all the odds to get into Lenzie Academy.

Robert, in his typical direct manner, told the headteacher that ramps were needed to get up

stairs and a lift had to be installed.

Major changes were needed to make classrooms and corridors accessible for his wheelchair. Although it took some time, the changes were made and the school doors have been permanently opened to pupils with disabilities.

Robert is under no illusions about the difficulties faced by people like himself.

"There's a path laid out



**ACCESS ALL AREAS ...** Lenzie Academy has been adapted to accommodate Robert

Pictures: JIM MACKEY

for disabled people and it's very difficult to do anything different," says Robert.

"But if it's only money that's stopping people like me from having the same chances as everyone else, then it's not a very good reason.

"Just because I'm disabled doesn't mean I don't have any rights and can't decide for myself what I want to do with my life.

"I can't help but fight to

do the things I want to do and have a right to do." Robert has been at Lenzie Academy for nearly two years and is preparing for his Highers.

He plans to study computing science at university, but unlike anyone else thinking about where to go, he has to choose the place very carefully.

"I visited one university and when I told the woman what subject I wanted to do, she said

there was no way I would be able to get inside the building," he says.

"I've already done work experience setting up web sites for a company in America."

**ROBERT set up Rob's Bio web site to explain a bit about his life and what it was like to live with cerebral palsy.**

He had so much response that he decided

to research the condition and extended the site even further ... now there are 50 pages.

When the English charity Scope saw what he had written, he was invited to speak at a conference in London about cerebral palsy.

"Everything has really taken off," laughs Robert, who has a sister, Julie (25) and a brother Scott (29). "And although I don't need special help, some people do.

"I've travelled to Blackpool and London to speak about the rights of disabled children.

"I've been like this all my life, but I'm happy. I have friends, a great family and I've got lots of plans for the future ... what more could I need?"

Roderick McLelland, head teacher at Lenzie Academy, said: "His determination, good humour and positive attitude have been an inspiration to us all."