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Flying Bonnets

by Nick Barrett

I'll always look back on it as the summer of loves; not the 1967 world famous one with the hippies, flower power and all that Californian music, just my very own summer of loves. There were two.

It was 1983, I was 17, a whole summer stretching ahead and the chance of getting my first car on the road, but it had to be built first. Two very old MG Midgets - imitations of sports cars, but representing freedom and a better chance of pulling girls — had come my way. One courtesy of a generous uncle and the other from my sister's mechanic boyfriend Vince who 'acquired' it from a mate who worked in a scrapyards.

Neither of the old cars could be made to start - often the way with MG's anyway - and both were basically rusting to bits, but Vince masterminded the project and assured me we could make one serviceable car out of the two, with a lot of hard work. I fell in love with the car I was going to have, devoting almost every waking hour for two months to helping put it together, leaving little time for devoting to Donna, my other love that year.

We had been getting on well for a few months but Donna wasn't ready to take that final step and have sex with me. She would only have sex with someone she was in love with she said, and that clearly wasn't me - yet, I hoped. We had been pretty close a few times, or so I thought, but she was always able to put the brakes on at the last minute.

I had tried everything to impress Donna, the latest stroke being to agree to have my hair dyed a brilliant orange one cider drinking night round at her pal Janice's house. Janice was a trainee hairdresser always on the look out for experimental victims and Donna got into the spirit of the thing by having hers dyed a vivid blue.

At last the car was almost ready. The last thing needed was some leather straps to hold the bonnet down and they were coming tomorrow. Tonight I was going out with Donna though and I had told her we would be going for a drive in the country. It was a gorgeous summer evening, just the sort of romantic light that could swing it for a lusty lad like myself, I hoped.

For want of two leather straps though...I made a decision, rigging up the old tattered straps to hold the bonnet in place, that would surely be OK for a few hours sensible driving. Donna was mightily impressed at the sight of the newly resprayed little red sports car. "Respect big boy," she said, a term she had never used before. "I like a boy that can see a thing through, well done."

I tried to work out what this might mean in terms of my chances of a meaningful sexual encounter but frankly my brain was in turmoil as we drove down the street into the stiffening wind that I thought might mean the hood would have to go up; fingers crossed it would work.

I was silently mulling things over as we sat at traffic lights in a not very salubrious part of the City when a small group of local louts drinking their pints at the door of a pub on the corner spotted us. I heard one shout: "Ho, ginger, is that an alcopop sitting beside you? Is she WKD? Your hair looks wicked," which set them off in lager induced paroxysms. We ignored them. The abuse quickly degenerated into shouts of 'wanker', and 'stuck up pair of cunts'.

The lights changed. This will show them I thought, flooring the accelerator and roaring away from the lights, when disaster struck - the bonnet came flying off the car, helped by a strong gust but probably mostly due to my sudden burst of speed. I slammed on the brakes and looked around just in time to see it fly straight into the guys outside the pub. It probably hit them all. Drinks went flying, a couple of them fell over. I looked at Donna who was clearly terrified and floored the accelerator again, leaving a fair amount of tyre rubber behind on the tarmac.

I drove for about 15 minutes until I was sure there was no pursuit. If anyone had got the number plate it wouldn't help trace me as the car was not registered. So it wasn't taxed or insured either, hang me now.

After the shock wore off we both started laughing hysterically telling each the story over and over again. I could tell Donna had enjoyed the frisson of excitement I had provided her with. "I thought you handled the situation very well, she said, "I have to respect that," she added, slinkily moving in for a squeeze and a very heavy kiss. "You know Gerry, I do think I love you."

Always slow on the uptake about these things it took me a minute or so for the implications to sink in. Next problem - how do you get that bloody hood up on this car?