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## Mortality

by Garf Collins

A trip to France long ago taught me the lesson.

John and I were to visit Danny - our old school friend - who lived south of Paris. On the way we were looking forward to trying out my new car - a Triumph TR3A. We set off for Dover in high spirits with the hood down and the wind blowing through our hair.

“Christ! What a strange road,” John said as we took the route south from Calais. In those days it was a single carriageway with an exaggerated camber. “Also, right hand drive makes it hard to overtake from this angle,” he observed.

So we were held back all the way to Paris. In those days to get south you had to drive through the centre. At one crossing John observed, “We’re gridlocked. It’s a solid jam on all sides.” We emerged from that melee an hour later hugely frustrated.

When we got to the start of the Autoroute du Soleil, I shouted, “Right! Now I’ll show you what she can do,” as I thrust my right foot down hard. They don’t have speed limits here.” With the assumed immortality of young men we were soon speeding down the fast lane at over 100 mph. The noise of the engine and the battering of the wind behind our heads obliterated all sense of anything else. In a very short time we were with Danny toasting our reunion and our exhilarating journey.

It was a memorable visit which included a night time tour of Paris - its monuments newly cleaned up and floodlit - and a walk in the Foret de Fontainebleau.

Our long weekend too quickly over, on Tuesday morning we started on the way back to Paris. This time there was more autoroute traffic which limited our speed.

“Look at that guy,” shouted John. I glanced sideways to see a large Peugeot being driven by a man who appeared in a trance. He was staring fixedly forward - completely oblivious of his surroundings. In the back was a woman shrieking and beating the seat in front of her. “Careful he’s coming across.”

The maniac cut into our lane and I could see he was swerving from side to side. “Not just mad but drunk.” I shouted to John. The woman appeared even more frantic.

We tried not to follow the manic driver. We could see he was weaving from lane to lane and narrowly missing collisions at every move. Eventually, we lost sight of his lunatic progress.

After a few more miles the traffic slowed for no apparent reason. But then we saw why. It was morbid curiosity. There, in a field alongside the autoroute, was the renegade Peugeot upside down and burning fiercely.

So what lesson did that trip to France teach me? I realised that the apparent immortality of youth is a mirage. You never know when you might meet the lunatic who is going to kill you and that lunatic might even be yourself.