



## Pandemic caused me a severe case of motoring pandemonium

I'M WORRIED about the psychological effect prolonged pandemic solitude has had on me. Incarceration for so long has imbued in me a profound disinclination to go anywhere.

My friends are singing freedom like canaries released from a cage and driving all over the country on the slightest pretext. Like a jailbird apprehensive of liberty, I sit in the car on my once-daily parole to the local shop for milk and papers and ponder.

There's nothing to prevent my driving into town. Then the prospect of mad traffic and difficult parking kick in and I scuttle towards hassle-free home. This is a tragic state of affairs for a professional shopper like me, to whom the serial delights of a shopping complex are nirvana.

My mileometer registers just over a mile per day – which will be handy if I ever sell the car. 'One over-cautious lady owner. Extremely low mileage'.

My first social engagement post lockdown saw me run the gauntlet of the rush hour. Halfway to my destination, I turned around, came home again and ordered a taxi.

I'm the kind of tension-filled driver who, on a narrow street, grips the wheel with claws of steel and holds her shoulders in to prevent clashing wing-mirrors with an oncoming car.

My manoeuvring skills (never great) are so rusty I need the length of two Lough Swilly buses to park neatly. As for reversing into a space – five attempts and a growing number of interested spectators don't help.

Also, I believe I'm the only sane, risk-averse person on the road – just the kind of driver you don't want to be behind.

My experience with wheeled vehicles is not a glorious one. Rollerskates defeated me entirely. (I have the scars to prove it.) I mastered a scooter, which

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had the reassuring advantage of a spare foot on terra-firma, though a net bag full of 'messages' on the handlebars occasionally upset my equilibrium.

Then, at fifteen, there was the bike. The adolescent spur to cycling proficiency was the prospect of happening (purely by chance) upon boys in the park, which was on the other side of town and also housed the library as a valid excuse.

All went swimmingly until my front tyre lodged fast between two cobblestones and I fell from grace. After that it was running for buses in heels and a brief romance with a boy with a motorbike called Betsy.

Being a late developer in every department,

*There's nothing to prevent my driving into town. Then the prospect of mad traffic and difficult parking kick in and I scuttle towards hassle free home*

I didn't learn to drive until absolutely necessary, because Daughter Dear was starting school.

The Loving Spouse, gentlest of men, valiantly offered some initial tuition. My utter ineptitude, lack of co-ordination of eyes, hands and feet an incapacity to understand cause and effect drove him doolally. On one occasion, he put me out of the car on a country road and drove away, leaving me weeping on the verge.

Doing a savage handbrake turn, he roared back, opened the car window and hurled my handbag into the ditch.

Time to call Bertie, patron saint of hopeless learners. Rumour had it Bertie could get a horse through the driving test. Placid, patient and unjudgmental, he deserved a leather medal.

Our car at the time, was an elderly and glaringly turquoise VW Beetle with a steering wheel the size of a satellite dish. Bertie was a man who spoke his mind. "This car's like driving a pig," he said, but he got me through the driving test first go.

Only subsequently did I discover I'd given my test-examiner's daughter first prize in a public-speaking competition some weeks earlier.

Then of course, I had to get a car of my very own. You'd think I might have been consulted. Hah! My one sanction was, "Anything but blue..." The Loving Spouse set off with Noel Who Knows About Cars and guess what they came back with?

That was five cars ago – and I never got a choice. I have strenuously resisted any knowledge of a vehicle's innards. Gary fills the tank, looks after water, oil and tyres. Noel does electrics, repairs and MOT preparation. I just drive it.

If you see a wee purple Fiesta tootling along at 29 mph – take to the hedges.

## ON THIS DAY

JUNE 15 1921

### Devlin on Reprisals

AT WESTMINSTER last night, Mr Joseph Devlin said they had seen how, in the supposed interest of law and order, a policy of repression unparalleled in the history of violence had been pursued by the Government in Ireland. In Belfast they had been accustomed to Government murders and military murders embellished by all the glory of authority ...

On September 26, in the early hours of Sunday morning, armed and uniformed men, wearing uniform caps, drove out to the house of a man called Edward Trodden in the Falls Road and there, in the presence of his wife and children, dragged him out into the back yard and murdered him. They proceeded to the house of John Gaynor in Springfield Road and did this man to death in the presence of his aged mother. They then proceeded to the house of John McFadden, Springfield Road and they murdered him. Mr Devlin asked the Chief Secretary [Sir Hamar Greenwood] what was to be done to bring these midnight assassins to justice and [Greenwood] said these murders will be submitted to a military tribunal inquiry. However, Mr Devlin said he had no faith in any of the Chief Secretary's inquiries. They were brought into existence... but to cloak crime and not to expose or punish it...

What happened on Sunday [in Belfast] was that McBride, Halfpenny and Kerr were dragged out of their houses and driven to a secluded spot to be riddled with bullets. Kerr was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians [Devlin's organisation] and his brother was a regimental sergeant major in the Army. The third case was that of Malachy Halfpenny (22)... He had served three and a half years with the Army in France.

An hon. member – The dirty dogs.

Mr Devlin – He was twice gassed... Four of his brothers were in the Army and one was killed in France. This was the boy who died in the night in the name of British law ...

Major Prescott – Does the hon. gentleman wish the House to believe that servants of the Crown put an end to such a life? (Cheers.)

Mr Devlin said that after 10.30 p.m. no civilian and no motorcars were allowed in the streets of Belfast. Who did it if it was not done by the forces of the Crown? **DEVLIN was taking a considerable personal risk by indicting the Crown forces for the recent series of 'reprisals' in Belfast. That such a police 'murder gang' could operate with impunity raised concerns for the safety of the Catholic minority in the new state.**

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