

Back seat drivers and petrosexuals

These days you could probably drive from London to Glasgow in about 6 hours, traffic permitting. When I was a child it used to take about 12 or more. At least it used to take *my Mum and Dad* that amount of time. Perhaps due to carelessness or overly imaginative driving they were always getting lost. We made the trip regularly enough but the route was excitingly different each time. And so, if memory serves, was the car. My parents changed cars as often as the Japanese change Prime Ministers.

My parents tended to buy British. I remember a Daimler, a Mini and various MGBs (a British sports car). The one time they went continental with a French 2CV I rewarded their sophistication by crashing it into the garage door.

Like many people, my parents loved their cars so much that they become like members of the family. My father's beloved Daimler was certainly a member of our family, albeit an aged and infirm one that required much love and care and rarely left its room. Its demise, (my Dad sold it to a neighbour), was like a bereavement.

The British are known throughout the world as careful and considerate drivers. We tend to observe the rules of the road and disapprove of overly aggressive driving or too free a use of the horn. However we can be pretty rude *about* cars. The BBC's 'Top Gear' has developed a cult following and is notorious for its **'motor mouth'** presenter Jeremy Clarkson's withering comments on models he disapproves of. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/topgear/>

We can be highly critical of driving styles too. We don't have 'paper drivers' but we get close with the expression **'Sunday driver'** which describes someone who drives so seldom that when they do, they drive so cautiously and slowly as to be positively hazardous. Another driving related neologism is **petrosexual** which reflects the fact that according to recent data there is now almost no difference in the driving habits and car choices of men and women except that women are still more likely to give their car a name ('Fifi' is the most popular apparently). My favourite expression though is **'back seat driver'** which can literally describe someone who sits in the back seat coaching the driver or figuratively to describe anyone who constantly seeks to instruct someone in authority with largely unwanted advice.

'Mr Tatoyama is the boss but his wife is a back seat driver'.

Petrolheads (car enthusiasts) visiting the UK will find much to delight them at the Beaulieu motor museum which offers an impressive collection of 250 new and old motor cars (from vintage Bugatti to classic Bond) all parked in the idyllic pastoral setting of the New Forest. And, of course, they will not need reminding that the British Grand Prix roars into action on July 9th

<http://www.britishgrandprix.net/>
<http://www.beaulieu.co.uk/beaulieu/index>

I for one though will not be tuning into the action from Silverstone. I just don't get cars. Maybe it was the endless meanderings in search of Scotch Corner or the experience with the 2CV but I never did take my test and remain not even at the back of the starting grid, one of the lowest of the low - a paperless non-driver.

Unlike my parents though I can find my way from London to Glasgow in less than half a day.

Via Heathrow.