

## Joyriding in the 1960s and 1970s

My one and only boyfriend was an apprenticed motor-mechanic when I first went out with him, and for the rest of his life wheels and engines were an essential part of him. He was apprenticed in 1963 to Lillywhite's Garage completing the 5 year apprenticeship, including day release at Highbury College, and then stayed on a further year to complete an additional diesel module.

When we first went out the Lillywhite's stock-car was then history. Several of the mechanics and apprentices used to spend hours constructing, repairing and racing this home-made machine, travelling to Aldershot, Eastbourne, Ipswich and Peterborough to see if they could beat the opposition. Roger Horwood was the main driver and many a tale has been told of beating the opposition, travelling with six in the car and the trailer attached behind, punctures in the outside lane of the Kingston Bypass and having to be at work on time the next day. Most of the lads could not afford their own vehicles, so relied on parents or Joe and Len Lillywhite for the loan of a car to go chatting, as they called going out with girls. We tended to walk into Havant to go to the Empire Cinema, or just walk.

Ernie borrowed Joe's car on one occasion to collect me from Liverpool Street Station. I had been to see my family in Norfolk and was returning with my Granny. Ernie met us and drove us through London and then home. Granny Bullock was a large, happy lady – 5ft tall and 5ft round, with a rich fruity chuckle. She sat ensconced on the back seat, while I chatted with Ernie in the front. When we got to Whicher's Gate railway bridge, Ernie accelerated and we flew over the top. Granny went up into the air; hit the roof of the car and her straw cloche hat jammed down over her ears and eyes. She was still shaking with laughter when we arrived home. Needless to say, Ernie was approved of by her.

Most of our group of friends had a connection with Lillywhites, and they were known as the Lillywhite Boys. As girls came along they were just added to the group. Several of us were there for some years, but others came and went. Roger was the one with the most changes – a new girl each week. Our meeting place was very often the Lord Raglan.

The first person to have her own car was Rosemary Lovell, who was going out with (and later married) Keith Shuker. She had a Morris 1000 Traveller, which had been bought for her by her parents because she was running the florist side of their business and needed transport for deliveries. After the wedding of Anne Parham (who worked at Lillywhite's) and Dave Hitchman at Southbourne, Rosemary's car had a severe trial. We had all been at the reception in the church hall, which was a corrugated building just behind the church in Stein Road, and decided to return to Emsworth. Rosemary and Keith sat in the front seats, three lads with three girls on their laps sat on the back seat and two further lads sat in the boot with two more girls on their laps. Twelve in one car, and Rosemary felt the steering was not very precise!!

Gradually, as they passed their tests, the lads got their own cars. A group of eight or ten of us would meet most Friday or Saturday evenings. In those days (!) there was always a public dance somewhere in Emsworth, where we would meet. It could be the Red Cross Hall, Conigar Road Hall, the Church Hall, the Public Hall (over the fire-station) or the St. John's Hall. After an hour or two we would pile into the cars and travel over to Aldwick, near Bognor. The Bali Hai Club was a night club and we felt very sophisticated being signed in as members or members' guests. Our table in the upstairs restaurant would be booked for about 11.30pm and we would dine on prawn cocktail, steak and chips with Black Forest gateau to follow - the height of chic! Then we returned to the dance floor for the rest of the evening. We usually ended the night (early morning) with breakfast at Jack's Café in Portsmouth. This

was the full English greasy meal that most transport cafes try not to serve these days. Arriving home about 7.00am it was in to bed for a short time and then up and do it again on Saturday night.

Each couple always travelled in their own car for the simple reason they could get lost (!) for a little while, and of course there was always the chance of hiding away together at the end of the evening. We all had our own places for being secluded, but during the summer evenings many of us would go to Hayling Island to swim after work and then - as it got dark - to linger. The main place was among the beach huts that were between the Inn on the Beach and the golf course. Cars would back up between the huts for privacy and it seemed an unwritten rule that head lights would not be turned on until the car had left the area. One evening there was a scrabbling noise and a thump, so head-lights came on all over the place, to show a car, which had been stealthily backing out from its place, had backed too far and gone over the edge of the track, so its own headlights were pointing to the sky. I am sorry to say that none of us went to help – we all just turned our lights off and quietly left the area.

The A27 had been made a dual carriageway as far as Warblington, but we all still preferred travelling from Portsmouth through Havant. It was one of those young men things, that when returning from Portsmouth they had to take the roundabout at Warblington at 60mph. Not as dangerous as it appears, because the sight lines were very open, there were nowhere near as many cars on the road – in fact at the time we were travelling we were often the only cars on the road – and the roundabout was so big that the curves were very shallow. It did make the girls shriek though!

Ernie's love of motor and motor-cycle racing rubbed off on me and we enjoyed ourselves travelling all over to the various meetings. Many of the other girls did not enjoy this, so our paths began to diverge. Eventually we found speedway racing. Our nearest track was Wimbledon, so every Thursday afternoon during the summer we would leave Chichester, where I worked, with a picnic tea and travel to Wimbledon to watch the Dons. Barry Briggs, Ronnie Moore, Trevor Hedge, Garry Middleton and all the other aces. Then squeeze out of the car park, back to Emsworth and be ready for work next morning – without a voice through shouting so much.

A couple of times we had problems getting home. We had gone to West Ham for a British Championship meeting and on leaving we found we had no headlights. The street lights were not as numerous as now, so Ernie fiddled around with the connectors and we found the only way we could have lights was if I held the switch in a certain way. Cramped fingers meant that when we went through a town I was allowed to take my finger off the switch, but had to be ready to put it back on when we reached the end of the street lights.

Our other memorable occasion was when a road was being prepared for resurfacing just near Morden (not far outside Wimbledon). As far as we could see there were no warning signs, so we hit an exposed manhole cover at about 50 miles an hour. Not only did it break the exhaust, but it took the manifold right out of the engine. (Next morning Ernie discovered that it had also broken an engine mounting as well!) The noise was horrendous, but where we came to a downward stretch Ernie would coast to allow our ears to recover. By this time we were married and living at Westergate, so we travelled via Hazlemere, Midhurst and Goodwood. Climbing up The Trundle was something I remember to this day – the noise was indescribable and I often wonder what the residents of Singleton must have thought.

Many of these joy rides finished in the early 1970s when we all gradually married and families came along, but when we meet up we remember these happy joy-riding days.

*Linda Newell*