

It was worth the effort!

Sometimes I wonder why I volunteer to get involved in things – then I remember why – I’m stupid – that’s why!

Now before you all put pen to paper to agree, perhaps I should be a little more specific – I’m not really stupid – just a little bit daft – in that I can’t say that simple monosyllabic word “No!”. Whenever I try it always sounds like: “Of course, I’d love to....!”

And so it was that I agreed to get involved with the Classic Car Show last November at the NEC. And if anyone tells you I actually offered, I will hotly deny it in the divorce court. You see my beloved and I have this sort of agreement – she goes to lots of dog shows at weekends, but tries to avoid going on Saturday AND Sunday of the same weekend – so she wasn’t overly impressed when I said I was going to set up the Car Show on the Friday, and then man the stand all day Saturday AND Sunday.

Nevertheless, having offered – sorry – agreed – to do it, how could I back out? Truth was I quite looked forward to it.

Alan (our West Midlands RO) and I had come up with the idea of a stand full of RED TVR’s. Why? Well, I fancied having my car on the stand (it’s red), Alan was the same (a red S3), Tony didn’t need a lot of persuading (a red Tuscan), and Jim’s red 450SE believes it’s second home is the NEC. So that was it – all red!

I then started to think about a red theme. My immediate thought was that most Ferrari’s are red, so as long as everyone else knew that fact, I could have a bit of fun, at our Italian friend’s expense.

So next day, in my office, I turned to my staff and asked them “What’s red?”

Perhaps I should have been more specific, because all I got was “Rudolf’s nose”, “Michael Owens’ shirt” and “Our bank balances because you don’t pay us enough!”

So, I thought I would try another tack. “OK,” I said, “what’s fast and red?”. I thought at least they would think of my red Griffith and put 2 and 2 together and maybe get 4! No chance! All I got from Neil was: “A baboon’s bum flying through the trees!”

Not to be outdone, I tried another way. This time I asked: “What’s red and sporty?” – which produced: “Jilly Cooper’s latest novel!” (Red...read...get it...you may as well laugh - it doesn’t get any better!)

Finally, in total desperation I said: “Think of a red vehicle - you know - four wheels - one at each corner?” Kate sat for a moment, obviously deep in thought then said, “I’ve got it! Postman Pat’s van!”

That’s the trouble - you just can’t get the staff these days, can you?

Anyway, having decided that we could go for the red theme, I thought our slogan should be:

“Not every fast red sports car is a Ferrari - TVR - British and proud of it!”

I could see us with this slogan on our shirts and around the stand, so I called Alan and asked him how much budget we had from TVRCC.

Do you know I don't think I have ever heard a man laugh as long as Alan did! I was sure he was either going to hurt himself or have a heart attack! Then, once he had composed himself, he said, in his much Anglicised Welsh accent, “Bud- jet? There is no bud-jet boyo!” (he didn't actually say “boyo” but I'm trying to give you the flavour of his Welsh accent and I can't write English sentences in Welsh without a “boyo”!)

Despite Alan's belief that we wouldn't get any “bud-jet” he did manage to get the club to agree to pay for some carpet and provide club red shirts for the stand members with cars. However when I suggested my “Not every fast red sports car...” strap line, he slowly shook his head.

“Don't think we can do that,” he said, “we might upset the Ferrari boys!”

Bearing in mind that according to Autocar & Motor in 1992 the 4.3 litre Griff (like mine) “...accelerated faster than a Ferrari Testarossa...” I didn't really care! But Alan thought it would be more PC not to point at Ferrari.

So we finally agreed on “Not every fast red sports car is Italian or German...”

When I arrived on the Friday morning to help erect the stand, they were laying out the red carpet for us - not because of our importance - but because Alan had ordered red carpet to match the stand style. When I saw it I was actually quite concerned that when the cars were on it you wouldn't be able to see them as they would be camouflaged! However, once the TVR Marquee had been erected (and that was harder than we thought - have you ever tried knocking tent pegs through 6” of concrete flooring?), and we had also put up some boards (red of course) for some large collages that someone at work had produced for me, the stand was looking quite good. All we then needed was some cars!

Alan and I left Jim Davie cleaning his much loved 450SE whilst we took our tintops home and picked up the TVR's. By the time we got back, some bone head had driven across the red carpet leaving dirty great tyre marks and several white van men had decided that the aisles between the stands were car parks! You just wouldn't credit some people, would you?

I left the Griff outside and walked in to try and find out how to get to the stand with the car. Because of white van man the easiest route was via the main concourse, down two flights of stairs and up an escalator, but I opted out of that one. Jim told me he had worked out a circuitous route to get to the stand, even though it was only 20 feet from the doorway. It involved two circuits of hall ten and one of hall eleven - with Jim walking in front - but eventually I got the car onto the red carpet - and left my own tyre tracks across it!

By late afternoon we had the Griff, Tuscan, S3, 450SE and a Taimar Turbo SE on the stand and it looked good. There was just one problem left - at least for Alan and I - we had driven over earlier in the day in our TVR's but how were we going to get home? Alan's wife couldn't pick him up because their dog was terrified of fireworks and therefore couldn't leave him at home, and at the last moment, my beloved couldn't get the time off work, leaving me with 2 train rides, a 3 mile walk and a 45 minute wait for a lift!

Oh the things we do for TVR!!

Saturday morning dawned and I donned my bright red TVR shirt and headed for the NEC, 20 miles down the M42. It was great walking in at 9.30 through the hordes of people waiting for the ten o'clock opening, but what about the people who actually visited the stand?

Well, there was the usual array of dribblers, tyre kickers and know-it-alls, plus I would say that about 50% had IQ's slightly smaller than their collar sizes! This was obvious as they couldn't read the "Please don't touch the cars..." signs!

One plastic bag carrying gentleman was very interesting as he had owned a 1968 Vixen since new, had covered 180,000 miles on 2 engines, and still had it in his garage. Then he ruined it all by admitting doing less than 1,000 miles a year these days, as he travelled everywhere by bus! Seems such a shame, doesn't it?

Then there were the people who told me they enjoyed my articles - which was very flattering until I discovered half of them had me confused with someone else! However, one person did say that he thought my article on names was funny, especially when I said thank heavens that Martin Lilley's friend was named Tasmin not Brenda - as "...taking my Brenda's top off, and giving her a good workout..." might not have been an appropriate thing to say in front of the vicar - and the reason he thought this was funny was that his wife's name was Brenda!

Perhaps this made it more real because that is exactly what he HAD said in front of the vicar! The mind boggles!

One of the funniest was the man with the ubiquitous plastic bags who wanted lots more information on the T350C. I'm sure he thought we were a TVR dealer. Alan was the person who spoke to him, but I couldn't help notice the look of incredulity on Alan's face, so I started to creep a little nearer to eavesdrop on the conversation. Turns out this guy was seriously thinking of buying a T350C - but he didn't look like a TVR man - don't ask me how you define what a typical TVR man looks like - I don't know - but this one didn't look like one!

Anyway, Alan asked him a very sensible question - what did he want the car for - what type of motoring was he interested in. Now I don't know about you, but I would have expected phrases like "open air", "driving to the limit" or "real grunt and power". But instead he said, "I mainly want to use it to go down to Sainsbury's to do the weekly shopping! Is there plenty of room in the boot for my shopping bags?!"

He thought that as it had a bigger engine than a bog standard Ford or Rover it would be more reliable and even economical! It takes all sorts doesn't it?!

Another guy was rebuilding a 1957 yank jobbie, and during the course of his daily grind, as a motor mechanic, he was MOT'ing a Griff and had realised that he had room for the Griff exhaust system under the bonnet of his American car, so he wondered whether I could lift the bonnet for him to photograph it! Now my engine is never that clean, so I was a bit reluctant, but as there was no-one else around, I agreed.

Within seconds we were surrounded by 30-40 blokes all wanting to peer into the engine bay! What is it about looking at engines that gets men excited? Looking at the complete motor - yes - but staring at engines? I dunno - maybe it's me - maybe I'm too much in touch with my feminine side. I just can't get excited looking at engines!

One visitor I did appreciate was Rob Barnett from Mequiar's - they're the people who do all the cleaning stuff. He remarked that my body looked tired and faded and could do with a good body scrub and a rub down with a soft cloth! Now I might be trying to get in touch with my feminine side, but I'm not that much in touch that I would allow another bloke those sort of liberties! But when he explained he was talking about the Griff I had to agree with him.

So he gave it a body scrub, polish and wax finish and I must say it gleamed! Positively sparkled! Trouble was, the offside door, boot and bonnet sparkled one shade of red and the rest a slightly different shade! I hadn't noticed before, but then someone explained that it was the sodium lights that caused it, and outside I wouldn't notice any difference.

And they were right - mind you it was dark and raining by the time we left - still, it was worth the effort. And in a few weeks time beloved will spend the whole weekend at Crufts - so after that we'll be all square again!

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