

Adventures with Mother



'Never go alone' they say. The wise mantra of the Green Lane code that only the foolish ignore, at their peril. So I didn't go alone. I took my 82 year old gravely ill mother.

Often when defending The Hobby (as it shall henceforth be known) we look to justify it with fine reasons such as access to the countryside for the infirm, a chance for those unable to mount a pony or don a bobble hat to still enjoy the sensation of open air, space, and broad horizons that a BOAT trip offers.

My daughter and I once turned a corner in our S3 Lightweight to come face to face with an elderly lady on a mobility scooter being dug out if the muddiest part of Wolvern's Lane by 4 burly motorcross bikers. It was jaw dropping and later, after we had towed her for 200m, a jolly amusing example of the call of the wild - the lengths people of all ages and abilities will go to for a bite of freedom.

Consequently it seemed quite sensible when I decided to take the Disco to meet Mum after yet another appointment with the oncologist. She lives in Kent and the trip down to Ashford Hospital had become a familiar commute, this time undertaken a lot more slowly and rather more loudly than when using my German daily driver.

My Mum has always been a wind in the hair kind of person. Years ago I gave up calling her on the landline during the day - she was simply never in. She was always to be found walking on the seafront or regaling a friend in a cafe with tales of growing up in the East End. Never slow to say what she thinks - or just say anything at all - that's my mother. Knowing now that our days together were numbered fewer than hoped, it seemed as good a time as any to introduce her to the ancient ways of the Green Lane. And how she loved it.

After a bit of a struggle climbing up into the thing, solved easily by carrying a step designed to help children use adult toilets, I could even hear her appreciative coo-ing above the rattle of the 300tdi around our uninsulated and uncarpeted cabin as we potted down the rutted routes. The wind once more in her hair.

East Kent is blessed with a good number of lanes and some start only a mile or so from the Celia Blakey Cancer Unit. It's a shock being shown CT scans of your body with unpleasant lumps

proliferating so I don't think I ever drove to the hospital in the Disco when I knew the appointment would deliver bad news. However if we were expecting a 'looks stable, see you in 3 months' kind of gig then we'd be straight out of the car park and doing a quick left towards the tight and scratchy Wye lanes.

Mum loved it, I loved it and it gave us a chance to spend time together, not something that had always been easy during the previous 5 decades.

The first lane we ever did was an off-camber chalky climb against a steep drop near Dover. It was winter, and I was very very stupid. But thank God, we made it through - just. I had decided that taking the Disco down to do some lanes on the same trip as visiting the hospital would be a good way to kill two birds with one stone, but it had all gotten a bit too literal there in the Alkham Valley. The very next day I called Nigel at Xcess 4x4 and ordered a locking rear diff. Like my mother and her cancer, my Landy was not going to go down without a fight.

From that day on it was flat, safe lanes only when Mum was aboard. The exhilaration of the bouncing ride and the rush of not quite knowing what was around the next corner helped mum and I both to get over the hour of stress we would have just endured in the small consulting room and over the 10 or so appointments we have had so far, some laning has followed about a third of them.

Lately, the various growths and sorenesses from invasive treatments have made even undulating tarmac roads in a normal car uncomfortable for Mum to endure and so we are reduced to pottering sedately about in the BMW on C roads, but I have been made to promise that it won't be long before she can have another go in the Disco 1 'Range Rover'. (Yes, I know, but she is 83. At least she doesn't call it a Jeep.)

Never go alone. It's true, you really should not. But having learnt my lesson on the first day I am happy to bend the rules on low risk lanes in my truck loaded with as many tools and spare parts as I can find, in order to give a very important person a last few cherished goes at adventure.

Betty Boreham passed away peacefully on 21st October 2019. Her last every car journey was a trip back from hospital to home, via chip shop, in the Disco.

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