

THE CAR MUSEUM ATTENDANT's PRAYER



I lie prostrate before You, humbly begging Your forgiveness for my transgressions since I started work here four long years ago.

In Your infinite wisdom and compassion, You it was who opened the door to a new life, as the door to an older (and better) life gently closed.

But in these surroundings and through Your infinite mercy, you have truly shown me a new life.

In these early days of interfacing (yet again) with members of the general public – sorry, public - I have come to know the true meaning of cleaning up oil leaks from two hundred and fifty exhibits. Moreover, it was You who enabled me to become excited and challenged each week to the true delights of checking the tyre pressures on all the wheels of all the vehicles from Sunday through Sunday.

However, in this noble task, I know I have sinned.

Most notably, I feel it may have been the heresies, blasphemies and profanities I uttered when I found the plug on the mobile air compressor wouldn't reach the one on the floor and I didn't really mean it when I said I'd screw the unmentionables off the sonofawotsit who'd nicked the extension power cable.

Only You irretrievably brought me to the edge of fully understanding that cleanliness is next to Godliness. In a now far-distant life when as just one family among many with mouths to feed, a mortgage to pay and an employer who was under arrest, you'll remember that for a four month period, I took a job as a Verger in a church. I learned a lot in those four months, among which was the noble art of polishing Altar candlesticks and these well-learned skills have surely equipped me to competently put an impressive finish to old brass radiator shells and carbide lamps on the cars that are on display.

I know that secretly You may agree I did a thorough and good job but condemn me not to hell for all eternity by 'borrowing' the tin of brass polish for my own brass at home.

You'll remember I knocked it over that evening, spilling all the contents and therefore I couldn't return it the next day, even when someone asked me what had happened to it. Lord, forgive me when I said I didn't know – and I



think I was believed?

It has been a heavy burden to bear but I have tried to do all this with a smile on my face, a spring in my step - and care in my heart.

You gave me the magic of power from my lips and the ability to 'speak in tongues' when undertaking Museum Tours.

Why did You thereby torment me in bringing me face to face with children?

Some can't behave. Others have leaking noses, or overfull bladders - or have just eaten fries and candies - simultaneously, and are cared for by mothers who are blind to the conditions of their offspring.



What sin did I commit in an earlier life to suffer the mothers from whose wombs these walking infants were so recently sprung?

They always forget to put a Kleenex in their handbags, say *"wait a minute darling, the man's nearly finished - haven't you?"* or ask if I'll mop up the mess their infants have left on the floor?

And while on that subject of 'accidents' - you and I both know it wasn't me who stole Warwickshire County Council property. Dear Lord, TRULY, it was an emergency at the time for a little girl whose Mummy needed her to have some dry knickers and I

was the one who got nobbled to take them off the little girl model in the road safety display. Yes, I know I certainly got some odd looks from quite a number of people at the time as I went about this onerous task, but You know I'm not a pervert or 'that way inclined'. I mean, Lord, what do you say at a time like that?

"Yes, nothing to worry about. Just getting a clean pair of knickers for one of our younger visitors".

But in the company of adults, spare me into eternity from having to suffer grown men who jingle coins in their pockets when I am talking, spout utter crap to their partners when they say a Morris Minor was not designed by Alec Issigonis but an Italian called Michelotti, or the MGB was a dismal marketing failure.

See me Lord, as I throw myself prostrate and full length on the ground when Americans look at the last TR7 or the last Spitfire to come off the line and say it's not 'stock' as described by Piggott or Thomason in one of their books because the steering wheel is on the wrong side – for them.

Give me the patience of Job to smile radiantly and explain courteously when questioned about why a hose clamp on a car is a worm drive version and not one of those crappy bits of bent wire the originality freaks just have to have on their own cars – and not reply with *"Who gives a ***t?"*

In those early days, did I do well?

Is that why You saw fit to have me in the Reading Room at weekends looking for old road test reports, searching wrongly documented owner chassis numbers and answering the same questions - ad nauseam, for the benefit of committed anoraks or the anally retentive type? What should I do Lord, when confronted by people suffering from chronic halitosis, unwashed armpits and finger nails that look as they had spent a lifetime in a marine engine oil system?

Should I smile again, peg my nose and say *"of course it's been a pleasure to help you"* when all I want to do is give them a bar of soap, a nail file and a bottle of undiluted mouthwash - urging them at the same time to "piss off."

In my promotion to run the global Clubs function, you taught me humility and tolerance - though I confess there were times when I acknowledged neither.

We both know there are some people out there whose lives have been such a dismal career failure that an appointment to a position within a small club structure is the pinnacle of achievement and success. As my life goes forward and I may meet or talk to an 'official' representing the **'Nether Wallop and District Vintage Dynamo and Starter Motor**

Appreciation Society' who treats me as though he was a graduate of the Heinrich Himmler School of Intimidation Techniques, teach me to have a response which is not "F*** off!"

Put a smile in my voice and co-operation in my heart - but as I may hang up after a phone call, please make sure there's enough Blue Tack in my desk drawer for me to make an effigy to instantly stab the bastard to death with my letter opener, while uttering the lines of the Three Witches in Shakespeare's Macbeth.

When it comes to being the driver in one of the Collection's cars on a Road Run, teach me compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and understanding. I know my friends in Workshops want to leave early on a Friday when I'm Course Marshall in a TR3A on a Sunday. That said, it is difficult to open the bonnet when they've locked the bloody glovebox with the bonnet 'T' handle inside it and kept the key on the spare set on the keys board, - or tried to get away with a piece of old HT lead when a new one would have been better.

I know I ought to accept they have bad days like me - but it's difficult to reconcile this on occasions.

Do You remember when I got down on my knees on the grass verge in the middle of the Cotswolds in the driving rain?

That was when I was suffering from arthritic wipers and a passenger who kept talking about *"I gotta get a flight to Atlanta in five hours time to go back home,"* followed by *"can ya fix it?"*

Finally, Lord, teach me to teach the fairer sex with whom I work (and who enjoy more senior positions to me and earn at least thirty thousand a year more for one hundredth of the effort I put in) that they really ought to know a little more about the importance of automotive history and the issues in my care.

None of them know the difference between a crankshaft thrust washer or a cam follower - and what makes it worse, they don't care!

They have taken me through the valley of the shadow of death on mutual character assassination, say they hate the guts of another female colleague but smile and joke with the same person in their company - and then claim the place employs far more women than it should - but they don't see why they should be first to go.

I have been bombarded with Cordon Bleu cookery tips and aspects of the latest fashions, yet they are resistant to letting me impart the finer points on how they can change disc brake pads, set valve clearances, or static ignition timing? In my heart, I know this is learning they can do without, but I've managed for forty years on how to scramble eggs, make a piece of toast and dress up a pair of jeans.

In Your Divine Providence Almighty One, I know it was You who kept me alive during that time, even though I have to say I got pretty sick of scrambled eggs and beans on toast in that period.

Finally, Lord - as I rise with the greatest difficulty to my feet and unclasp my hands, I entreat You not to let me agree - even though I may want to - when people say, *"Hey, John - you've got a pretty s****y job here."*

In the wisdom that only comes with advancing years, life has taught me I'm nothing more than an old fart with an interest in old cars - and let's face it, there's nowhere else to go in this place, to get out of the cold and rain.

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Amen.