

JANET, JENNY, JULIE and JO

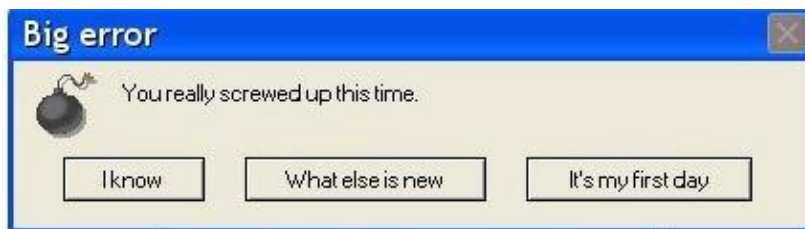
I write this piece of material with mixed feelings and fearful of being accused of ‘sexism’ and being seen as a male chauvinist pig – or whatever the current terminology may be. However, I feel it’s important to flag up how slowly evolving technology can bring chaos in certain situations and in the most unlikely circumstances.

So, let’s start with technology as we know it today – and then, while still addressing the subject in its many wider and varied forms, we can safely jump backwards by at least fifty years to a time where technology, as it has been developed over the years, sometimes didn’t work out quite as it was supposed to prove itself.

This is a long story and it’s not easy to abbreviate, so please bear with me.

In this age of computers, there are many millions who are ignorant of computer jargonese and would inevitably have major difficulties in writing and speaking to each other in **BASIC, COBOL, FORTRAN, XBL** or whatever moniker you choose to throw at the mysteries of computer programming. I still shudder when recalling MS-DOS!

Today, most of us (myself **ex**cluded) would probably find life wasn’t worth living if we didn’t have a smartphone. I have one myself, but I only use it for talking to people – which, to my mind, is what a telephone was originally constructed to do? I do however find my laptop and even my iPad - on occasions, come in handy for meeting my own specific needs.



Indeed, I gain much comfort and re-assurance in knowing if I do something on either my iPad or laptop which the program I’m using doesn’t like, it’ll tell me in short

order. After all, what use is a computer if it doesn’t have an integral screen to tell you it’s not happy? Be assured, it wasn’t always like that.

Back in the mid/late 1950’s, The Standard Motor Company in Coventry was gearing itself to introduce an entirely new car, code-named ‘**Zobo**’ which would ultimately appear as the **Triumph Herald**.

However, before the Herald could go into production, a place in which to make it – along with all the other models in the company’s product line-up, was required.

To do that, the cost was going to be some **£17,000,000** (about £532,000,000 in 2026 values) and part of that massive expenditure was to effectively computerise the whole production process, together with computerising everything else. Things like forward ordering for required componentry, the Parts Division needed massive computer power for its many provisioning and supply needs. Then there was Production stock control/ordering/receiving/storing the stuff coming in from suppliers, General Accounting, Sales forecasting, Payroll and a raft of other related and unrelated functions.

Undertaking such a massive project required humongous manpower to get it up and running. On the one hand, we had the programmers doing what programmers do. On the other, we had all the people who had worked at all the ‘many coalfaces of activity’ and knew how things worked and why, and they worked in close harmony to ensure the programmers knew what was wanted – and always, **WHY** they needed it. Part of that

overall function was to alert the programmers to devising methods and systems to things that saved everyone's bacon if an event (nearly always human intervention where it wasn't wanted) and that no-one had previously considered, raised its ugly head and screwed up everything.

This story explains such a scenario. Simply, what to do in the highly unlikely event that something somewhere goes 'tits up' (no pun intended).

Anyway, back to the 1950's.

Having taken such a radical and costly decision, the company suddenly found itself being visited by a plethora of 'key decision makers' from other manufacturers around the world – Ford, General Motors, Datsun, Toyota and many others - to try to work out how it all hung together. To handle this colossal change across so many different departments, it had already been decided to invest in a computer - known as '**LEO**' - and Leo was the acronym for **Lyons Electronic Office**. Like many computer systems of its day, 'LEO' was essentially a punched card system and when it worked, all was fine and dandy.

It was when it *didn't* work as anticipated, things got a bit 'hairy'.

This story illustrates what did sometimes happen when things went 'a bit hairy' and failed to flag up a 'system failure' – or to coin another more modern acronym which is GIGO – or 'garbage in, garbage out'.

Working in the Export Sales Department, I often had the occasion to visit a department located deep in the bowels of the Main Assembly Hall (aka The Rocket Range) and known throughout the company as **Production Control** – or just ProCon, for short.

The reason for these visits required the delivery of vehicle build orders received daily from around the world, so they could be coded to LEO by four very friendly and attractive ladies in their early to mid twenties, known to everyone as Janet, Jenny, Julie and Jo.

Jo was the most senior member of this team of four, and she also was a Shop Steward for the GMB (General, Municipal & Boilermakers) trade union. The fact that Jo's husband was also a senior convenor for the GMB – and a giant-sized professional wrestler into the bargain, meant that there were occasions when a union meeting was taking place and Jo always had to attend. The professional wrestler 'halo' also indicated that Jo was an 'untouchable' – and there were many among my colleagues and surely elsewhere, who would have relished the opportunity to 'touch' her if they could. The deterrent was getting reported to the husband – and no-one in their right mind wanted that level of risk! Simply, Jo's "assets" put Dolly Parton in a very distant second place! A one-horse race, so to speak.

I can therefore confidently state that it was Jo's bodily form that caused most testosterone-laden males of all ages to appear to have an almost continual presence at her desk while she chatted, laughed, joked and was all her delightful self, as she simultaneously - with a flying and firm right hand, entered the data from the car build sheet orders on her desktop to her terminal and in the process, all this resulted in a lot of harmless flirting.

But workwise, all Jo had – was a mere keypad terminal, and no screen.

In those days, no-one with a terminal had a screen – unless you worked in a room adjoining LEO's mainframe. To get into those total off-limits areas, you needed a signed pass, had to go through umpteen airlocks, comb your hair with a slide rule and be fluent in whatever program language that LEO could accommodate.

Otherwise you were denied access.

But back to Janet, Jenny, Julie and Jo.

As orders from the Home and Export sales departments came in several times each day, it was one of Janet, Jenny or Julie who did the first data input.

If they made a mistake and didn't realise it, that same document was passed to Jo for final coding – and what Jo coded was considered firm, final and done - and over-rode any errors originating from Janet, Jenny or Julie.

At least, that was what I was led to believe.

For quite a number of years, it seems no-one had ever considered what might happen if Jo made a mistake and confirmed a build order that was actually WRONG when it left her keypad, even though it might have been CORRECT when originally keyed by Janet or Jenny or Julie.

I learned many years later that Jo did indeed make mistakes – and costly ones too – but the fact she was a union Shop Steward, it would be very risky to move her to another position that wasn't quite so volatile and might also require her to accept lower wages in another role. Such a move would have really put the cat among the pigeons and a strike would have been inevitable. A strike would have cost the company far more in lost production than the actual cost of sorting out Jo's coding errors. Ergo. Jo stayed in her job and she was still doing it when I was transferred from Coventry to the company's London showroom.

I recall a day when I was one of several others at Jo's desk and she was happily chatting to everyone as she coded the orders in front of her, and then she stopped. I noticed a red light had appeared on her keypad and irritated, she kept hitting a key marked **ESC** until eventually the red light went out, a green one appeared and she continued her keying at very high speed.

I asked an entirely innocent question.

"Jo, what was the red light for to then be replaced with a green one?"

"Means I made a mistake, my flower" (one of her many terms of endearment). *"When the red light goes off and I get a green one, it means I can carry on."*

"I see. And what if there's a glitch somewhere and your mistake doesn't get corrected?"

"Nothing to worry about, darlin'. All it does is throw up an error report in the Control Room and they correct it".

That made me wonder how the Control Room could correct a mistake when I didn't think they would have a copy of the vehicle spec sheet she was using - but I kept my mouth shut.

After all, what did I know about computers?

Jo continued.

"Trouble is, sweetness, it's me boobs".

"I'm sorry?"

"My tits, lover. They're so bloody huge and heavy, I sometimes can't see the input sheet and the keypad at the same time and I wrongly code a car feature or equipment item. But if I do make a mistake, I hear that beep, the red light comes on and I keep bashing the escape button till the light goes green,. Then I know I'm safe to continue. In any case, there's so much stuff coming at us, we have to work fast and it's really just like touch-typing. My elder sister works at the Jaguar operating a Sumlock comptometer and she's got far more keys than I have. She says sometimes she needs all her fingers on both hands at the same time to make sure she don't make a mistake.

I was re-assured, but just to make sure that what Jo had said about her boobs obstructing her view of the input sheet and her keypad, I very casually and even more

discreetly moved behind her chair, bobbed down to where my head was level with hers and where I looked downwards over her shoulder – and all I could see was the amazing vista of a massive cleavage – but no sign at all of the data needing coding, or Jo’s keypad!

What Jo had said was absolutely true.

Her boobs were surely a potential computer “falldown” area – in in later corporate technology – “a serious red flag area”.



*Lord Stokes of Leyland –
CEO of British Leyland*

My move to the London showroom took place and with the formation of British Leyland in 1968, I found myself promoted in early 1969 to be one of two Personal Assistants to British Leyland’s newly appointed CEO, Lord Donald Stokes.

My principal role was to act as his shield in keeping angry customers away from his office door - and take my word for it, British Leyland had angry customers and across the whole product spectrum; cars, trucks, buses, earthmoving, refrigeration, materials handling, farm tractors and foundries - to name but a few.

One day, seated at my desk and pleading with the Almighty to give me a break from all the aggravation that was coming at me from outside phone calls – my internal phone rang.

Well, an internal call was a change. There was obviously a lull on the main switchboard.

“Good afternoon. Consumer Affairs”.

“John? It’s Debbie in Reception. Any chance of you coming out here to help a gentleman, please? He’s demanding to see the Chairman and says he refuses to leave until he’s spoken to him. I’ve already told him His Lordship is out this week (perfectly true as it happened) but he won’t take my word for it.”

“Be with you in a minute, Debs.”

“Thanks, John,” and in a lowered voice – *“be aware, he’s a **very** unhappy bunny.”*

Debbie’s assessment of this man’s mood was not an exaggeration. He was ‘steaming’ with anger!

Presently I arrived in reception, went over to the man sitting on a sofa and introduced myself.

“Good afternoon, Sir. I understand you wish to see the Chairman, but I do have to tell you he is not in London today. I am one of his two personal assistants and I’m happy to meet you and try to help you in any way I can.”

“Hmpf. Nice ploy young man and no disrespect to you, but I’m here to see the organ grinder, not his monkey!”

“I’ve just told you Sir, the Chairman is not available and it falls to me, as one of his personal staff, to determine the nature of your visit and to do anything I can to assist in the event you have a problem. I assure you, you have my full attention so please go ahead and tell me why you need our help”.

It needs to be said that at this point and in those now far-off days, the UK had no legislation for consumer protection. Ralph Nader had cooked up a storm in the US but here in the UK, there was nothing of that sort. In fact, when you took delivery of a new car

and signed the 12 month/12,000 mile warranty form, you signed away your rights under Common Law!

In response to my verbal offer of trying to assist the man, his reply was succinct.

“Better than that, I’ll bloody show you! Are you willing to come downstairs to see my car?”

“Of course, Sir. I’m pleased you’ve even been able to find a parking space anywhere in the West End, so let’s go and have a look at it, shall we?”

We got into the lift and on our way down, I was regaled that his new Triumph Spitfire had not been bought on any finance agreement or loan, he’d saved assiduously to buy it and denied himself even modest food and no vacations for two years past so he could pay for it, in full, in cash and answerable to no-one for his car’s ownership.

As we walked out of Berkeley Square House, I was aware of a Wedgwood Blue Spitfire in the goods unloading bay alongside the main entrance. The fact the car already displayed three parking tickets on its windscreen did nothing to help the owner’s temper.

We came up to the car and it didn’t appear at first sight to have anything wrong with it – until I looked a little closer and was amazed at what greeted my eyes.

Foolishly, oh so foolishly, what met my gaze made me utter a quiet chuckle of disbelief and the next thing I remembered was a major pain on the left of my jaw and I was lying flat out on the pavement with my assailant standing over me.

Somehow, I continued to remain calm – but it was difficult.

I got to my feet.

“Sir, might I respectfully remind you that I’m here with you in an attempt to help with issues to do with your Spitfire and laying me out on the pavement with your fist, is hardly the way to go about things. Now what is it exactly that’s troubling you?”

He mumbled a sort of apology that didn’t sound at all convincing, but he got underway.

“Well, when they painted it, at least they got the colour right and the steering wheel’s on the correct side and it’s got an engine. But I didn’t order a steel hardtop and the black soft top and a tonneau cover have not come with the car. What’s more, the seats are upholstered in blue when I ordered black. If you look a little closer, you’ll see I have knock-on wire wheels on the front, disc wheels on the back with hub caps – and if you look in the boot, you’ll find one wire wheel and one disc wheel as spares. What’s more, the supplying dealer absolutely refused to modify the car as per my order until it has its 1,000 mile service. Look, to confirm what I’ve just said, here’s a copy of the order form I signed when I ordered the car some months ago.”

I briefly studied the form, then I looked at the car and wondered, *‘how the hell did it manage to get built like that in the first place and then get released to the dealer for customer delivery?’*

Back upstairs to the office. The customer is now a little placated and enjoying a pot of freshly made coffee, and I hit the phone – first to the selling dealer. The dealer was not especially helpful, maintaining *“the factory didn’t believe us when we told them how the car didn’t match the order. They said we’d only get paid five quid for each pre-delivery check and any rectification should be done at the first service. Next question?”*

At this juncture, I do need to say that problems with Jaguar, Rover and Standard-Triumph were very occasional in terms of customer displeasures – but the same couldn’t be said for Austin, Morris and MG owners – while truck and bus issues were in another universe. All that to one side, when one of our assembly plants received a phone call from

me on behalf of the Chairman's office about rectifying customer dis-satisfaction, things tended to happen at almost the speed of light to address and resolve the problem.

Conveniently (for me) I knew the Sales Co-ordinator in Coventry for this dealer and I placed a call to him.

"Pete? John Macartney in the Chairman's office. I've got a problem with a newly delivered Spitfire. I need help. The customer's here, he's steaming angry, he's just laid me out on the pavement with his fist and he's adamant he won't leave until he sees His Knibs".

"What's going on, mate? How far are you into the brown stuff?"

"Currently, I feel I'm in over my head," and I recounted what had taken place.

"Bloody hell, not another one!"

"What d'you mean, another one?"

"I'll tell you later. Let me get on to the dealer to find out why they didn't sort the car on the PDI and I'll be back to you within half an hour".

"Fifteen minutes would be better, Pete".

"Yeah, okay".

We hung up.

Pete was as good as his word.

"Tell him to get the car back to the dealer now. We'll have two fitters down there in the morning to swap out the stuff that's gone tits up and it'll probably be two days to make the changes. Dealer is going to give him a fully fuelled demonstrator to use in the meantime and they've also agreed to pay his parking tickets."

"Brilliant! Thanks so much. But when we spoke earlier, you said 'not another one'. What did that mean?"

"Remember Jo in ProCon – her with the double 'British Standard handfals'?"

"How could I forget her? What's she done?"

"We think they've sorted her for now. The first thing they found out was she'd knackered her data-input terminal. Something about her hitting the keys too hard and eventually it gave up the ghost. Gave her a new keypad, as well as the other girls too as they were well worn, and everyone thought the matter was sorted – but it wasn't."

"Why?"

"Took several days to identify the prime cause and they discovered some mice had got into the cable ducting going from ProCon to the mainframe. Dead and badly rotting mice everywhere as all of them had got electrocuted by feasting on the cable insulation. Sshort circuits going everywhere! Rumour has it the whole thing's been sorted now and working as it should".

"Re-assuring, I guess."

"Maybe – but you've obviously not heard the rest of it, have ya?"

"What d'you mean?"

"What's been coming off the lines over the last few weeks, mate. Either it was her bugging up her keypad, or the mice – or both. Guys on the track couldn't believe their eyes at some of the stuff coming down from Pre-Mount on to Final Finish – and they couldn't stop it. Rumour has it the blokes on the car crusher are claiming overtime for the extra work they've had to do in disposing of the cars she keyed in".

"Such as?"

"You sitting down? You won't believe this."

"Try me."

“Well, Frank Callaby from Photographic got called in on a number of occasions to take pictures to prove to management what everyone had discovered. Production insisted on there being pictures before Management started throwing their weight around”.

“Tell me more”.

“Well, the first one was a Herald. A saloon, I think – but a Herald with a difference. Came down Final Finish with a left hand drive instrument panel and steering set-up, but with a right-hand drive foot pedal layout”.

“Your joking”.

“No way, mate.”

Then there was a Toledo which we’ve only been making for the last few months. As I’m sure you know, they’re available as two and four door versions.”

“Sure. What about them?”

“Had another one in the crusher last week, so it wasn’t the first.”

“And.....”

“Two doors on one side and one door on the other!”

“Yesterday, we had a 2000 Estate car with Vitesse front seats that obviously didn’t fit, while on the back seat, the backrest was trimmed in black ambra with a red seat cushion!. Trim Shop sorted that one in short order in the ‘hospital’ off Final Finish”.

“How in heaven’s name did that happen?”

“Don’t ask me chum. I didn’t catch the ball to sort it all out, thank god. But you obviously haven’t heard the best one?”

“Go on.”

Remember Dave Watkiss, the Paint Shop Superintendent?”

“Sure. The man with the racing pigeons.”

“That’s the one. He’s doing a morning shift and scans the body number of a Dolomite as it comes through in body in white, and the whole paint line suddenly stops. Dave naturally wants to know why and checks his line setting ticket where it’s been coded DT91V. Now that code ain’t been used for yonks, as it’s the former moniker for duo tone paint. We don’t do duotones no more. As you’ll recall, DT91 is duo-tone and the ‘H’ is for horizontal, meaning body one colour, roof another colour, right? Well, this code with the V means a vertical colour split. So, bells are ringing and people asking questions why the line’s stopped and there’s nothing poor old Dave can do, so he hits his over-ride button and let’s the system sort it out. All it does is paint the front end of the car red including the leading edge of the roof, but only up to the ‘B’ post and it don’t do the back end at all! So Dave hits over-ride again, and after the car’s done one trip through the low-bake oven, it goes round again. Next time it’s coming up to the paint guns, the lines have already been loaded with Conifer Green and done a few others in Conifer ahead of the Dolly and Conifer’s what went on the back-end of the car on its second time around. I saw it when old Frank had come back yet again and was doing his pictures – but this time he’s shooting in colour as well, and when I saw the car it looked like a set of bloody traffic lights! Red at the front, ‘n green down to the arse end! Any ways, management realises there’s a major fault somewhere and we had to halt production for three days to sort the mess out. That was when they found out about the mice and chewed up wiring to the mainframe.

He paused.

Anyway mate, you tell the customer we're on to his problem and I'll ensure it's sorted fully over the next forty-eight hours or so. Very sorry – and all that. I'm sure you'll relay that to him? You're good at that sort of bullshit."

We hung up and I went out to Reception to give our unhappy customer the good news of what had been arranged and for him to get his car back to the dealer within the hour.

He even said *"thank you"* as he left, shook my hand and actually smiled.

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*My own much-loved and sorely missed
Triumph 'Big Sixes'.*

Fast forward, at least forty-five years.

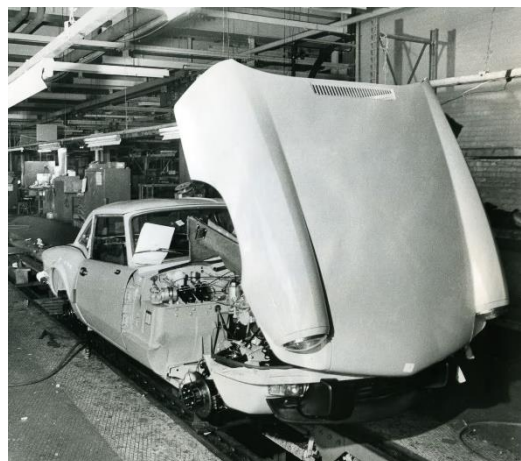
I'm now doing a nice little job at the BMIHT Museum in the UK following a major illness and several years unable to do any form of paid work. It's a nice little job. I'm in the museum with all the cars that were new when I was young – but there are many others that pre-date me by decades. The guys I work with are great fun too. We all worked in "motor city" (aka Coventry) and nearby, at more or less the same time.

There's Dave from the former Rootes Group with his immaculate Sunbeam Alpine and a Tiger – both former press cars which are mint, much used and very loved. Freddie, who I remember from my days as a Jaguar Apprentice is here too with his XK150 drophead. Gordon who did many years at Abingdon has an indecently fast three bearing crank 1963 MGB, a drop-dead gorgeous 1948 MG TC and a diminutive early 1930's MG J2 that none of us can get into because it's so small. I had my two 'Big Six' Triumphs – the brown one is a 1970 2.5PI and the Mallard variant is a Mk 2 2000 from 1973. Both quick, both supremely comfortable and I loved 'em far more than any TR, GT6 or Spitfire I owned in the past.

None of us ever try to score points off the other as marque enthusiasts, because we're all true 'motor men' from Coventry and where you worked wasn't/isn't relevant. We love all the cars we're here for and that we care for because they awaken so many happy memories of times past.

Anyway, back to the day in question.

It's pouring with rain outside, it's cold and there are very few people in the museum itself. Opposite the military Land Rovers, are the Standard-Triumph exhibits and a man is standing looking at the very last Spitfire to come off the line. It's an Inca Yellow hardtop



*No more after this one. The very
last Spitfire down the line.*

with overdrive and has just 27 completed miles on its odometer. It might do another mile in the next three decades and maybe it won't. Who cares?

It's the very last Spitfire made anywhere and it's permanently brand new – for ever.

I bid the visitor a 'good morning, Sir' and he asks me if I work here, which query I confirm.

"Did you once have one of these, or maybe you still have one for high days and holidays" I enquire.

"Wish I did," he replies. *"I bought mine brand new in 1970. I caned the living daylight out of it until it finally fell apart in 1980, after 140,000 very hard driven miles. Wanted to keep it, to one day restore, but we were just married, money was tight and I had no garage to rent where I could keep it. Broke my heart the day it went off to the scrapyards on the back of a truck."*

"But if you did 140,000 miles in it and hard-driven too, it must have impressed you?"

"Well, truth to tell, when I took delivery of it, I was so disappointed with what faced me, I nearly told the dealer to stuff it where the sun didn't shine. What they wanted me to drive off their forecourt was most certainly not the car I'd saved up to buy. I was furious and heartbroken with disappointment. I'd waited nearly six months for it and it was far less than what I'd hoped for."

"So, did the selling dealer sort out your problem for you?" I enquired.

"Grudgingly – and very reluctantly. I was so angry that day that I went to British Leyland's head office in the West End and demanded to see Lord Stokes. He was always on radio and TV saying how marvellous British Leyland products were, and they never gave any trouble."

"Did you manage to see him at all?"

"No, I didn't. But I met a nice chap who seemed to work a 'behind-the-scenes' miracle and he got my car sorted within the week. I don't know how he did it, but when I got it back, everything was as I'd ordered and I never looked back. Caned it all over the UK and Europe, did a bit of amateur rallying in it and frankly, I was less than kind or considerate in the way I used it."

"Tell me a bit about your car, Sir. For example, what colour was it?"

"Pale blue. As I recall, it was known as Wedgwood blue."

"I see. Anything else you weren't happy about?"

"Yes, it had a hardtop I hadn't ordered, the soft top and tonneau cover I'd ordered hadn't been supplied and, er, there was something else I can't immediately recall."

"Something like wire wheels on the front, disc wheels on the back – and one of each in the boot as a spare? Also the upholstery was the wrong colour – blue instead of black, or the other way about?"

He looked at me dumbfounded.

"How on earth did you know that?"

I smiled at him.

"Let me put it this way, Sir. The bruise on the left side of my jaw has just about gone but if you want to hit me again, I'd prefer you used the right cheek if you don't mind."

His stare of astonishment was priceless.

"You are the young man who worked for Lord Stokes who came down to look at my car when I came to Berkeley Square to complain about it?"

"The very same, although I'm not as fit as I was and my hair has thinned a lot as you can see – but yes, I am that person," I replied with a smile.

He looked at me again.

“My dear fellow, if you knew the sleepless nights I’ve had down the years when I think back to that appalling behaviour of mine, you would surely know how sorry and truly contrite I am at what I did. Please forgive me.”

“It was all a long time ago, Sir. And you didn’t really hurt me. You were understandably angry and disappointed at the car you’d been looking forward to having had failed to come up to your hopes. That makes people angry – and believe me, when I was doing that job, I met lots of very angry people, and usually for similar reasons.”

He looked at his watch.

“May I ask if you’ve had lunch yet?”

“No, not for about another thirty minutes.”

“In that case – and I don’t care what you’re doing, I must insist on buying you the very best lunch that any pub or restaurant hereabouts can offer – and I regret I can’t take No for an answer. It is the very least I can do after all this time and I do it with pleasure.”

That said and done, I was propelled by him out of the museum, across the car park and into a car made in a place called Stuttgart. The firm that makes them has the reputation for making the world’s most popular taxi, and most of the vehicles of that make, have a sort of gunsight in the middle of the top of the radiator shell. I don’t know what model this particular one purported to be, but the inside was very sumptuous and there was an E500 badge or something on the bootlid.

Certainly quieter and a lot smoother than a Triumph Spitfire.

It didn’t take long to reach **‘The Three Horseshoes’**.

I can’t say I recall all that much of our lunch, except it was exceptionally good. We had two or three gin and tonics to get things underway, several bottles of St. Emilion and I lost count of the number of toasts we raised to Janet, Jenny, Julie – and Jo.

To much laughter, I told him all about Jo’s ‘mammarial difficulties’ and how they obscured her key pad - and the mice eating through the computer cabling. I also told him about the oddball Herald, the three door Toledo and the traffic light Dolomite.

Eventually, it was time to go. His Amex Gold Card was accepted with alacrity and I was delivered back to the museum.

Looking back, Yes, perhaps I was just a little bit the worse for wear, but not noticeably so (I think) – but I found the Managing Director (a woman much younger than me by some considerable margin) standing by my desk.

“And where the hell do you think you’ve been all afternoon?”

“Why, what happened, Gloria?”

“Nothing happened!!! I’ve been calling your number ever since lunch without a reply and you were last seen in the museum at about twelve-thirty. Where have you been since then?”

“I_have_been_in_the_pub, Gloria - with a very nice man who, forty plus years ago when I was working for Donald Stokes – you may have heard of him? He ran British Leyland, whose many badged cars we now have in the museum. Anyway, the man I’ve been with today, laid me out on the pavement in Berkeley Square in 1970 because he was so angry and I – hic – I foolishly laughed at him and his Spitfire.”

“Why was he angry with you?”

“It’s a very long story, Gloria. But it had a lot to do with Janet, Jenny, Julie and Jo.”

“And who are they when they’re at home?”

“It doesn’t matter now, Gloria. They’re all probably Grannies by now – and I expect are drawing their State Pensions as well.”

She turned away and made off towards her office, muttering something about *“that man’s not only drunk - but off his trolley into the bargain. Fighting in the street, too – but not here and on my watch”*.

I called after her.

“Gloria?”

She turned to face me.

“Have you got a screen for your computer?”

“Of course I have! Just like you. What’s the use of a computer without a screen?”

“Quite so. Sadly, Jo didn’t have one for hers. Nor for that matter did Janet, Jenny or Julie”.

“The man’s mad. Completely off his trolley” and she disappeared.

There wasn’t really anything else to do, so I lowered myself gently on to my comfortable office chair and reflected on that remarkable lunch.

In a while, I made my way home and as my little car happily ate up the miles towards a warm fire in the hearth and a hot shower.

Strangely, all I could do was think about Janet, Jenny, Julie and Jo – but particularly what Jo couldn’t see on her desktop – and why.

Perhaps that was the most poignant memory of all?