

## The driving test.

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My service within the old Swansea Borough Police led to many unusual experiences, some exciting, some frightening, some very challenging, and in addition some highly amusing.

Among the latter category there stands out the infamous Police Driving Test.

I have on many occasions been a speaker at various functions throughout the country and even out of the United Kingdom. My speeches are on various subjects, all of which are successful in their objective of entertaining the audiences.

Without any doubt the subject which is most likely to provide genuine “belly laughs” is the Driving Test.

I will therefore be delighted to give this written description of the sequence of events concerning the test.

I trust that most ex Swansea Borough officers who are now members of N.A.R.P.O. will have some memories of the incredible circumstances that came out of the driving test all so many years ago.

My driving examiner was to be a quite unique character, Police Sergeant Edgar West, otherwise known as “Knocker West.” As well as having a very aggressive appearance knocker did have a short fuse and could resort to threatening verbosity at a drop of a hat. I nevertheless had no other choice other than to place myself under the scrutiny of Edgar.

On an arranged date and time I drove my car to the appointed location, this was Pleasant Street.

Now I must describe my car – It was a 1938 Model, Morris Eight, which I kept on the road with my own maintenance, regularly replacing broken parts with second hand items bought for a song from Alfie Hunts car parts yard at Brynhyfryd.

To be quite truthful it would never pass a test nowadays.

After a short wait Sergeant West joined me at Pleasant Street and immediately enquired where my competent driver was. I informed Knocker that he had gone shopping but he didn’t believe me.

Anyway, I was asked to produce my driving documents and when I told Knocker that I had left them at home he started to lose his limited self control. Although I assured him that all documents were in order he shouted back at me, “I want to see the damn things myself”

Knocker reluctantly agreed to go ahead with the test after I promised him that I would bring them into his office the following day.

After seating himself in the front passenger seat Knocker looked at the L plate which was stuck to the front windscreen immediately in front of him. He said, "What's this doing here ?" To which I replied I have to display it there". Knocker was slowly getting redder in complexion as he shouted, "I can't see the roadway, Move it !".

He then told me that I should drive ahead and react to each order that he gave me. I slowly accelerated ahead but owing to a large hole in my ~~exhaust~~ exhaust pipe clouds of carbon monoxide gasses entered the car. This caused knocker to open the near-side window and gasp for air. He shouted out, "What a heap ! Get that repaired soon."

I then drove on, turning right into Alexandra Road and then left into New Orchard Street. When I reached the Druids Arms public house (Remember that boozier you older officers ?) I was ordered to turn left toward Graig Terrace and the route which was nicknamed The Goat Track.

Now at this point of the journey the gradient became quite steep and I was confronted by a pickup vehicle being driven in the opposite direction.

I was unable to drive pass the vehicle and therefore came to a stop. I must point out that the handbrake on my beat up car was faulty, with very worn ratchets, which meant that I had to apply the brake and retain a firm handgrip to prevent it releasing itself. I observed that another vehicle had come to a stop immediately to my rear, which again presented problems in as much as it prevented any reversing.

Knocker started shouting out of the open window toward the pickup driver ordering him to "Bloody-well get out of the way".

It was at this point that things came to a head and destroyed any chance that I had had of completing my test. The wooden ply flooring of my car was over twenty years old and somewhat rotten. In addition the screw holes that secured the front seats were worn to a larger size. Owing to the added stress imposed, suddenly there was the sound of snapping wood and the near-side front seat with knocker seated in it tipped backward. I saw knocker assume a position somewhat like an overturned Turtle. His feet were thrashing about and the buttocks enclosed within the regulation riding breeches ,was facing the sky.

The language being uttered by knocker would have made a seaman blush. I was now confronted by a major problem – What should I do to solve the dreadful situation ?. I couldn't reverse, neither could I drive forward. I dare not remove my left hand from gripping the faulty hand brake handle otherwise I would lose control and run backward

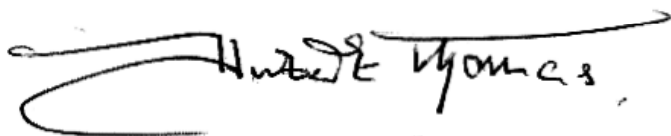
My police training caused me to make a decisive move. I leaned to my left and succeeded in opening the near-side door handle. I then gave knocker a firm push causing him to fall onto the roadway tarmac with a thump.

Knocker climbed up from his undignified position and approached the pick up driver who was completely shocked by events. He was screamed at by knocker and ordered to "Bugger Off".

After the departure of the pick up I drove into Graig Terrace and came to a stop. Knocker came up to my car and said "Get this heap put into a roadworthy condition, this includes the exhaust pipe, the handbrake and the bloody seat". As he walked away I said to knocker, "Sergeant, Have I passed the test?"

I won't repeat what knocker said in reply but I can assure readers that it was to good old "Four Four" (Ken Evans) that I went for the next test, and I passed!

If readers wonder what the final drive of my dear old "Heap" led to, here it is. - I abandoned the car in a lay-by halfway up Langland Bay Road, my patience finally exhausted. A telephone call to Alfie Hunt resulted in it being towed away. Come to think of it I could probably get a fortune for the model nowadays because that Heap would now be considered as Vintage.

 Andrew Thomas

Ex 90 end later 2010.