

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE RECTOR

Mishaps and miracles with a beastly Iron Pig

Nostalgia, I've learned over the years, comes in unanticipated waves. In a recent downpour, for example, I was struck by an unexpected nostalgic twinge for the most abominable automobile it has ever been my misfortune to drive.

It was the office car of the Frankfurt Bureau of the *Financial Times* of London – a 1970 Renault 16 that had seen very much better days long before I first clapped eyes on it early in 1975.

The bodywork appeared to have been worked over with ballpeen hammers, while the upholstery looked as though it was in an advanced stage of automotive leprosy.

Its French automobile builders could not be blamed for the years of abuse it had suffered at the hands my predecessor, a crazed Hungarian as much given to driving on the sidewalk as the roadway. Thumping over curbstones and grinding along garden walls is not likely to enhance a vehicle's looks.

What, however, its designers should rightly have been berated for was their entire engineering concept.

They had given the Renault front wheel drive and an engine slung slap bang over the front wheels. If they'd left it at that things probably wouldn't have been too bad. Certainly it would have had plenty of traction on slippery roads.

The trouble was they didn't stop there. In an apparent fit of Gallic exuberance, they concluded that one could never have too much of a good thing. So *in front* of the engine they placed the gearbox and, then, *in front* of that they put the clutch.

It being 1970s Europe, power steering was naturally dismissed as an unmanly example of American decadence. Thus, as a consequence of all the front-end leverage, the thing took the strength of an ox to parallel park.

And if the weight over the front wheels made them almost impossible to turn when stationary, things didn't get very much easier at speed. The miserable brute needed constant steering even at 90 miles an hour on the autobahn.

Indeed, while most cars will automatically follow a banked curve, the Renault, left to its own devices, would carry straight on over the top of the banking and into the fields beyond.

Its handling was such a challenge that Charlotte, admittedly not a large person, found driving it, much less parking it, utterly impossible. As for myself, two hours of wrestling the brute left me acutely sore across the shoulders for at least two days.

The appalling steering was not the end of its problems: The gear change was equally difficult. The shift was on the steering column and it was connected to gearbox, way out there in front, by a linkage system involving 17 individual links.

Column shifts are not particularly positive at the best of times, but to describe the Renault's as sloppy substantially understates the case. The shift waggled about so much it took an act of faith to let out the clutch.

Not only that, the linkage system was fragile beyond belief. Indeed, a broken link once marooned us – me, Charlotte, parents-in-law and two howling children – in third gear in the Spessart mountains.

Neither Charlotte nor I are in the custom of naming our vehicles, but that Renault 16 simply begged for it. And, in keeping with its character, we christened it "*Der Eisenschwein*" or "The Iron Pig."

But if we thought The Iron Pig was absolutely good for nothing, we were wrong – at least in one respect. Its super heavy front end made it a marvel in ice and snow.

We discovered its extraordinary snow and ice road holding properties on a trip to Denmark in the winter of 1975. We were heading through northern Germany when we unexpectedly encountered a blizzard of epic proportions.

The autobahn rapidly became so slick vehicles were spinning off the roadway in all directions. But not The

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the parish office (410) 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Parisa, Daniel, Leona, Charlotte, Bryan, Rachel, Elizabeth, Dorothy, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, Adrian, Tom, Michell, Al, Kathy, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, Judy, Wade, Sifa, Theresa, Lisa, Larry, Dan & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Bethany, Caroline, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Catherine & Elizabeth

IN MEMORIAM: David Bryson and Steven Baker

THOSE WHO MOURN: The Clausen, Bryson & Baker families.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt. Col. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

Iron Pig. It plowed on utterly unperturbed at a steady 55 miles an hour with never so much as the hint of a skid. In fact we reached the ferry from Schleswig-Holstein at exactly the time we had planned.

Even so, its performance on the ice-covered autobahn didn't shake my resolve to be rid of it as soon as I could find a suitable replacement.

Shortly after the Copenhagen trip, I was chatting with Dr. Herman Apps, then Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Deutsche Bank and the grand old man of German banking.

"Is that your car, Herr Hawtin?" he asked, looking with some distaste at The Iron Pig. I confessed that it was. I explained it was named "*Der Eisenschwein*" and that I was looking around to replace it.

"What vehicle are you considering?" asked Dr. Apps. I told him I had been looking a Volkswagen Passat.

"Oh, in that case I'd keep *Der Eisenschwein* if I were in your place," he said, drily, "At least it has the benefit of eccentricity."

I took the hint and ordered a BMW.

But this isn't quite the end of the story. Years later, in the afternoon on the day in November I'd taken delivery of my second BMW, snow started falling with a vengeance. That evening we were invited to a dinner party, and, living in the Taunus Mountains, snow was not an acceptable excuse.

I was unwilling to risk a car I had never driven, and Charlotte was most certainly not willing to risk her Mercedes. So, utterly out of character, we did the responsible thing, and took a taxi.

Next morning the snow had stopped and the roads had been well plowed. I got into the new BMW and gingerly began the 3,000 or so feet descent to Frankfurt.

Suddenly at the third hairpin bend on the winding mountain road, I hit a kilometer-long patch of snow covered with two or three inches of melted water. It turned out that our village and the one four kilometers down the mountain were feuding over whose responsibility it was to plow the stretch in question.

I went into that third hairpin at about 20 miles an hour, but by the time I got to the fourth I was aquaplaning at 40. I barreled into the fifth hairpin at about 55 miles an hour, and careened into the sixth at nearly 70.

Automobiles are not cut out for the Cresta Run. At the sixth hairpin, I lost it. The car hit the bank, rolled over a couple of times and, *mirabile dictu*, ended up in a ditch on the opposite side of the road from a sheer 500 feet drop.

I came to, upside down, suspended by my seat belt. As I slowly regained my equilibrium, I became aware that the music playing on the tape deck was from Handel's *Messiah*. It was — I kid you not — “*I know that my redeemer liveth.*” Never have truer words been sung or spoken.

“You know,” remarked Charlotte smugly, after Manfred, our village cop, deposited me on the doorstep, “If you'd been driving The Iron Pig this would never have happened.” It's amazing how infuriating wives can be . . . especially when they're right. GPH✕

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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www.ststeve.com

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector
The Ven. Michael Kerouac, Vicar ·
Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki,
The Rev. M Wiley Hawks
and The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers

Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding
Coordinator

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)
11am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)
Choral Services (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer
Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist
Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club
Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle
Noon: Bible Study
Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, 7.00 PM, June 19th

Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, Noon, June 19th

Reservations, call all Sara Douglas at 410-560-9026

Summer Choral Events

(as announced)

Choral Evensong on June 2nd was announced in error

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