

## DAREDEVIL DRIVERS

Davy Gill became my best friend at primary school on the day he told me he had been given a pedal car for his 7<sup>th</sup> birthday. He also promised me I could have a “go” in it.

On the same day, after school I soon walked the mile uphill from my home in Gilnahirk to Davy’s house. His family lived in a farmhouse called Hilltop, almost where the road levels at Mann’s Corner near the bus terminal to Belfast.

I don’t remember much about Davy’s Mum now apart for her total lack of anticipation!

“Hello Denis, you’ll find Davy around the back,” she greeted me. I went through a gate and found him trying to pedal his car across the rough ground in the yard. Mrs Gill appeared at the back door and even she couldn’t help noticing Davy’s reluctance to get out of his new car to let me get in, so she suggested;

“Take your car on to the road where the surface is better and let Denis have a go.” Seeing Davy’s sour expression she added, “Why don’t the two of you get into the car?”

Hearing that suggestion, I looked doubtfully at the little pedal car; it was obvious to me that it was meant for one Davy-sized person only!

With a great show of reluctance and much mumbling, Davy dragged the car out on to the main road and climbed in. I tried to get in the other side but it didn’t really have an “other side”, the steering wheel, pedals and Davy were in the middle of the cockpit and there was no more room. I tried to get a leg in but Davy protested angrily;

“There’s not enough room, you’re hurting me”.

His Mum appeared at this moment and ordered;

“Davy put your right leg out over the side of the car. Now Denis, you get in beside Davy and hang your left leg over that side.”

Eventually we were both crushed into the wee car, which was pointing up the gentle slope before the road levelled out at the top of the hill. Even with Mrs Gill’s assistance the car couldn’t be moved uphill with two boys in it. At this point Mrs Gill’s lack of anticipation was revealed as her great idea dawned;

“I have a great idea,” she announced as she put her plan into action:

Grabbing the steering wheel, she moved the pedal car around to face down the steep hill, which the Belfast bus comes up every hour!

YOU will have anticipated the next part of this story but Mrs Gill totally failed this test!

I doubt if any pedal car in history ever went from standstill to 30mph in such a short time! Two problems were immediately apparent to all present: nobody had agreed who was going to steer before we were sent off on our Kamikaze mission, there had been no pre-flight discussion.

Secondly the wheels in a pedal car are designed for one small person peddling about 100 yards a week; not for two boys reaching 30mph in under 5 seconds!

I felt as if I was on a scenic railway when the train reaches the end of the level bit and plunges downwards like a stone.

The pedal car raced downhill swerving wildly from left to right as Davy and I, each with one leg swinging about outside the car, were fighting to pull the steering wheel in opposite directions, whilst just a an inch beneath the two feet in the car, the pedals must have been a blur of moving metal!

What happened next was unclear but, suddenly, the earth seemed to turn upside down with sickening crashing noises; then I was rolling down the hill with the pedal car trying to overtake me. Davy must have been behind somewhere!

When everything stopped moving I heard crying; it turned out to be me!

I saw Davy struggling to his feet and seeing a wheel on the road, he decided it was the cause of the incident! He flung the wheel as hard as he could towards the hedge, just missing my head fortunately; I had suffered enough that day! Without a word to me, he turned on his heel and limped off up the hill bawling his head off and I did the same, only downhill. The car was left in the middle of the main road. I didn't see it ever again! I hope the bus driver did!

I bawled all the way home; blood everywhere on hands, knees and clothes. When I arrived home, my mother made me walk further down the road to Miss Garret's big house where the good lady must have spent an hour patching me up. She was well experienced though because she was a senior person in St John's Ambulance Brigade.

I must have seen Davy at school after that incident but I don't think we ever exchanged a civil word again. Soon afterwards the family moved away from Hilltop and I often wondered if Mr Gill had decided it was too dangerous for his family to live on top of a hill!

That day I learned a very important lesson: adults don't really know everything, after all!

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