



BRIAN JOHNSON

THE ENTHUSIAST

WHEN I WAS A KID, there were some beautiful two-tone cars around. Jaguar MkXs were particularly good at carrying off the two-colour look, and nearly all Hillman Minxes were two-tone (as far as I can remember, mine was black-and-rust). Rolls and Bentleys had some of the most beautifully hand-painted two-tone coachwork – dark silver over light; black and fawn – but all cars presented that way looked very special, which makes me wonder why they don't try it now.

Oh, I know, every automaker has beancounters who would suffer coronaries at the very thought of having to use a little skill to paint a car, but I think they're wrong. The Bugatti Veyron is a perfect example. I've seen them in a single colour and I swear they just don't look as good or as sexy. There was always something special about a white Mini-Cooper with a black roof, or the delightful Wood and Pickett basket-weave specials that showed the world England was still a little 'bobbies-on-bicycles-two-by-two' crazy.

I'd love to see the present carmakers give two-tone another shot – it lends a car that bespoke look, that 'I'm not gonna be Mr Average' feel.

My favourite two-tone race car of all time is the Porsche 917 in Gulf Racing colours of pale blue with an orange central stripe, which then wraps around the mouth of the car – it's stunning. Then again, gentlemen, I'm sure some of you will also have encountered so-called blondes who, when you got down to it, were two-tone as well...

Another disappearing car-fancy is the vinyl roof. Some of them were so bad, it looked like you were driving half a suitcase. I have inside knowledge about these auto add-ons, because between 1975 and 1979 I was out of work and broke and had a mortgage to pay. So I got a job with a windscreen replacement company, which is where I learned the trick of putting on a vinyl roof. They were very popular with the used-car salesman brigade, for the vinyl would cover a multitude of sins; add a couple of pinstripes down the side of the car, and a GT was born. Thankfully vinyl roofs were a passing fancy and became extinct. Praise be.

Back to two-tone cars – a couple of months ago I was invited to do a TV show for Speed, an amazing channel that's dedicated to all things motorised. They told me I was to drive a Lamborghini Gallardo Bicolore from Central Park to the 17th Street pier.

'Ooh, I can do that,' I thought. Then they told me that I had to do it in the morning rush hour, racing a guy riding a Vespa scooter and another fella taking the subway. I realised very quickly that this was a set-up, the whole point being that no matter what kind of car you have, it'll be pretty much as useless as a G-Wiz in the Manhattan traffic. 'It's just a bit of fun,' the director said.

So I arrived at Central Park at seven in the morning, to find two helicopter camera crews and chase cars waiting for me. I met my opponents, who were very optimistic about their chances, and went to have a look at the Lambo. It was mid-grey and very sexy looking, and when I sat in it I straight away felt at home; not as complicated as the Ferrari 458, and not as expensive, for an impractical car it seemed pretty useful. I checked out the important bits – the horn and the headlight flasher.

It was then I was told that each contestant had to stop mid-journey and eat breakfast, and not start again until that was finished. Bugger, I thought, that's pretty tough to do in a Lambo in Manhattan. Favourite to win was the pedestrian, and second was scooter-man, with yours truly a distant no-hoper.

At 7.30 exactly the flag dropped and off we went. I can't tell you too much about what happened next, because the New York cops would

certainly nick me, but I managed to find a street vendor and bought a Danish and a very milky coffee, which I could drink quickly because it wasn't too hot. I then belted down to the FDR, the motorway that runs down both sides of New York. I remember it being exciting – I just didn't wanna lose too badly.

The down ramp to the 17th Street pier came into view, and down I went and onto the pier, being filmed by two cameramen who looked a bit surprised. 'Where is everybody?' I asked as I got out. To which the director replied – 'Oh, no... You've won.'

And so I had. The scooter turned up 60 minutes later and the pedestrian 40 minutes after that, because his train had broken down. The fabulously impractical Lamborghini turned out to be remarkably practical after all. Yee-ha!

BRIAN JOHNSON

Brian joined AC/DC as lead singer in 1980, just before releasing *Back in Black* – the second-best-selling album of all time. A keen historic racer, he started with a Lotus Cortina, now has a Lola T70, and also drives a vintage Bentley. He is currently standing in for Nick Mason.

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