



People keep asking me why I like being a co-driver rather than a rally driver. The explanation, while somewhat circuitous, really is very logical when you understand that all of it is based on my long standing inability to deal with machinery - no matter how simple.

Somewhere along the line a myth has been perpetuated that man's first mechanical achievement that amounted to anything was the wheel. Now, don't get me wrong, the wheel is a dandy item and several wheels spaced appropriately on axles make tractor trailers which in turn makes the evening commute a nightmare that would have been far beyond the comprehension of any self-respecting cave man. The point is, I'm not sure that man did himself a giant favor inventing the wheel. It led to a need to invent other things since it didn't take long to get bored with the wheel. The wheel led to axles and then came gears, somewhere along the line we got the printing press and not long after that the internal combustion engine. Now, while it may be true that we have just skimmed several hundred years and failed to mention thousands of other important mechanical breakthroughs, the invention of the wheel marked the beginning of the eternal struggle of the species on who's in charge of what mechanical objects.

Thanks to our predecessors, our lives are simply overburdened with mechanical objects - or so we are taught in high school physics. And the only way we can maintain some sort of order in our lives is to assign each mechanical object to a person as it's primary user and responsible party. This is all well and good until the mechanical object breaks and the inevitable question, "How did this happen?" is asked by the person who has not been designated primary user but rather primary fixer. In only rare cases and with very special people (yours truly not being so blessed) is the primary user and the primary fixer the same person. Think of it this way, if the primary user and the primary fixer were the same person then our airways would not be cluttered with double a, m c o - beep beep.

Having never been accused of being mechanically inclined, I look upon my role as overseer of certain objects a burden. I don't want to know how the vacuum cleaner works, I just want it to pick up the mess. Asking me how it got broken is tantamount to asking me to explain how a diamond gets created out of a lump of coal. I know it's got something to do with pressure but we're all under a lot of that these days.

On a good day I'm almost as handy as the next person. On a not so good day, replacing the battery in a flash light can be a problem best left to the likes of Einstein. With a lot of tenacity and more than a few broken nails, I've pretty much got manually powered hand tools down pat (as long as one does not include a vise grip which is much more complicated than it needs to be since I can never seem to get it to grip anything). I've conquered both a blender and the food processor in one lifetime, which has to be considered a monumental achievement when one reviews my track record on ostensibly simpler machines, like the dust buster. The sewing machine, an object that performs a necessary and valuable chore for anyone who has split a seam, has been, since eighth grade Home Economics class, a mechanical monster that has my number. While I have a fleeting familiarity with what a sewing machine is "supposed to do" it seems that anything that can potentially go wrong with one of those things, will, the minute I sit down in front of it. With a high level of concentration I can thread the thing and even get the bobbin thread to come out of the little hole on the bottom like it is supposed to. But that is where my talent ends. When pro's start talking about needle alignment and foot tension, they might as well be talking about the make-up of the rings of Saturn.

Needless to say, my inability to deal routinely with anything more mechanical than a dust mop is a bit perplexing to a person like TH, who's very existence is based upon how much more plumbing he can fit into the MASS. When I try to explain to him that even the basic concepts of mechanics confuse me, he assures me that if I would simply read the manual it would all become abundantly clear. Well, I'm here to tell you that I tried to read the manual once - you know the kind they write for the sixth grade reading level - and I still managed to put the vacuum cleaner bag in upside down! And it worked - for awhile.

I appear to be one of those legion of people who learn by actual hands on experience - usually under the close supervision of a highly tolerant soul who thinks it's cute when I put sprocket A into hole C when the rest of the world knows just by looking that it belongs in outlet B. It seems that I achieve the best results when someone walks me through putting something together without

burdening me with a lot of explanation about why. Knowing why tends to distract me from the real goal which is simply to get the bloody machine to do what it is supposed to do - which is allegedly to make the job at hand simpler and my life easier.

Being the navigator in a very complicated machine like the MASS (that, by the way, does not come with a manual) is a job perfectly suited for one with my particular limitations. There are only three mechanical objects that I have primary responsibility for on any given event. (It used to be only two but I'm living proof that new tricks are possible when one really concentrates). The first is the electronic odometer that has been Suzie-proofed by TH with a toggle switch that I put in the right position over fifty percent of the time. The second is the plug-in for the intercom system and I'm so good at that now I don't even have to look up anymore. The third is the hardest, so I've saved that for last. It's not that the warning triangles are so complicated to form, it's that the need to pull them out is usually under a highly stressful situation when my wits are not exactly at their best. With lots of practice I can now get them formed pretty quickly, it's collapsing them back to their storage state that drives me nuts. I guess adrenaline figures into my performance success quotient!

Being mechanically disinclined does have its advantages. When a mechanical object that I am responsible for breaks down, I get to pass it off to a designated fixer. When a seam splits, I get to take the problem to the seamstress at the dry cleaner for resolution. But best of all, and the number one reason I like being a co-driver is that I get to ride in the right hand seat of the MASS and tell TH where to go.