



FEATURE

Paul Roberts: A History of Cars

Former Stranglers lead singer Paul Roberts takes a breather from the theatre to chat to justwheels.co.uk about his car history, his frightening accident and pet hates on the road.

Paul Roberts is best known for that all time classic "Golden Brown", a tune produced by Brit band the Stranglers. After a decade of hits the group have gone their separate ways with Roberts ending up in theatre.

During a rehearsal for "Darling Buds of May", a show quite the opposite from the rock stages graced by the Stranglers in the past, Roberts gives us the lowdown on his car preferences and tells us whether women are better drivers than men.

What started your interest in cars?

James Bond really, when I was a kid. Oh yes DB5 and DB6. If I ever earned a fortune I would buy a DB7, a DB8 infact. I would like the whole range from 5-10.

I also grew up with a chap called George who ran the TR shop in London and then I moved on to Triumphs. My friend Chris Coleman also runs the Jaguar shop and they're very good old friends of mine - I was their little boy. We used to wreck the cars and bring them into Chiswick high street, tip them on their side chassis' and take them into the shop.

I went all over Britain collecting redundant spares they used to call it, from Greenwich autos and eccentric boys from Leamington in Coventry. I had a very rich car life from an early age.

So could you say you're a bit of a mechanic as well?

I'm an engineer by trade although I didn't finish my apprenticeship. Here we go: did you know the TR 3-5 can be taken apart with a half inch 9/16th spanner?

Did you pass your driving test the first time?

Yes, two lessons then I passed. Obviously I had been driving before that, haha.

Would you say you're a good driver?

Always been a good driver - I do care about my passengers thoughts, that's the main thing for me. If their uncomfortable I want them to tell me.

What do you look for in a car?

Comfort, reliability, economy and safety - very important.

Are you a fan of the many Green initiatives taking place in the motor industry currently?

Yes, but I have a big problem with manufacturers selling cars that are tearing roads up, like Expireds. 20 years previously we were hammering on about the environment, emissions may have gone down a little but the cars are getting bigger and people are becoming more selfish; particularly in Britain, driving things around London which should have never been allowed into London. I have a very big problem with that.

You're getting tyres made with oil, they're huge tyres tearing roads apart and you've got one little lady sitting in them driving to town and back or one little man. It's absolutely wrong.

Who do you think are the main culprits?

Any high brow designer. I don't see why Audi, BMW and Volvo have to follow suit when it comes to building big cars, if they hit you you're dead. There is no 30 mile an hour or twenty, what is the point. Gordan Ramsey drives a humongous car - why does he need that car. He doesn't carry pots and pans around everywhere does he?

Out of the following which would you prefer to drive a Lamborghini, vintage Cadillac or a hummer?

I'm not a great Lamborghini fan. I don't like Hummers at all, I think they're vulgar. I'd probably go for a vintage Cadillac but I probably wouldn't drive it because of the mess it would make.

What car do you drive now? Why did you choose it?

I've got a Golf Mark 4 (Mk4) 1.8 20 valve, it was pretty much down to money for me.

What was your first car?

An Osten 1100 that my father gave me with old greased pumped up expansion.

I read you were unfortunately in a car accident a few years ago. Has that changed how you drive and your feelings towards cars?

Oh yeah. I haven't got over it in my mind. Every time I see someone going fast it makes my stomach turn. If I want to get somewhere very fast I'll maybe go 80. I wouldn't want to tell you how fast I used to drive. I was very depressed and trying to get away from what I was doing. When you spend so many hours away from home it's very hard to drive at 60. I know that contradicts what I've just said.

Could you tell us what happened?

It was the last gig I ever did for the Stranglers and I was driving from Nottingham. I was asked by someone to give them a lift and I had never taken that person home before.



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The irony of it was that we went into a garage and there was this little boy racer there. I said to him make sure you drive carefully mate - just because I talk to everyone. I drove off and was just approaching a junction from the M23 to the M25. I remember my speed falling from 60 when I pulled over to the slip road. I wasn't going very fast and it was slightly damp. Suddenly I felt something seem to go at the front of my car and I went across the nearside mud and I lost control of it.



It started to turn and hit the barriers. The car jumped up and I shat myself - not literally. I suddenly said 'oh my go, my head, my neck,' and I saw the passenger side of the car smashed.

I thought I have to get out. The car stopped still on the blind side of the bend facing the wrong way upside down. It looked like a ramp; you couldn't see the lights so it was deadly. So I had to get out quickly and stop traffic and they didn't want to stop.

It was terrifying, but it was a long time coming. I'm just glad it happened when it did. If it had happened a week before I'd probably be dead. The psychological side of it is devastating.

Are you a fan of racing/motor sports?

I totally lost interest in formula 1. I don't want to see cars following each other.

My friends infuse about the technical side of it. Hang on, I don't want to do figures: I can go down to the bank and do that by working out how much I owe. I don't want to stand there and work out how much petrol they use - it's a joke.

But I take my son to the British Grand Prix. I was invited a few years ago and the cars looked lovely. The greatest thing of all were the 1970s cars. The JPS and 6 wheeled elf. Every time they came around the engines were growling and changing gears physically. It was just so much fun and my son said to me afterwards - 'this is just so much better.'

But half the stands were empty. Formula 1 has such a grip on people now. Perhaps because it's more exciting - there is that chance that someone is going to crash and there is a chance that someone is going to come off, and there is a good old bunch in the corner. It's all about dare and energy.

Do you think women are worse than men when it comes to driving?

I don't think that's an issue. I think men probably, because men think they're better but I know women who can keep up with any guy and men who drive as safe as women.

Are there any driving habits that really annoy you?

Not indicating at roundabouts. Parking on a double yellow line and putting on their flash lights - what you think that's not going to get you a ticket - also people who put them on coming up to an accident.

People who fly along at 100 mph on the motorway and insist on indicating on going in then pull in and out, in and out. Just stay where you are and we're all a lot safer.

What was it like on the road with the Stranglers?

Well I used to have my own entertainment and get up and see the sights wherever I was. The rest of the band wouldn't do anything like that. I spent most of my time with the crew - so I had a great time.

We had an American tour bus and an English tour bus. I spent a long of time on tour buses thinking I was going to die. You call your bed your coffin because you never know when you're going to get out of it.

How does it compare to touring with the theatre?

Oh I love this. Its so nice being around people who just want to have fun: there wasn't that feeling in band at all. I really like the people I'm working with, they're just so warm. This is so much fun, very hard work. It's a different discipline.

Are you still in touch with the band?

I don't speak to any of the band. I don't have time for them, a couple remain in my heart and that's the way it goes.

What can viewers expect from the play?

A happy rump, it will make you feel that you want to be part of our family and remind people that there is warmth and love in the world. It's certainly not a Stranglers show. (he laughs).

Everyone involved is very much looking forward to entertaining everybody and trying to expand our family into the stalls, dress circle and above.

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