



With Whom Do You Ride?

ITS NAME WAS TOOTSIE. METALLIC BROWN with a beige interior, my first car resembled a Tootsie Roll sprinkled with gold glitter, and soon after pulling onto campus my senior year in college, it received its very appropriate nickname.

The car was a gift from my Aunt Nancy and Uncle Pat. My senior year, in need of a car for my internship, Nancy gave me her 1982 metallic brown Mercury Capri. It was delivered to me in Santa Cruz, where I was staying at our student government retreat before school started. I was in awe of Tootsie. It was not just a vehicle; it was a ticket to freedom. With parking permits difficult to come by at my small college, which was tucked back into the hills of Santa Barbara, I spent the first years of college riding “The Loser Cruiser,” a shuttle that looped from the campus, downtown, to the beach and back, providing free transportation. Looking back on it now, it was a great service offered by the school, but that didn’t keep students from coming up with snide names: The Loser Cruiser, Shuttle of Shame, Shame Train. The freedom of my own car was something I had never experienced before. At home, I had driven my parents’ cars, and at school I’d never had wheels. With the addition of a car though, I could go to a store by myself, visit off-campus friends at any hour, and get away on my own – something I hadn’t been able to do in three years.

Driving from Santa Cruz back to Santa Barbara, in my “new” car, traveling along winding roadways carved through high hills, and accelerating on stretches along the coastline, I felt invincible!

As Tootsie and I got to know each other though, I discovered some quirks. The car had come with the warning to pump the gas before starting it. One day, in frustration, I went back to my dorm and told my roommate that the car wouldn’t start.

“You have to pump the gas, remember,” she said. This was a girl who, when I first met her, didn’t know Thanksgiving was on a Thursday every year, nor that Canada stretched the entire width of North America, so I doubted her ability to navigate the world of auto mechanics and cars with much success.

“I did, it just won’t start!” I whined in frustration.

“Let’s go try it again,” she said standing up and grabbing me by the arm. Out to the parking lot we went. I unlocked Tootsie and slipped behind the wheel while she settled into the passenger’s seat. “This is exactly what I do every time,” I said, pumping my foot up and down on the gas pedal as fast and furious as I could.

“Stop!” she yelled. “You’re flooding the engine!” Turns out I’d been flooding the engine every time I got into the car. I thought if one pump was helpful, wouldn’t 25 be better?

My roommate-turned-auto genius explained why only a few pumps were needed. From then on, Tootsie started every time. Parking was another story. The parking lot at my internship was tight and on a hill, meaning that most of the spots were angled upward. I quickly learned that Tootsie’s parking brake was more for looks than function. When I parked on a hill and set the brake, the car would slowly roll backward. No problem! I cruised the streets until I found curbside parking, even if it meant parking several blocks away.

Once Tootsie’s kinks were worked out, it served me well throughout the year. As graduation loomed closer though, and the time to leave Southern California approached, I had to figure out what to do with Tootsie. Though great for Santa Barbara, I doubted Tootsie would make the 1,200-mile trek home, and I knew that with rear wheel drive it would be a death trap the minute it met the winter combination of snow, ice and the Freya hill.

With a twinge of sadness, I sold Tootsie to a girl across the hall in the dorm. She was a junior and I knew Tootsie would enjoy another year in beautiful Santa Barbara under her ownership. Diploma tucked under my arm, and suitcases in tow, I last saw Tootsie, glistening in the parking lot of my dorm, metallic brown finish glinting in the sun, as I left campus for the last time.

First cars; they set roots deep into our hearts! In this issue, as we celebrate autos, we asked some readers to share tales of their first cars, as well as what their dream car is (p.158) Some said Porsche, some said Lexus, and most said, fully loaded. (As for my dream car, I’ve always thought I couldn’t go wrong with a Loomis armored truck, fully loaded!)

Whatever your car story is, whether you have a Pinto in your past, or a Porsche in your future, remember, it’s not what you drive, but with whom you ride that matters the most in life.

Happy reading, and safe driving,

Blythe