

# MY TINY PICK-ME-UP

Andy Kershaw roars back onto Radio 4 behind the wheel of a delightfully silly – and very small – British original

### Cheaper than Walking

Monday 11.00am Radio 4

**T**HAT'S RIGHT, IN the photo I'm picking up a car with one hand. Not to show I have the strength of Popeye but to demonstrate just how small this car is. It looks like a toy, but it isn't. It's a grown-up car and central exhibit at the Manx Transport Heritage Museum in Peel, Isle of Man. The museum is a compact, bijou kind of place, but even more compact and bijou is Peel's very own contribution to the history of motor manufacturing, and holder of the world record for the smallest ever production car – the Peel P50.

Manhandling the P50 was a requirement of ownership. In fact, there's a promotional photo from the early 1960s – see inset below – that shows a woman doing just that. She's wearing white stilettos and holding a small suitcase in one hand, grinning at the camera as she drags the blighter into a parking space.

The Peel P50 was manufactured in the early 60s – the only car ever to be produced in the Isle of Man – and represented the zenith or, more accurately, the swansong of an extraordinary period of British car-making. For a decade or so, beginning in the late 40s, Britain excelled in producing tiny cars, generally powered by tiny engines and usually built by family companies.

Forget the continental bubble cars of the time, like Messerschmitts, Heinkels and Isettas – this is the story of the Opperman Stirling, the Allard Clipper, the Bond and the Frisky Family 3. Cars that were so small and economical that, as the advertising literature described it, they were almost cheaper than walking.

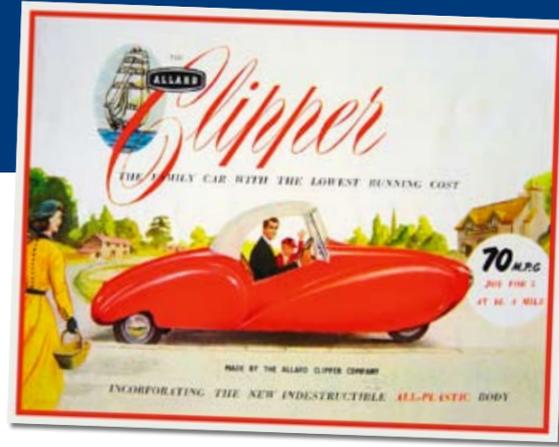
The microcar was a luxurious advance on the motorcycle and sidecar. Strange as it may seem, there was a time when putting your kids in the boot was actually viewed as

*"It handles like a blancmange on castors and veers all over the road"*



**EASY RIDER**  
Andy Kershaw isn't super-strong, it's the Peel P50 that's light enough to be man (or woman) handled

**UNIQUE SELLING POINT**  
Adverts for the shapely Allard Clipper boasted a "new indestructible all-plastic body"



luxury motoring, and not a reason for someone to phone social services. Most of us nowadays take car ownership for granted, but you have to remember that, in the grim austerity of the postwar years, transport options were a lot more limited. Particularly when in 1956 the Suez Crisis threatened to cut off Europe's oil supplies and everybody began to see the point of cars that were capable of a hundred miles or more per gallon.

The P50 and the two-seater Peel Trident, were the brainchild of an inventive, restless and intensely private man called Cyril Cannell. For many years his company in Peel produced fibreglass boats and racing motorcycle fairings. But Cannell had long dreamt of producing an affordable fibreglass car and the P50 was the realisation of that dream. Between 1963 and 1966 his company turned out about 200 P50s and Tridents. When Cannell died in 2008 the P50 pictured here provided a three-wheeled salute to its inventor.

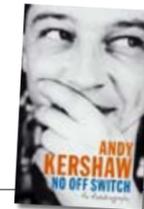
**O**NE OF THE first British microcars was the Bond, named after its creator Lawrie Bond. His "One-Eighth Litre Shopping Car" went into production in Preston in 1949. The Mark A Bond was an aluminium three-wheeled open-topped tourer. Early adverts show a family gazing fondly at their Bond with the strapline, "You too ought to own a Bond Minicar – the World's most economical car". When Britain's first motorway, the Preston bypass, was opened in 1958 a Bond was handed the considerable honour of being the first private car to drive along it.

Getting behind the wheel of one of these vehicles is a unique automotive experience. Even a chicken might develop claustrophobia in a Peel P50. It handles like a blancmange on castors, veers all over the road and gave me the strong sensation that I'd stolen a dodgem.

The microcar was a product of an age of possibility and also necessity. No wonder some courageous entrepreneurs have just put the Peel P50 back into production. These are people who believe that yesterday's answer to austerity is also today's – and tomorrow's.

Oh, and did I mention that microcars are delightfully silly and huge fun...

**RT Offer** Andy Kershaw's autobiography *No Off Switch* is available for £8.54 (usually £8.99) inc p&p. Call **01326 569444** (national rate) quoting RT, or visit [www.rtoffer.sparkledirect.com](http://www.rtoffer.sparkledirect.com)



## PICK OF THE WEEK

Jane Anderson

**Archive on 4: A Life Less Ordinary**  
Saturday 8.00pm Radio 4



Sandra Gregory is the definition of stoical, which probably accounts for why she is still alive and sane. In early 1993 she made a really stupid decision and agreed to carry 89g of heroin in her back passage through the flight check-in at Bangkok airport.

A suspicious customs team stopped her for an x-ray and she was, as she puts it, "caught bang to rights." Why had she agreed to carry the drugs for someone else? Desperation is her only explanation. She'd run out of money in Thailand and was going to use the £1,000 she'd been promised if she carried the gear to buy herself a ticket home to England.

Gregory makes for an interesting first subject in the return of *A Life Less Ordinary* – the series that examines how ordinary people are transformed by extraordinary events – but not a particularly likeable one. While she takes it firmly on the chin about how stupid she was and how guilty she felt, and still feels, about letting her family and friends down, there is something frighteningly determined about her. Perhaps that's how she survived the squalor, rats and leeches of a Thai jail, although she found her incarceration in Durham Prison – after she had been repatriated, but still had to serve her sentence – with the likes of Rosemary West far more depressing.

Gregory's feelings about the British media, who responded to her imprisonment with a mixture of broadsheet empathy and tabloid disgust, are extreme. She asks herself why she has agreed to work with them again on this programme. Maybe she still likes to take a risk?



**BANGED UP**  
Sandra Gregory on trial in Thailand

## Ambridge Diary

*The Archers* this week...

**H**e may have the voice of Duncan Bannatyne but it's doubtful that Jazzer has the brains. So why is Tom seeking business advice from everyone's favourite pigman – surely production of the ready-meal range isn't facing difficulties?

No less fraught is the atmosphere at the Dower House where Lillian is still curious about how much Matt might be to blame for Joyce's recent accident. Then there's the news that Matt's half brother Paul (yes, he of the strong shoulder to cry on) has been asking after her.

Yet sigh no more, for Lynda's plans for a Christmas production of *Much Ado about Nothing* are in full swing. Fallon is frontrunner for her Beatrice, but finding her Benedick is proving a harder task. **David Brown**