

HARBURN PENSIONERS IN PITLOCHRY CAROUSEL CAROUSAL

The rain as we set off did little to dampen the spirits of the (bakers') dozen members of the *Over 50s Friday Lunch Club/Oldsters' Soup Kitchen* on our jaunt to see *Carousel* at Pitlochry Festival Theatre last Saturday (2nd July). With Allan's firm and practised hand at the wheel and Mary riding shotgun, er, umbrella, from *Harret* to *West Torphin* (Heather & John) to *Broadmeadow* (Isobel & Jim) to, oops...

[driver's expletive deleted]

It would be unkind to note that the Maclaughlans had neglected to pick up their next-door-neighbour, but life *can* be cruel at times. To *Station House* (Sandra & Eric), to *Phantassie* (Anne) and out to the Lang Whang wilds by *Halfway House* (Ray) and *Aberlyn* (Helen) where some kind of male-bonding bash was going on.

It used to be commonplace to see a chain left dangling to the road from vehicles in an attempt to ward off travel sickness. Mary thought a trailing broolly wedged in the door during a minibus manoeuvre might serve the same purpose, but the door wouldn't shut and the grating noise was excessive, so one of Helen's bodyguards sprang to our aid.

[driver's expletive deleted]

Back to *Harret* (and a bemused Howard) and down to *Polbeth* to pick up Kitty at *The Firs* (or *The Stumps* as it's known since the Chainsaw Incident). A tank-filling stop at the Lizzie Bryce became a bladder-emptying one, and us a mere three miles from home. This didn't bode well in terms of continence, but the next pit-stop was to be Pit-lochry itself.

Via Stirling or The Bridges? was the question tossed between driver and replacement shotgun. Half an hour quicker by The Bridges, so it was the Fife route chosen, and we saw the new third?/fourth?/fifth? Forth (Replacement) Bridge all strung up and almost ready to be played by wind, birds or some heavenly harper, and we began to speed northwards. Or tried to. For Allan, not long ago District Governor of Rotaria, was finding himself in the unusual position of being governed himself, by a 60mph governor wired into the minibus's engine.

[driver's expletive deleted]

Guide Anne was meanwhile whiling away the journey with name and details of every other farm we passed, along with the genealogical web woven by Fife and Lothian farmers over the generations. But near Kinross they (Highway Maintenance, not the farmers) were grouting the M90's worn concrete slabs ready for tarmac, so our trusty driver's additional governor became the slow crawl ahead of us (2½ miles per quarter hour).

[driver's expletive deleted]

But the sun was out, and after that, a delightful spontaneous detour off the motorway took us through the Victorian splendours of the side-streets of western Perth ('Better than Perth, Western Australia' wisecracked Jim. Ray muttered something inaudible).

[driver's expletive deleted]

Not far now, but then we hit the notorious single lane A9, and the equally notorious 50mph temporary maximum speed for HGVs. But the landscape *was* lovely.

[driver's expletive deleted]

Yet we managed to arrive at the theatre by 1pm, where our stalwart driver was told by the resident gnome that after dropping off his passengers he would find the buspark halfway up the mountainside and be able to abseil down to join us.

[driver's expletive deleted]

Queues for food, a Kew in the Gift Shop (sheepish present necessities), and a light lunch at the theatre made lighter by dietary requirements. Jill and Richard (paymaster and organiser, to whom much thanks), joining us from their flat in Dundee, made up the dentist's dozen (15, almost half a mouthful), and the musical could start. No show without them!

And what a show! A superb harbourside set with slatted laths round-framing the behind-gauze orchestra and bright costumes all a-glitter in the stage lighting. We saw Billy Bigelow, carousel barker with an eye for the ladies, meet the love of his life, only to be tempted from the straight and narrow by his wharf-rat pal with the flashing knife: an eventual suicide led to an ersatz heaven and a ghostly reappraisal of his life and the daughter he never knew. Clam-bakes and carousal, with expertly-wielded raggedy puppets standing in for a kiddie cast, were all authentically acted with darn good east coast accents and some top-notch singing (perhaps a little loud for unwaxed ears). Chuckles to the right of me, sobbing to the left, and a few grey heads nodding in front, despite the drama, humour and pathos of this truly excellent production of Rodgers' & Hammerstein's musical. Bring on our pantomime!

After *Carousel* came our own mini-carousal, booked ahead at *Drummonds'*. Five of the more sprightly of us walked there, crossing the Tummel over the shoogly suspension bridge and uphill through the sunlit trees, arriving at the same time as the bus-borne others. In a lodge-style restaurant/bar resplendent with colliery plates and paintings, coal artefacts, railway prints and individually pyrographed place-boards we split unconsciously into laddies and lassies (with two cross-sitters) and despite a cross-table order (with a few cross words) amid chatter and laughter we all enjoyed our Fish High Teas (with bread and butter!), steak pies or scampis, and some of us had our just desserts.

The dry drive back through the magnificent scenery was, according to our dutiful driver, 'a doddle', and we were back home at the back of nine, though it was raining again on the Whang when Helen stepped out of the bus into a puddle, and the boys had all gone home. The planned whip-round to buy Allan a TomTom (he already has a Tom) somehow never came about. Whatever we may say about him (all in jest of course), he drove magnificently and selflessly, and we would have been nowhere without him. As it was, we all had a great time. As they say in Spain: 'May God repay you, señor!'

[driver's expletive deleted]

[JGW]