

Breathless in Wilhelmshaven - Paul Levitt

If you were a PRS-ite in the fab fifties or the swinging sixties you will recall those magnificent (and some not-so-magnificent) cars that our teachers and parents drove. In 1960, for example, Mr. Callan, housemaster of Drake Boys, had a nice black MG Magnette ZB saloon that I had the “pleasure” of washing as a punishment for talking after lights out. Another teacher, Dai Davies (history master), drove a black Mercedes 300 (or was it 220b?) from which a sixth-form wag “borrowed” the emblem from the bonnet, offering it back to him as a replacement for the one that had “gone missing”. Cars that weren’t black (yes, there were a few around, even in 1960) belonged to Mr. Hayes of Collingwood Boys (nicknamed “Gabby” for some reason unknown to me), who drove a classy maroon Sunbeam Talbot. But arguably the most striking car was the pretty little Simca (Aronde Caravelle?) cabriolet owned by Miss Tyler, art mistress and head of Drake Girls. The two-tone bodywork and white-wall tyres set it off a treat.

Parents’ cars would roll up at half term and a brand new Ford Anglia (the one with the newfangled rear window) drew several admiring glances when parked at the Sportplatz. I think it belonged to the parents of Judith and Mike “Titch” Howes, two former pupils and our neighbours in Herford (anyone know what happened to them?). Anyway, our dad rolled up on one easy weekend in a tiny Austin Metropolitan two-seater cabriolet in which four of us had to squeeze for a ride to some local mud flats masquerading as a beach. With just a token bench seat for toddlers and virtually no headroom with the hood up, riding along with two strapping teenagers in the back was no joke. Not being a particularly good traveler (were any of us at that age?), I had to have the windows rolled down to avoid feeling sick. But when driving through Wilhelmshaven on this particularly hot summer’s day, the hood and the windows stayed firmly shut, apparently to prevent us from breathing in any of the air outside because of a polio epidemic in the town!

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