

Murder on the Aachen Expressway?

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My friend Gordon, his girlfriend Denise and I are in his Frankfurt-registered Ford Taunus coupé (red with a black roof) en route from Frankfurt to Calais and the ferry to Dover.

Driving home for Christmas.... la la la. All three of us live and work in Frankfurt and are looking forward to getting back to our English homes for the festive season. The drive, however, is not speedy, with heavy snow falling as we crawl along the autobahn nearing Aachen. This was where we had to join the E40 to take us east past Aachen, Liege and Brussels and on to the channel ports.

In the driving snow, we miss the exit, but not by much more than 30 metres, when we stop on the hard shoulder. With no other traffic on the road at that time, Gordon reverses (unlawfully) and tip-toes round the cloverleaf to the E40. Coming on to the bridge over the road we had just left, we are confronted by a polizist in a long white mac and hard helmet brandishing a large lollipop of a red light showing "Halt". So we do. Gordon opens his window. In German, of course, the cop doesn't beat about the bush: "You reversed on the autobahn. That is illegal. 100 metres after the bridge there is a picnic area. Pull into it and stop." Gordon closes his window. From the rear, Denise says, only half joking, "Should we make a run for it?" Thank goodness we don't.

Gordon crunches into the snow-covered picnic area. Suddenly, there is a police car backing up in front of us, another behind and a large police van alongside, illuminating the area from searchlights mounted on its roof. Being in the front passenger seat of the left-hand drive vehicle, I am looking across Gordon as another cop signals him to lower his window.

"Where are you going?"

"To England, we are English."

"Passports!" We duly hand them over.

"Get out and open the boot." So Gordon does and disappears from sight with the cop. Then Denise taps me on the shoulder and says, in a low voice, "Look to your right."

The picnic area slopes up from where we are parked. In summer, a grassed area dotted with wooden tables and benches. Now, pristine white..... with seven policemen in black riot gear all pointing their sub-machine guns at our car!

What the

We just sit and wait, saying nothing, not daring to move.

10 minutes later Gordon reappears. As he slides into the driving seat, the cops all troop into the van and it and the police cars are gone.

“What happened? Did you get fined? Why the guns?”

In the van, the cop who had “escorted” Gordon from the car and inspected the contents of our boot had accepted we were genuinely who we had said we were and told Gordon: on the previous morning, December 22, a bank in Kaiserslautern had been robbed and the four robbers had escaped. Three of them, two men and a woman aged around 30, escaped in a red car with black roof and Frankfurt number-plates....after killing a policeman during the getaway. We, and our car, fitted, far too closely for our liking, the description of the criminals, the Baader-Meinhof gang!

Had we “made a run for it”, the trigger-happy cops would certainly have made it a “Murder on the Aachen Expressway” and you would never have known me or my story.