

A Real Con-Man



My brother-in-law Brian lived in Teignmouth and with his father ran a small business specialising in motor body repairs. They had been established for many years and had built up an enviable reputation for quality work. Brian's father retired and Brian and his two sons continued the business. From time to time, when business was quiet, Brian would buy-in a motor car and restore it to pristine condition. The vehicle would then be offered for sale by placing an advertisement in the Western Morning News. There was no E-bay in those days and even if there were Brian, in his old-fashioned way, would not accept these new fangled sales methods! I was a frequent visitor to their work-shop and Brian was proud to show me his latest acquisition. It was a Vauxhall motor car and following Brian's restoration it looked like new, it wouldn't take long to sell? The advertisement was placed and the price quoted - all that was required was a buyer. Within a few days a man appeared on a Friday afternoon looked at the car and purchased it for the asking price. He told Brian that he worked in a bank in Bristol and lived at week-ends in a Cockwood property. The car was required to travel to Bristol during the week. He paid for the vehicle with a cheque drawn on a Bristol Bank. Brian believed what he said, handed over the vehicle log-book and the man drove off in the Vauxhall car. Brian spoke to me following the sale and was very pleased that it had been achieved with the minimum of effort. My first question was, "How much did he knock down the price?" I suppose my attitude was attuned to the Arab philosophy where you always haggle and that's half the pleasure in doing a deal. Brian, to my surprise, said the man paid the asking price so everyone was happy. I suppose my police background made me question anyone but there was a niggle there.

I have always been keen on motor cars and dealer's premises are always an attraction to me. I enjoy looking around them to see what bargains

there are? At this time I lived in the St. Thomas area in Cowick Street. There were a couple of motor dealers' yards and as I passed one of them I saw this very nice Vauxhall motor car on display. It looked very much like the one Brian had sold the previous day, could it be? I couldn't quite believe it? Some how the registration number had stuck in my mind, there was no doubt about it. It was the car Brian had sold - it was very suspicious to say the least. I suppose the man could have taken a quick profit on it but not very likely. This needed looking into. I spoke to the car dealer acquainting him with the facts, he said that he purchased the vehicle the previous day for cash. It had been a part exchange deal and the man had taken a much cheaper car as part of the deal. He was due to collect the cheaper vehicle in a few days time? Pigs may fly, he had got cash and was very unlikely to call back. I now had the sad task of telling Brian that he had been 'done'. He had in effect lost his car and several hundred pounds. To make matters even worse, if that were possible, the car had been obtained by false pretence and not stolen. This in effect meant that the dealer had lawful possession. Brian was mortified and when you analyse the facts it was clear that he had been a victim of a typical con-man. He said that he worked in a bank, which gave the victim confidence that the man was honest. He presented the cheque late on Friday knowing it couldn't be paid in to the bank until the Monday and it would still need days to clear. Brian was naïve. I don't think he was aware that such people existed. I suppose the correct course of action would be to report it to the police and leave it to them! The one big advantage that Brian and I had was that the offender would be unaware that the offence had been discovered so quickly.

There was very little chance that he would remain in the area but it was worth visiting Cockwood and the surrounding area. He probably still had cash from the sale of the car and I

thought a visit to the local pubs maybe worth a try. There was little else to go on so during the evening we called on the pub adjacent to Cockwood Harbour. I said to Brian if you see him tap me on the shoulder and leave the rest to me. I've always been quite a lucky person. There was only one person there, he was seated at the bar with a glass of beer in front of him. "Hello are you the man who bought Brian's car, are you happy with it?" He said that he was. No good beating about the bush. "I know you have sold it." He looked very shaken and was obviously in shock. I told him that I was a police officer and that I was arresting him. He quickly regained his composure saying I couldn't arrest him. I thought maybe he was going to make a run for it. I then left him in no doubt that he was under arrest and I was taking him to Teignmouth Police Station. I then handed him over to the Police at Teignmouth giving them all the facts. He was, I understand, interviewed and bailed to return there some days hence. He never did. I think the Police at Teignmouth were very poor in the way they dealt with this matter. They failed to see if this man was wanted - a phone call to C.R.O (Criminal Records) would have revealed that he was wanted all over the Country for similar offences. I felt pretty bitter, what I consider had been a good job was 'cocked up' I don't think he was ever arrested? On reflection it would have been better if I had taken him to Exeter Police Station? The end of the story was that Brian repurchased the car from the dealer at the price he had paid for it.. Brian learnt a very important lesson - when you sell check and double check - better still take cash!

To be continued.....

Barry Forrest-Jones