

# Changing pitch

Shane Barratt hopes to find himself in a number of sticky situations in 2010... putting all on display on his Swift caravan or Volvo car!

This summer we Barratts will be hunting down the 'Big Five'. No, the editor hasn't acceded to my request of two issues ago to be sent on a once-in-a-lifetime caravanning tour of Africa where, from the safety of the stable door, I might train my binoculars on leopard, lion, rhino, buffalo and elephant.

The Big Five I'm talking about are those modern-day hunting trophies which signify one's spirit of adventure, thirst for culture and penchant for Victoria sponge. I'm talking car stickers, and they don't get much bigger than the National Trust, the Wildlife Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Caravan Club (natch) or West Ham United FC.

There are others which one could argue merit a place in the Big Five; those little drawings of fish displayed on the bumpers of cars driven by born-again Christians, for instance. For years I thought these people must belong to some kind of clandestine society of fishmongers until a friend of mine pointed out the religious symbolism. Then there's the 'Baby on Board' brigade. Grrrrrr! When Louise was a baby we never felt the need to patronise the driver behind by assuming they were less capable of road safety than we were. What kind of example does that set the little'un?

At Louise's insistence, our car stickers usually end up on one of the Swift's windows rather than the Volvo's. Added to the Brittany Ferries and dealership transfers which were on the caravan when we bought it, Louise has placed stickers for Heart FM and Apple Mac. The latter fell out of a holdall containing a laptop Sandra bought herself a couple of years ago, and before I could say "Control-Alt-Delete" we were driving around the countryside promoting a computer manufacturer.

Three of the Big Five have been in place on the rear window for a few years now. The fluttering red flag of The Caravan Club is nestled between the Wildlife Trust's badger and my

prized 'Come on you Irons!' West Ham sticker. No lover of football, Sandra warned me one day that if I displayed anything West Ham-related on our car or caravan, there would be hell to pay. Embracing my beloved, I reassuringly kissed her on the forehead, nodded in acquiescence and a week or so later – season 2005/06 as I recall, shortly before the Hammers made it to the FA Cup Final against Liverpool – paid a most enjoyable trip to the club's merchandise store in east London.

For a month or so after she clapped eyes on the sticker there was no reaction. Nothing. No Arctic silence, no look of burning hate. Then, one weekend when we took the caravan to the south coast, as I lazed on the sofa with a beer in one hand, Sebastian Faulks in the other, utterly enveloped in the glow of relaxed holidaymaker, I caught Sandra and Louise sniggering. They continued until my glow turned into a glower.

Finally Sandra told me to turn around and look at the window. To my horror I discovered I'd been resting my bald patch against a 'Chav on Board' sticker the pair of them had found on the internet and slyly placed next to the football one. One all!

Our quest over the coming months is to add the RSPB and National Trust motifs to the Swift's windows. That we are surely the only middle-class family left in Britain without either the famous avocet or oak leaf stickers on our car/caravan is down to my reluctance to see the wood for trees, so to speak. Every time we visit a reserve or stately home, here's how it goes [tightwad husbands, turn away now]:

Sandra immediately falls for the commercial charms of the old biddy trying to sell annual membership.

I'll stand a few feet back, feigning interest in a shelf of souvenir mugs while crushing the life out of the wallet hidden deep inside my slacks.

After an eternity of friendly prattle, Sandra will turn to me to relay the financial facts.

I'll baulk at the price.

Sandra will huff. I'll puff...

And we'll end up paying on entry once again, despite the fact that deep down I can appreciate that it will be cheaper if we join for the year.

Alas, no membership pack, thus no car sticker. However, as I simply cannot face another withering glance over the pince-nez from a ticket biddy, I've promised Sandra that I will reluctantly concede to common sense this year. At last, the Big Five will be ours, all ours!

So watch out for a West Ham-supporting family of chavs who visit stately homes and wildlife reserves, listen to Heart FM and do their book-keeping on an Apple Mac. I shouldn't bother to knock and say 'Hi' though... we'll be out squeezing every last penny of value from all those annual memberships.



“ The Big Five are those modern-day hunting trophies that signify one's spirit of adventure, thirst for culture and penchant for Victoria sponge ”