

That road test— then and now

Early Monday morning, I passed another one of those milestones in life with my youngest daughter. She took her driving test.

Some time ago, Jen decided she'd like to take her driving test in Guelph instead of waiting several months to get a test date at John Rhodes Centre over on Airport Road in Brampton.

Personally, I'm a firm believer if a young driver can successfully pilot a vehicle to John Rhodes without being totally terrorized, the Ministry of Transportation outta just give them their licence—it's totally insane to drive to.

I had no problem with Jen choosing Guelph. As she slid behind the wheel of my car that morning, and we headed up Hwy. 7 to Guelph, I experienced feelings of déjà vu.

The month was September, the year was 1967, but other than that, the exact date escapes me. I was 16-years-old as I drove with my mom seated in the passenger seat of our 1966 Pontiac Parisienne sedan, parking in front of the old volunteer ambulance building in Georgetown, beside the Remembrance Park.

Every Wednesday a team of Ministry of Transportation officials arrived in Georgetown to strike terror into the heart of every 16-year-old wannabe driver, as they subjected them to "The Road Test."

I'd had my 120-day licence since my 16th birthday in June, (none of that 365-day sissy thing back then) and I figured it was high time I was a full-time driver.

Jen's examiner strolled over to the car, greeting her, "Hi Jennifer, my name's 'such 'n such.' I'll be your examiner for this road test."

He looked like a child— maybe 30-years-old.

My examiner, on the other hand, was probably closer to 100, an ex-army drill sergeant, who woke up each morning mad at his wife, and he walked around with a chip on his shoulder the size of a 2 x 4.

I assumed he ate small children for breakfast.

"Aren't you going to lock your door?" I asked meekly, quoting driver ed class. His glare indicated a

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Ted Brown

definite 'no' and I figured I'd failed before turning the key of the ignition.

"Pull out and drive to Main Street Mr. Brown," he growled in his condescending enunciated monotone, "Then execute a right turn at the corner..."

He obviously hated young males, and I was certain his lot in life was to make their lives a living hell, if only for that 15 minutes he spent in the car with them.

But he was God as far as that driver's licence went.

Down Main Street, make a right on the red around the corner to Mill, down Edith to Church, back up Main, then parallel park (in THE smallest spot he could find for the Pontiac) and back to the ambulance hall. Thankfully, I aced the parallel parking— perfect!

"It appears you passed Mr. Brown," he said like I'd somehow ruined his day, "Just brush up your skills on those 'right turns on a red' a bit."

As Jen and her examiner pulled back into the parking lot in Guelph, I watched while he explained her score. Her smiling face indicated it was a good test. He walked past me, nodding in acknowledgement, and I watched as Jen bounded across to the parking lot to me, jumping into my arms, almost flattening me.

"I passed Dad!" she exclaimed, beaming.

I congratulated her, (catching my breath) and we celebrated with breakfast at a coffee shop.

As we chatted, her one comment told me we weren't that far apart from my test, 36 years ago.

"You know Dad," she grinned, "I aced the parallel parking... it was perfect!"



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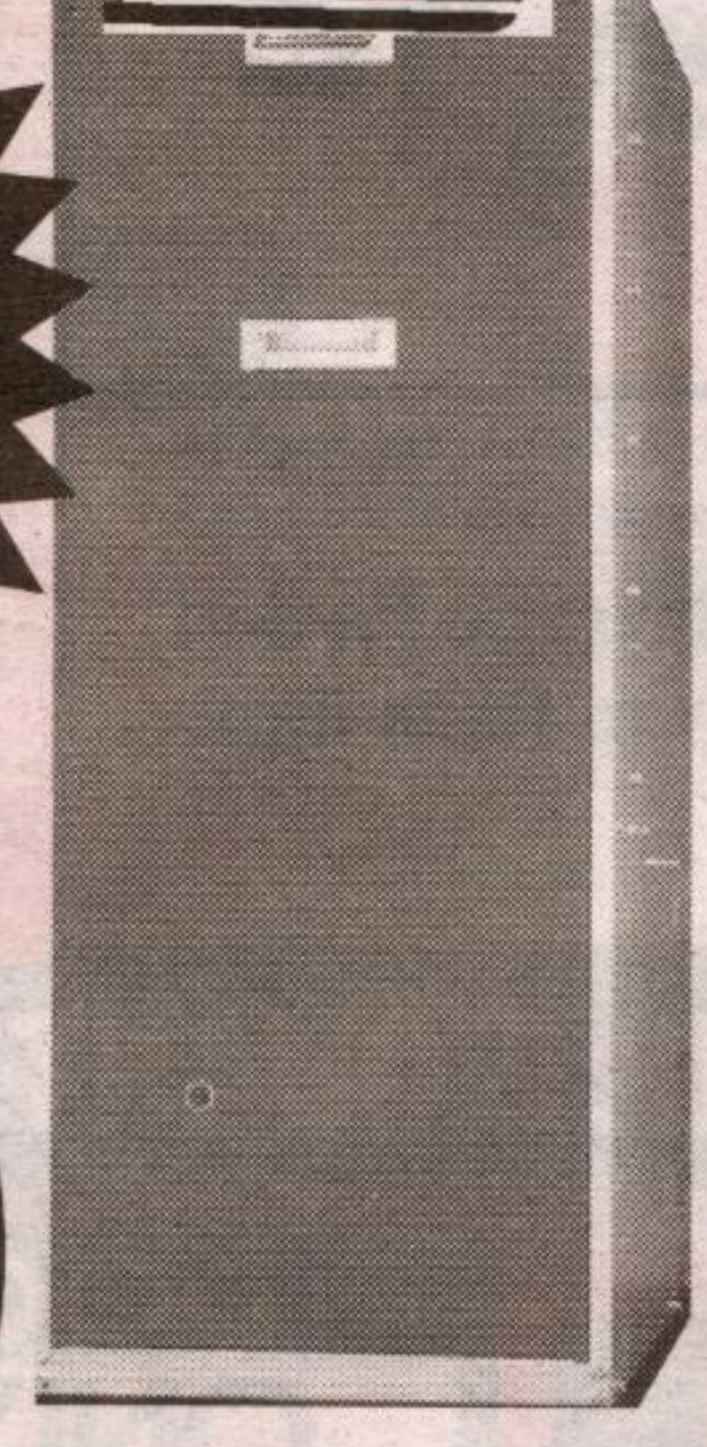


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