

Motoring Holidays

Fun for all the family!

At a cocktail party, some friends entertained us with the surprising story of a family holiday and a forgotten dog. The story starts on the way home, when the family, including the dog, stopped for a comfort break at a road-side café-restaurant. They were nearly home by the time they realised that their Best Friend had stayed behind, and by then the only thing to do was to continue and hope for a phone call from a dog-loving stranger.

And that's what happened. But these were cautious dog-lovers, who were not going to hand over this Best Friend to just anybody who happened to pick up the phone. What to do? Someone suggested putting the handset to the dog's ear. This worked and all howled with glee as the dog leapt and yelped on hearing his owners' voices.

Perhaps even more surprising is that this sort of thing seems to happen quite a lot.

The short road from Sydney to Melbourne was long. Not as long as the long road, but it was still a good two-day drive if you stopped once or twice to eat and sleep. Single carriage in each direction for most of it, a ribbon of pock-marked asphalt and gravel, threading through monotonous, grey-green bush, crawling up hills and shuddering down them, lunging left and right to get tangled in ubiquitous towns and town-lets of no discernible purpose or function. An eternal file of households hauling their holiday-making misery in lurching, two-tone pastel ply-wood caravans. It was slow, dusty and exhausting. It was also dangerous, and often lethal.

Resigned to the ordeal, they headed off: Dad and ten-year-old son in the front seat, Mum and eight-year-old daughter in the back.

Two and a bit hours from home, we stopped at a mean sort of road-side cafeteria that served dodgy meat pies, stale sandwiches and stewed tea - and the inevitable queue for the ladies' toilet out the back. Dad allowed what he judged to be long enough, then, with son trailing him, stoically re-joined the grinding queue. An hour or so later, son was asked to ask Mum for something in the back. Son turns around: the back seat is empty. ... Another ten miles passed... Dad asks again. Several more miles. Son gulps and winces the bad news. Silence. They pull over to the gravel and wait for the next dawdling caravan to open space enough to go back and start again.

Forlorn in the road-side dust, there they stood. Words were at once not enough and too much. Thus the family holiday continued.