

# Bus stopped

**Charlotte Reather** has a brief spell of teetotalism and finds that travelling by (fun) bus and playing nanny are overrated

**A** DAY at the races can be fun, but don't travel on a bus. And definitely don't return on one. In fact, my advice is to steer clear of any plans that involve buses altogether. Conjure up all those childhood and holiday memories of bus trips and recall how awful they were. Nothing has changed. The only bonus of going on a bus as a teenager was, aside from escaping lessons, being able to look down into the cars below and catch the odd grubby commuter picking his nose on the journey to work. But that's not much of a recommendation, is it?

Anyway, Comb Over Man (COM) and I went to the races... on a bus. It was Friday the 13th, so not a great start. I then checked my diary and discovered I was due for a "legs in the air" and a hepatitis booster after a trip to India (no tattoos to report). The nurse laughed heartily as she stabbed me with the needle and my arm started to dance. "Oops, think I've hit a nerve." Then she hit me with the real crippler. "Best not to drink for 24 hours."

Brilliant. Racing without drinking? Had it ever been attempted? I wasn't sure, but certainly not by anyone British. We met our gang of fellow racegoers at a local pub. As everyone quaffed Bloody Marys, I forced my elderflower pressé down with a face like thunder. The whole gang thought I was "up the duff", and nothing would convince them otherwise.

The bus was late. Very late. COM was getting twitchy as he didn't want to miss the first race – his best friend had a horse running. The "fun bus" was so late that we not only missed the first race, but lunch as well. As a genuine turf-junkie, COM was having a proper Liza Minnelli moment. "Richard's horse won. And I didn't see it. I'm a bad friend." I suggested we have a pig in a bap and watch the second race intently. He agreed.

By the time we'd found a pig in a bap, which actually turned out to be a cow in a bun, the second race had started. COM tried to eat and watch. In his hurry he forgot to chew, and just swallowed. What followed was half an hour of *Holby City* as I took up "heart attack watch" outside the men's loos. Poor COM beat his

chest to make the beef go down. Then he tried bulimia, before deciding that booze was the only solution. After necking two pints, he was restored. I drank a coffee and felt fleetingly superior to him for abstaining. Teetotallers must feel smug all the time. How dare they judge us.

As we enjoyed a little box-hopping, COM consumed more and more booze, "to aid his digestion". I looked on with mock disgust. He was having a riot of a day while I played nanny to an elderly hedonist on the lash – it simply wasn't fair.

After what seemed like an eternity, it was time to leave. I grabbed COM by the arm and "gently" reminded him we needed to hurry so we didn't miss the fun bus. A handsome but pompous gentleman snorted: "A bus? OMG, how awful. Sounds like my idea of hell." I replied, "Buses are not awful. They are an invaluable, cheaper means of transport and

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far more reliable than men." However, I wasn't convincing him or myself. Yes, Mr Pompous, buses are a key method of torture out of the diseased mind of Beelzebub himself.

At the exact moment we left the warmth of our friend's box, the heavens opened and we were deluged. We stood without shelter and duly waited for the bus. After 15 minutes, looking like drowned rats, we were still waiting. COM was slaughtered and started to act up. "I want to go home now. I'm going to get a taxi," which was easier said than done and, in his case, not easily said either.

Our group leader, Tom, announced that the bus was going to be half an hour late. There was a collective groan. "If we start walking, we'll meet it in half the time," said Tom. COM was clucking like a wet hen. I pointed at his



trilby, "Well, at least you have a hat." He banged it down on my head. I gave it back. He threw it over the hedge and stomped off in the other direction – he was at Mariah Carey levels

of divadom. I tied him to my coat with a scarf and marched in the general direction of the fun bus. After what seemed an eternity we finally saw it like an oasis in the desert.

We were on our way home. But suddenly the bus ground to a halt and six people got off. "Where are they going?" I demanded. "McDonalds," came the reply. I was raging like Victor Meldrew inside. I was soaked to the skin, in danger of catching my death and these morons were buying nuggets. COM knocked back the port "to keep warm" and the beer "to sober up". Half an hour later we were off again. I stared out of the window into the black night and vowed never to go on a bus again, ever. ■

*Charlotte Reather is winner of the Gloucestershire Glamour Award 2008*