



Home again to England

It was like a fast-action video game acted out in real-time: *The French Connection* with a faster car. I watched in horror as we zig-zagged back and forth across three lanes, powering on past a sprinkling of vehicles out for a Sunday morning drive. Glancing across at the speedo simply increase the alarm: 140 miles per hour! Twice the limit and faster than I had ever been on four wheels!



A motorway signboard flashed by indicating a service stop ahead. Trying to sound as nonchalant as possible, whilst shouting to be heard above the scream of the engine, I called out to the driver:

"Hey Mike, could we stop for a bite? I'm famished after the flight; the food was crap!" It wasn't true, but I would say anything to escape this high velocity merry-go-motorway, even if only for brief respite.



“*Sure George, sure,*” he quipped back to me, swinging over to the left lane and releasing his foot from the gas. The exhaust burred excitedly, as we powered down towards the legal speed ... and the exit lane.

I was returning home after twenty years on the other side of the planet, in Australia. I had met Michael – not Ferrari’s Schumacher, (though perhaps that’s who he thought he was) – the previous year, during a reconnoitering mission to the *Old Country*. I’d applied for a job with his English learning academy, which was in fact a one-man show (my inclusion made it two) and the interview turned into a longer-then-planned beer drinking session, which we both drove away from, distinctly under the influence and certainly over the breath-test limit. Mike treated such mundane matters with elite disdain.

My job like the academy was a bit of a scam, and involved teaching English to a young boy from an extremely well-healed South Korean family. The teaching took place at an exceedingly prestigious (and thus fantastically expensive) private school for boys: a repository for the sons of British aristocracy, plus any other country’s nouveau riche.

As well as being a formidable consumer of beer, I found that Mike was also relentlessly addicted to nicotine. He also taught foreign students at the same hallowed halls, and when our timetables permitted, we would meet for a cigarette-smoking challenge, washed down with bottomless cups of thick black coffee, whilst looking towards the main gate of the austere college which paid our way, from a vantage point in a rather exclusive coffee shop, across the street.



These were fun times, until I found out that my boss was on decidedly intimate terms with the extremely wealthy mother of my young student. Often our coffee breaks would turn into a rant from him, about his dealings with her. Without doubt, it was an intriguing return to my homeland.

The last I heard of Mike, was of him attempting to resist *747 Jumbo* in Hong Kong, charged with smoking in the t he was being handcuffed and led away:

“My God young man, how do you expect me to exist for need to provide a smoking room. ... Would you like a cig

Duncan Gregory

www.whittlingourniche.com

