

Harley Ate My Gear Knob!



**By Philip Faithfull
from Northern Ireland**

In December 2010 I was persuaded to take in a 10-week-old Beagle from the local dog pound; an unwanted Christmas present that needed a new home.

This new addition to a house, already containing two cats who hate each other, created its own form of absolute chaos. The dog was quickly named Harley, after the motorbike, and Harley the Beagle Harrier soon began to take over the house.

In the first few weeks of living with us Harley ate furniture, skirting boards, supposedly indestructible toys, and produced enough waste to make me wonder if someone was delivering 'take out' food to him during the night, particularly of the extremely smelly curry variety.

Anyway, that sort of sets the scene for Harley's arrival and the next few months saw the tiny pup grow into a 30 kilogram muscle bound monster who had to be walked by my wife or myself four miles every day. It's a great way to lose weight, and sometimes friends, but we are lucky to live in the countryside with some great long walks only a few miles from home.

Harley loves the car and I made the mistake of commenting to my wife Hazel, that Harley was

always on his best behaviour when travelling in the car. Famous last words!!

Harley loves travelling in my wife's 2002 Garnet Red MX-5 Montana - a great car that we have put over 125,000 miles on in nine years of ownership.

It was a lovely day in August when I put Harley into the passenger seat, strapped him in and prepared for a four-mile hike in the mountains. Then I got called over by my next-door neighbour and had to leave Harley for exactly three minutes alone in the car. No problem. He had never posed a threat to the MX-5 before. Why would today be any different?

It was! Looking through the front windscreen Harley had disappeared from his usual position beside the steering wheel. I approached the MX-5 with an increased sense of dread and trepidation. Had he escaped or was he simply lying down on the passenger seat bored of waiting to get into the starting blocks for his walk?

No... I could see as I slowly looked in through the window that Harley had decided that the beautiful brown wooden Nardi Torino gear knob was ripe for destruction and was at exactly the right height to fit exactly into his mouth and was an excellent teething toy for dogs.

I opened the door, almost started to cry, and watched Harley's big brown eyes look away from me as if to say... 'I know something's wrong but I'm not exactly sure what the problem is here.'

The gear knob was a mass of splintered wood gauged out by huge teeth marks, part of it already swallowed and the rest lying forlornly on the floor of the car. I could have said more but my only relief was that he had not the time to eat the wooden steering wheel and handbrake handle.

Anyway, off we went in silence for the four-mile walk with me having dark thoughts about taking him off the lead, hiding behind some trees and running to the car before he missed me!

To cut a long story short I checked eBay and found a Nardi gear knob for sale on there. I bid and bought it for £35, as new.

Harley loves the MX-5 with the window down or the roof off, ears flapping in the wind.

We also have 20th anniversary MX-5 model in red, white and blue. Will he ever get into it? Only if he learns to open the door himself!!

By the way, Harley ate the mud flap off my 1986 mint Opel Manta last week. One year on, would I change him? Not a chance.

If you are visiting Northern Ireland why not visit Harley and the Abingdon Collection in Omagh Co Tyrone. Check out www.theabingdoncollection.com or telephone 028 82243373.