



# Driving me to drink



**T**his column took 18 months to write. There's a wine for that, I hear you say. Yes, Flagstone in Somerset West makes a decent pinotage called Writer's Block.

The delay hasn't been due to lack of inspiration, though. It's just that I've been burning to tell you about the exhilarating experience of buying a brand-new electric vehicle ever since placing the order for it the year before last. I thought I would wait for its arrival, smell the seats (made of vegan leather – a politically correct term for fake leather) and go for a spin before completing the missive. The whole exercise has taken just over a year and a half.

It all started when London mayor Sadiq Khan kindly informed us that our 10-year-old diesel vehicle was no longer welcome in the city's expanded ultra-low emission zone. Our home, in zone 2, has been within the zone's borders since October 2021, and it presented a problem: every time my wife drove past one of the many newly installed cameras on the streets around us she would have to pay £12.50 for the privilege.

My wife, you ask ... but what about me? Well, we've been a one-car household ever since moving back to the UK in 2012, and I'm the one who chose not to be the owner of a vehicle. Public transport will do me just fine, thanks.

It was the playwright Samuel Johnson who famously said to his biographer, James Boswell, that when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life. The better part of 250 years later, travel writer Paul Theroux amended the statement, saying that the man who is tired of London is probably just tired of looking for a parking space. This echoes my sentiments exactly; it's also one of the reasons I gave up the one and only motor vehicle I ever owned in London back in 2006.

Not long after that, I was interviewed for a new management job at a South African institution. The CEO of the ultimate holding company asked me what was in the boot of my car. When he heard that I didn't own a vehicle, he burst out laughing, telling me that he had asked the question any number of times without ever getting that answer.

He also told me that the contents of your boot will say a lot about you as a candidate. Golf clubs? Not a serious enough worker. A mess? Avoid. Not sure? Dipsy. And so on.

I got the job, though it wasn't a career highlight – a story for another day. If I'd had a car with a messy boot I may have been spared that character-building experience.

Much earlier in my career I also had my personality assessed in the form of car questions during an interview: what vehicle did I own? Did I buy it new or second-hand? Was I paying it off, and how much did I owe on it? The

answer to the last question was especially important, I was told, as it said a lot about my risk profile. Only boring young people bought cheap cars for cash, and this company was looking for high-flying, ambitious types willing to burn the candle at both ends. I did not receive a job offer on that occasion, thank goodness.

## Rock down to electric avenue

Back to my wife's new Volkswagen ID.3. It's common cause that there were serious supply chain issues affecting many industries after the Covid lockdowns ended. Microchips in particular were in short supply and, as every electric vehicle contains upwards of 1,500 of them, you can begin to understand why we had to wait so long. Perhaps not a bad idea to stock up on some shares in Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co, after all?

In the end it was all worth it, I suppose. My wife no longer needs to book one of the smelly rental Zipcars in our neighbourhood every time she wants to drive to Tesco or drop our daughter off at the tennis venue. The dog, who is a passenger more often than I am, can go for walks in his favourite park again. And, I have to admit, even the fake leather seats smell rather nice.

But it's fair to say that this whole drawn-out episode was frustrating enough to drive one to drink. Which is just about the only driving I enjoy. Another glass of Writer's Block for me, please. ✘