

Shifting **GEARS**

By Carol G. Stratton

Clutch. Now that's a word I've not thought about for years. At least not in the automotive sense. Clutch to me means a dressy purse for special events, a clutch play (some emergency term I've heard my husband yell during a ball game), and clutch as in clutching my children in a national emergency. Those are concepts to which I can relate. But a "clutch"?

"Put in the clutch," I heard voices in my ear exhorting me. Dumbly I searched my mind for the meaning to this archaic word. I sat in my brand new Red Poppy colored VW bug in single digit weather as my family and friends urged me to start the insect, or should I say "the beast." This ferocious animal had a lot of horsepower under the hood, sort of a sad ironic joke for someone who drives way under the speed limit. My sons grumbled how speed was wasted on the speedless (like youth wasted on the young). Again the voices encouraged me to find the clutch.

Beads of sweat turned to ice on my forehead on the frigid winter evening. This is stress, I thought, as I looked at my family and friends, not being able to drive the coolest car I'll ever own. I had always driven minivans and before that, station wagons. Even in my carefree single days in California I probably owned the only rusted-out Chevy in the San Francisco Bay Area. Now I was put to the test in front of all my loved ones to try and remember how to drive a stick shift.

Don't blow it in front of everyone, I told myself as a flashback of the sound of grinding gears popped into my head. Shaking from a combination of the cold and peer pressure, I put the key into the ignition.

Now let me think, there are three pedals . . . that means one is

the clutch. Far back in my memory I remembered the farthest away pedal and pushed it in. Quickly the configuration "H" came to mind and I found myself shifting into neutral like a pro.

I must really be impressing the kids, I thought as I heard the sound of metal on metal as I attempted to put my bug into reverse. The mighty machine lurched into service and suddenly I was off and motoring down the whole length of the driveway. I had passed the test! Looking cool and nonchalant, I zipped around the block before returning to my admiring friends. I even raced the engine a bit to show my brothers that their older sister knew how to control her hot new car. Ah, this was the life. I could already see myself and the rest of the family -well make that half the family, I thought as I looked at the cozy back seat. One pygmy baby could hardly have room to turn over in its sleep. No carpooling here. But a great road trip, yes that might work.

Forty thousand miles later I have proved that man - and this woman, in particular - can overcome technological handicaps. I have conquered the clutch. In fact I have conquered three of them. The last one fell out on the side of the road as the vehicle screamed to a lurching stop. At twelve hundred dollars a pop I have decided I had purchased enough clutches.

As the tow truck drug away my shiny little Bug, a wave of sadness passed. It had been a great ride while it lasted. My midget car with the daisy flower holder had done its duty as it brought back fun for an ex-minivan mom. **FW**



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