

One of those jobs on one of those days

The man on the land has often had to work on his own – sometimes through necessity attempting jobs that should only be attempted when two people are around. Mostly he gets away with it. Other times he becomes a gruesome statistic. But occasionally, well, judge for yourself.

About thirty years ago, a young bloke called David was cleaning up loose grain after emptying a temporary silo. He jumped into the old Land Rover to get a few more bags from the wheat dump out in the paddock, but found the battery had gone flat.

We have all been in the situation. Flat battery, flat ground, no jumper leads, no one to push. How do we get going? An idea occurred to David. What about a gentle nudge from behind with the front-end loader on the tractor, a push start?

He put the old jeep in gear, pulled the hand throttle out a little and turned on the ignition key. Carefully, he eased up to the back of the 'Rover with the tractor and gave it a bit of a shove. It coughed and fired, with a puff of smoke. But his elation turned to dismay when he realised that he had pulled the hand throttle out too far on the old Land Rover, and off it went across the paddock!

The tractor was a Ford 5000 Selectamatic, the one that didn't need the clutch to change gears. A simple flick of the lever and it was in or out of gear. As he leapt off the tractor, David flicked the gear lever down into neutral (he thought) and set off on foot after the runaway jeep. To no avail. It was doing about twenty miles an hour in second gear, headed towards the far side of the paddock. But just before the fence was an area where the pigs had been rooting. The front wheels hit the soft, rough patch, slewing the jeep and wheeling it around towards him. It straightened up again and a glimmer of hope presented itself.

As the Land Rover drew level, David lunged for the door handle, but missed. He couldn't get his hand into the recess to grab the handle and couldn't open the door. Now, the runaway jeep was headed straight back for the house! Visions of summery nights under the stars were replaced with "What will I tell the wife?"

Thank God for the pigs. They had been at it again near the front garden. Once again, the jeep turned suddenly and careered off in another direction. Still running after it, David watched helplessly as it ploughed in under a cone-bottomed silo and lapsed into silence. He eased to a walk, now that it was all over, and then turned to the tractor.

The tractor – where was it? When he jumped off, in his haste he had knocked the gear lever down past neutral and into reverse. All this time, it had been quietly backing across the paddock in reverse gear. Just as he turned, it reached the haystack. He watched as it proceeded to bury itself in the hay, demolishing the stack and finally lapsing into silence also.

David just stood in the middle, looking from one disaster to another. What an exciting few minutes! Instead of just some grain to bag up, now there was a tractor buried in a haystack, a bent cone bottom silo, a bent Land Rover, still with a flat battery, and he still had no bags to clean up the last of the grain! All he had to show for it was the trail of destruction left when he tried to do one of those jobs that needed two people, on his own.