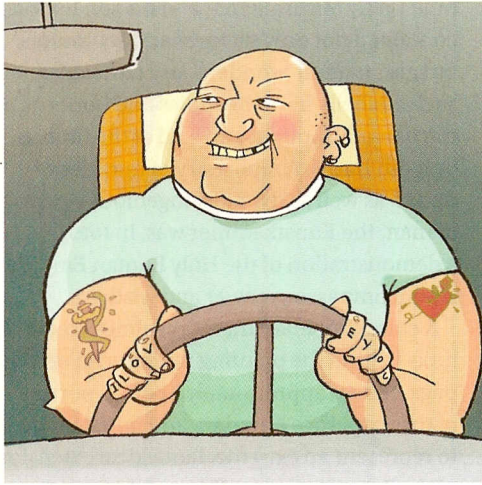


In your own words



King of the road

Some of our members may remember him, our temporary coach-driver at the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association Home in Crieff, during that long, hot summer a few years back.

Jock was a big bloke, aggressive-looking: his back ram-rod straight, bulging biceps with snake tattoos, and a T-shirt (when he was wearing one) stretched to busting over his barrel chest. When we arrived at his chosen destination, he would take off his T-shirt to show us some more of his tattoos. He wasn't too old for earrings, either. He had two of them, both in the same ear. One was in the usual place, and its twin was above it in the top rim.

Jock's hair also craved attention because he had none. From our seats behind him, his bronzed head looked like a mahogany newel post announcing an impressive staircase. That was the view we had of him as he drove us frantically around on his 'mystery' runs. Sometimes they would begin as a mystery to him, too, since his geography was poor.

One day in Inverary I asked him what he normally did for a living. 'I bounce,' he said. 'Bounce? Trampoline instructor?' I ventured naively. 'Naw,' he said in his broad Glaswegian accent. 'I bounce troublemakers out of a nightclub in

Glasgie. See this?' he said, indicating the big brass buckle on the wide belt looped through his tight-fitting jeans. 'When I wrap that round my fist, I mean business. Doonah tangle wi' me, mon,' he said playfully, as he extended alternate fists at me. The sun sparkled on heavy gold rings that could do duty as knuckledusters.

Jock's boots – the type worn to shin up Everest – had shiny steel plates encasing

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the hard toecaps. The heels of this formidable footwear were similarly adorned with decoratively patterned plates that could protect him from a rear attack. When on duty Jock would be stone-cold sober, he told us, to make sure he had no problems with the hot-headed drunks who tried to cause trouble. Those who were forcibly ejected into the cool night air would actually bounce on the hard pavement outside the club.

Jock's fascination with tattoos extended even to his hands. The letters along the top of his fingers read I LOVE YOU.

When 'bouncing', Jack gave a dangerously half-drunk clubber no time to read the message, let alone appreciate its irony, before the lights went out.

But Jock was at peace with his passengers. We were all limbless ex-servicemen on holiday and we made him feel whole. Jock counted our heads before setting off on the return journey, to make sure he had everyone on board. If he had divided our arms and legs by four, he would have been a few short. 'All present and correct. No one has escaped,' he would joke.

Jock was very attentive. He was quick to help those on sticks to board the coach, and he carefully loaded and unloaded those of us in wheelchairs using the rear-mounted hydraulic lift, which sometimes had to be encouraged with an armour-plated hoof to withdraw into its hideaway.

His time up, Jock said what a pleasure it had been to be with us. 'I'm staying over in Crieff for the car boot sale on Sunday,' he said to me. 'Never know me luck.'

'Looking for something special?'

I asked.

'Yee'll nay laff?' he asked diffidently.

(I wouldn't dare.)

'I collect thimbles,' he said.

I couldn't help it: I burst out laughing. ●

Eric Cottam