

328 735 kilometres

Persona, cars, labels, life



Peter Geyer

*I'm wheels, I'm moving wheels
I'm a 1952 Studebaker coupe
I'm wheels, I'm moving wheels, moving wheels
I'm a 1952 Starlite coupe ...
Absent lovers ... absent lovers*

Adrian Belew

*I'm drivin' a stolen car
Down on Eldridge Avenue
Each night I wait to get caught
But I never do*

Bruce Springsteen

Introduction: Cars and persona

It's a curious fact that motor vehicles have been around for about the same time as modern psychological theory and practice. So it's not all that surprising that several psychological associations have been made between these functional, mechanical objects and their owners. Cars built for speed, or comfort, or the midlife experience (even Jung drove a red convertible), toughness, reliability, and so on.

In an age without visible uniforms to more easily tell the differences between ourselves, cars have for some decades provided some insight. Over the years, Australian stereotypes involving Valiant drivers, Mercedes drivers, Volvo drivers, owners of 4-wheel drives, sports cars of various types, utility drivers, and so on have become folklore: at least partly because the stereotype works, although there are always exceptions.

In the past there's been opposition to cars from Japan and Germany, for instance, because of their complicities in wartime

atrocities and the like. If you know that Hitler had a role in the development of the Volkswagen Beetle, that can change your perspective in getting behind its steering wheel — or that of a BMW, for instance. This can be a little subjective if you also know about the less-than salutary role of the Ford Motor Company in the same place and time.

For some people, though, cars are simply functional, and for them there's no choice involved that relates to personality. This may be so, but it might be wise to keep an open mind. If an individual choice is unconscious (and so, in choice theory terms, not a choice at all), then it may say something about the person concerned.

My first car was a 1963 EJ Holden, and my second a 1967 HR Holden. I chose these because they were available; I didn't seek them out. But my father had driven these models, and they were familiar—typical, even. In the outer world I'm tentative in general, particularly in unfamiliar territory, toe-in-the-water stuff.

I didn't know anything about cars (and still don't know much), but my father did, and although we didn't have much of a positive relationship in those days, I can see now that there are unconscious associations with family and father and the stereotypical male aspect of such vehicles.

There's a certain incongruity between who I am and what these vehicles symbolise, which I was only partly aware of at the time. But this also means you can safely hide, a subject I'll come back to later.

My next car was a 1973 VW Superbug, made in Germany, with that language expressed in various places. I had it for 12 years, and even had a German mechanic, Jürgen.

An INTP's reflections on an INTP car

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My German heritage from the distant past can easily be associated with this vehicle, particularly as I enjoyed that aspect of family, with its quasi-noble overtones. But I didn't choose the car: my then fiancée did, demanding that I get rid of the HR. (I think she didn't want to be seen in it.) I couldn't even drive the floor shift, and it took me some time to make it mine.

In retrospect I can see this as psychologically getting away from home, with help from the feminine, and embracing more of that aspect of my psyche. For the first time in my life I was even trendy, as far as cars go, for in the car park at Monash University, where I was studying at the time, were several VWs, as well as Morris Minors (my mother's then car, which was also interesting).

Eventually the VW's body was bound together with much fibreglass and fuelled by continuous oil. On starting out in business for myself in 1993, I took the opportunity to trade it in on a 1987 Hyundai Excel. Here it was the trade that was important, as well as the size of the car. I can't really drive anything other than small cars. (I don't know what that means, but I can speculate.) Judgment of where the end of the car is defeats me, particularly on the side.

Like the VW, this purchase was partly a collective decision, although my then partner didn't drive. But she wanted to feel safe, and also suggested I needed to have space for driving my parents around, which was something I hadn't had to consider. So I picked something that met all those criteria: essentially work and others, none of which were really personal, simply functional. I didn't even like the colour.

Number plates

Some time in 1995 this unprepossessing car became 'INTP', a label it held until the end of its working life in June 2005.

Why did I do it? Personalised number plates aren't exactly an introvert's territory, and a decade ago they were still relatively rare. Today's roads have a lot more number plates with individualised statements or arcane messages.

There's also a bit of the lair, or lairising, associated with them. Funnily enough, I could identify a little with that sort of thing in the way I approached playing football, and, at one stage, in the way I dressed for work—although I'd like to think that was flair, rather than lairising.

In some ways, too, it was an extension of wearing an INTP T-shirt in public, which I liked to do in supermarkets and the like. The lettering on the T-shirt was deliberately hard to read, and you could see people startled by it. Doing that sort of thing isn't unusual for an INTP.

For instance, you can buy soccer T-shirts with a quote from a famous philosopher, and their name and number on the back. I bought a Machiavelli one, but never wore it out of doors, as that was a little too public. But the shirt is currently in the possession of a much younger INTP who is studying philosophy—and I'm reliably informed that it's made a few public appearances, which is quite pleasing.

As far as number plates go, I'd also just come back from the USA after studying with Otto Kroeger for several months. He had driven me around in his 'MR MBTI' plated car. A friend of mine who worked for Otto also had an 'MBTI JR' car, and there were one or two type labels around as well. As I needed to replace my plates, which were a bit battered, the idea of an INTP car turned over in my mind. But I wasn't keen on having the Jeff Kennett slogan *Victoria – On The Move* on something I owned.

I also wanted to say something about what I did, even though most people wouldn't know what INTP stands for, which is sort of like having it both ways. And it was also a cheeky way to say to certain people (whether they saw me or not) that I was involved in the MBTI at a particular level.

After I changed the plates over, I discovered that driving around with an INTP car had its interesting moments. Mostly these were when I could see pedestrians trying to work out what the letters stood for. My driving style and self-management might also have come under scrutiny, particularly in the area of inferior function.



Personalised number plates are not exactly an introvert's territory—there's a bit of the lair associated with them

I got mostly ambivalent responses. A less than positive comment was overheard in the hotel car park at AusAPT's 1996 conference in Coogee. Comments about that sort of thing in courses I taught were mostly met with quiet derision, and sometimes surprise. I think that culturally Australians don't like personal labels, although they will wear designer and other labels. This doesn't make sense to me: it's too much like commercialism and advertising for my liking.

When I moved down to Warrnambool in 1997 I was in a bit of a quandary. A personalised plate seemed OK in a big city, but might be a bit too public for a regional town of just 30 000 people. I wasn't sure that it was the right way of being known.

Occasionally a tradesman would ask me what the letters meant and I'd have a quick response, although often interest waned once I said it was about personality. These people weren't that curious. Last February, on a hot summer day in Mildura, a truck driver pulled up alongside me at a set of lights and genially inquired about the plates in a country-style extraverted fashion. My answer satisfied him in a non-curious way.

INTP carried a few people round in its time. Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, Otto on several occasions around Melbourne and places in Victoria. On one occasion I took Otto to the Twelve Apostles in a fairly strong gale that made the car rock quite a bit. Mary McCaulley was a passenger in 1994, before the name change.

Its first drive after purchase in 1993 was to take Linda Berens and Stephanie Rogers down the Great Ocean Road to the usual spots, replete with strong winds, and listening to SPs in a Camperdown hotel. There were several visits to Erskine Falls behind Lorne, my favourite place.

INTP took me to work and to conferences around Melbourne and in Mildura, Bendigo, Ballarat, Gippsland, Sydney and Adelaide; even to Tasmania last year, where I mixed work and family history, and stretched the limits on an ageing vehicle, probably sealing its fate. In a more personal vein, I went on honeymoon in INTP. It's taken me to four different residences.

I drove my mother away from the family home, where she'd lived for 50 years, to her new, modern house in Werribee. And I did get to drive my father around. It was the last car he sat in and he offered a compliment about it. On Father's Day 1997, a few weeks before he died, at his request he was taken to Altona beach to 'see the swans', whereupon a large, swirling mass of those birds greeted us: a truly archetypal experience I'll never forget.

My interest in cars is not mechanical, but functional. I like to drive, something I have in common with my father. Where I live now, he drove around as a travelling salesman in the late 50s and early 60s. We came with him on school holidays when, in his ESTJ way, he told us about landscape and history: gold and pioneers, the Stony Rises, the Mahogany Ship, and so on.

So I like driving on long trips when I can, looking at the scenery, taking photographs, and having access to the music that I like to hear, to think about, or to sing along to. INTP graduated from tapes to CD players, and outlasted the lot: a couple of motors and another gearbox, as well as the regular mechanical replacements.

In some ways it was the ambivalence between public and private that I found hard to resolve: particularly after a few years, when I wondered whether I wanted to be noticed driving around in an ageing, messy vehicle with a clear identification mark. Some similarities between car and owner were obvious, to me, anyway.

INTP blew smoke a bit, particularly in the last year or two, when carrying extra oil became mandatory. Last year I had two tyre blowouts, just a few weeks apart. Earlier this year the EPA wrote to me, concerned about the polluting aspects of INTP on a drive through Carlton. Shortly after that I discovered that the amount of oil required to keep it on the road meant that it was about to cease functioning altogether.

So in June we said goodbye. The day before the end I drove down to Loch Ard Gorge, the Twelve Apostles and London Bridge, where I had first taken it almost 12 years beforehand.



I wanted to say something about what I did, even though most people would not know what 'INTP' stands for

The next day INTP's number plates were taken off by my mechanic. In filling out paperwork for my replacement car, we discovered that we were born on exactly the same day. A trade-in was out of the question, given the condition of my old car. I drove it to a local wreckers, a little money changed hands, and that was that.

The odometer said 328 735 km. I hadn't driven the first 85 000 km, but the rest was essentially all mine.

I took the plates, put them in the boot of my replacement car, drove home, and then headed off to Erskine Falls and the Great Ocean Road to start the whole thing again. The plates are on a shelf in my garage: I haven't worked out what to do with them. I know I'm not going to put them on a car again, and in many ways it's a relief not to have them drawing attention to me.

In my now-anonymous transport I still think that people know it's me—or, at least, 'the INTP'—because that was the identifying label. Internal anonymity might take some time, if it ever comes. ❖

References

Adrian Belew 2001 (1982), 'Neal and Jack and me' (Adrian Belew, Bill Bruford, Robert Fripp and Tony Levin), from King Crimson CD *Beat*, Virgin.

Bruce Springsteen 1979, 'Stolen car' (Bruce Springsteen), from *The River* CD.

POSTSCRIPT

Resurrection?

Four months after INTP had gone to the wrecker's, I turned a corner on the other side of town and saw it sitting on a nature strip. Still unregistered, no radiator—but a new sound system installed. So its body was deemed worth another foray onto the road, with the music that comes from that.

Well, the car I drive is parked outside

It's German-made

They resent that less than people

Who are German-made

Oh, no! Bring her home and the folks look ill

Oh, no! They can't forget that war

Sparks, 'Girl from Germany'

Preconference Workshop

Personality Type and Religious Leadership



Otto Kroeger

**Brisbane
28 June 2006**

Ahead of AusAPT's national conference, **Otto Kroeger** will present a workshop on Personality Type and Religious Leadership in Brisbane on Wednesday, 28 June 2006.

Otto will explore how type impacts on the pastoral role, functions, spirituality and prayer. Time will be spent exploring how type-alike clergy are, and how this impacts on the church hierarchy, congregations and staff configurations in parishes. What natural strengths do certain types bring to ministry that, when maximised, may in fact contribute to their undoing?

The workshop aims to acquaint participants with how our personality preferences shape our faith and allow us to be 'at home' with the 'faith of our fathers'—or play a part in our rebellion and rejection of our religious inheritance.

Through discussion, lecture and case study the workshop will explore the impacts of the preferences, the frustrations, and the temperaments on the religious preferences of various groups of people.

To register for this preconference workshop, complete the registration form on page 37.

Enquiries: marilenastirling@yahoo.com.au



End of the road ... or is it?