

The Test Drive

“Prestige Marc Cars”, Bruce Kelly had come across the pretentious name in Autotrader. The stock list, which he had been checking out for the last few of weeks, was short but impressive. Two Ferraris, an F50 and an Enzo; a McLaren Mercedes SL, a pair of Aston DB9s, a new shape Bentley Azure. And, yes, they still had the two-year-old Maserati Quattroporte V8. At just under sixty grand, the Maserati was by far the least expensive car listed. It was exactly what Bruce wanted; an up-market, rare car, but one that was quite hard to move on in the second hand market.

As one might expect, “Prestige Marc Cars”, was located in the posh south Manchester suburb of Wilmslow. Just 35 miles away. Bruce paid the showroom a visit in the evening. Of course it was closed at the time, but he managed to have a good look through the window. What he saw met with his approval.

The next day, Bruce ‘phoned to enquire about a viewing and a test drive. At first the supercilious salesman seemed reluctant. Maybe it was Bruce’s Liverpool accent. The guy was obviously fishing to see if Bruce was a genuine punter who had money to spend. Bruce explained how he had just floated his computer games company, and now, with family on the way, he wanted to trade up from his M3 coupe to a car that was fast and exotic but still practical for family use.

The salesman, who by now had introduced himself as Marc (with a C) Morris, agreed to a test drive. Bruce knew they were not normally open on Sunday mornings, but he told Marc that he had to attend a games show in London Saturday, and Sunday was the only time he could make it. Bruce had guessed correctly that Marc would be keen to sell the Maserati and was not surprised when he agreed to a test drive at 11:00 the next Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning Bruce drove over with Sharon. When they arrived at nearly 11:15, Marc Morris was anxiously awaiting them. Bruce made a show of helping the heavily pregnant looking Sharon out of the M3’s high-sided sports seats. Apologising for being late, he told Marc that Sharon had not been too good with morning sickness.

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Marc fussed over them as he ushered them into the office at the back of the showroom. It was a small room with a single desk and three chairs, one a large leather executive type, placed strategically behind the desk. On the wall, behind the desk was a small locked key cupboard, and to one side, a locked filing cabinet.

Before they could sit down, Bruce said Sharon was still not feeling too good and asked she could have some water. Marc readily agreed and popped out the back. He returned a few minutes later and handed Sharon a glass of water.

After Marc sat down behind the desk, Bruce asked him all about the Maserati, probing its detailed specification, service history and previous ownership record. Marc answered all Bruce's questions, and now, as he was convinced he had a genuine punter, he unlocked the filing cabinet, extracting all the vehicles documentation to show to Bruce.

Seemingly satisfied, Bruce indicated he would like to check out the vehicle and have the promised test drive. At this point Sharon said she still did not feel too good, and asked if it would be alright if she waited in the showroom, as she did not want to be sick in the car. Marc said that his would be fine.

After Bruce had given the Maserati a good visual inspection and had peered under the bonnet, Marc invited him to take the wheel. They sped off, down the twisting road that led out of town. As they neared the motorway, they narrowly missed a large empty car transporter lorry that was speeding towards them. Bruce uttered some expletives regarding the idiot not knowing where he was going.

Bruce put the car through it paces on the motorway and tried the handling down some of the back lanes. Then, 30 minutes into the drive, Bruce's mobile went off. He pulled into the side of the road to take the call. With a worried look on his face he told Marc that it was Sharon, she thought she was having a miscarriage and was in an ambulance on her way to Wythenshaw hospital. He asked Marc if it

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would OK if he ran him straight there. Of course, Marc readily agreed. They swapped seats, and Marc drove Bruce to the hospital, where Bruce jumped out and ran off into the maternity suit, calling back to Marc that he would 'phone him later.

A few minutes later Marc arrived back at the showroom. It was empty. All the cars had gone. The key cupboard was wide open and all the vehicle documentation was missing from the filing cabinet.

Bruce met up with Sharon at the agreed spot outside the hospital. She told him all had gone to plan. After he'd left for the test drive, she'd removed cushion from under her dress and easily managed to pick the locks to the key cupboard and filing cabinet, using picks matching the key impressions they'd taken when Marc went for the water. She had all the keys in the cars and the showroom door open ready for when the lads arrived with the transporter. With their smart monogrammed overalls they raised no suspicions, muttering something about "official receivers" to the couple of passers-by who had looked curious. It had only taken them a few minutes to get all five loaded and be underway back to the docks.

By now the cars were being off-loaded into the containers to be shipped to their pre-arranged customer. A cool one million quid's worth.

Bruce thought to himself, nice test drive, but he didn't think he'd buy the Maserati, even though he could now easily afford to!