



Jeremy Clarkson doesn't like to be restrained (well, not in public) and it's reached the stage where he has to tear round a field in a Danish go-kart to feel truly free

Backfire

I've got a Ferrari in the garage and yet, give me the choice of going for a blast in that, or going for a spin on the Hoover-powered bedspring and there's no contest

AUTOMOTIVELY SPEAKING, I think it's fair to say that Denmark has not exactly been a major player. In fact, come to think of it, I can't think that Denmark has made much of a contribution in any field. I think I went there once, and I seem to recall there were many cows. Maybe Hans Christian Andersen was a Friesian.

In fact, on really, really quiet days I have found myself wondering, what exactly is the point of Denmark? But now I have the answer. It's called the BoCart.

Made in a town that appears to have been named by someone who simply ran amok with a typewriter keyboard, it's a sort of off-road go-kart. A modern-day Honda Pilot, if you will.

Except that the Pilot was made largely for an American audience and, as a result, you couldn't see where you were going for all the warning notices. Every square inch of the chassis was smothered with labels warning drivers that if they drove fast, they would be killed, that if more than one person was on board at a time, everyone would die of plague and that if you tried to drive across a steep bank, you might trip the missile silos in Kentucky and instigate a nuclear winter which would last a thousand years.

The BoCart is mercifully free from such prophecies of doom though the handbook – well hand-pamphlet to be precise – does make a few veiled threats. It says, for instance, that you shouldn't try to clean the vehicle while it's in motion, but it doesn't say what would happen if you did.

I like that sort of attitude to safety, though it might explain why we hear so little from Denmark. Perhaps they're all dead. And anyway, if I wanted to be nice and safe, I wouldn't be interested in a BoCart. But I am, and you should be too.

Some figures: The Panther Extreme, the biggest, fastest, most expensive model – and let's be honest, that's the one to go for here – is £2,999. Plus the cost of an acre or so of paddock. At today's prices, reckon on about another two grand.

For your money, you get a 13 horse-power Honda

engine... Yes, I thought that too. I went round the field a couple of times and I thought it was fine – a sort of grown-up kids' toy, but not really capable of arousing the adrenalin gland in a man who's been to the sound barrier in an F-15.

However, I then invited some mates round for a go, and instilled with an 'it's-not-mine-so-I-don't-care-if-I-break-it' bravery, they went berserk. Pretty soon, it was three feet in the air. And then – shortly after one of them discovered that if you braked hard while going fast round a corner, it would spin – it was upside down.

This is the key. Once I'd been shown that I could hurt myself, I started to love it a whole lot more. And now, obviously, I've got to buy another. Owing one BoCart is like owning one Japanese fighting fish. Fine, up to a point. But having a pair to race would lift the excitement to a whole new level.

Now this is interesting, isn't it? Without wishing to sound completely spoiled, I've got a Ferrari in the garage and yet, give me the choice this afternoon of going for a blast in that, or going for a spin on the Hoover-

powered bedspring and there's no contest. The BoCart wins every time.

Why? Well, part of it has to do with the utter simplicity of the thing. You can see the springs working and there's no heavyweight bodywork to dilute the fun. It's just you, a roll cage and a four point seatbelt. That's it.

But I think the main reason has to do with the freedom you get in a field. You can ride it drunk – I have – and it's up to you, not Stephen Byers, how fast you can tackle the jumps and dips. Driving on the road these days is slavery. Driving off it is freedom.

Of course, it never takes very long for a crowd of ramblers to arrive and stand with their hands on their hips, looking displeased, but this just makes the whole experience even better. Because there's absolutely nothing they can do about it, and anyway, devising new ways to annoy people in cagoules should be on the school curriculum.

Actually, did you know that the Ramblers' Association began life as an offshoot of the Communist Party. That's true, that is.

Anyway, my point is that with all the speed cameras, and sleeping policemen, and wide-awake policemen, a normal road car, even a very good one like a 355, has limits. That's why track days are becoming so popular

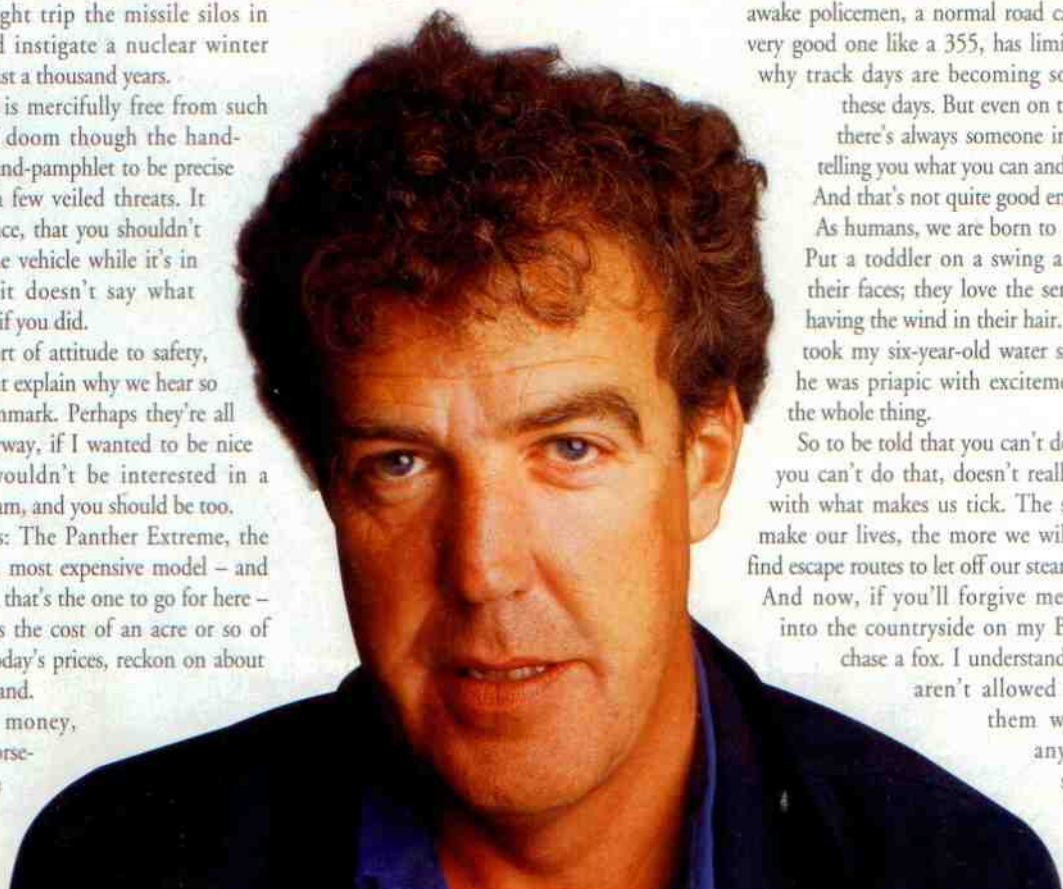
these days. But even on track days, there's always someone in a tabard telling you what you can and can't do. And that's not quite good enough.

As humans, we are born to take risks. Put a toddler on a swing and watch their faces; they love the sensation of having the wind in their hair. I recently took my six-year-old water skiing and he was priapic with excitement about the whole thing.

So to be told that you can't do this and you can't do that, doesn't really sit well with what makes us tick. The safer they make our lives, the more we will have to find escape routes to let off our steam.

And now, if you'll forgive me, I'm off into the countryside on my BoCart to chase a fox. I understand that you aren't allowed to chase

them with dogs any more, so...



Photography: Mike Thorne