

DRIVING to Venice

An adventure with my son.

BY JOE FASBINER

So we're going to Venice, Goddamit.

But, I'm thinking, not before I get some black spray paint and just blot out the view from the side window of my car, and maybe half of the windshield. But that wouldn't stop him.

My son is 17. Perfect Venice age. A skateboarder (no helmet), a videogame mastermind and a driver. My car.

And for some irrational reason, the California Department of Motor Vehicles has deemed it wise to endow him with a license to drive a car with which he can threaten the lives of everyone around him.

Though, to his credit, he hasn't killed anybody yet. Not that I know of, anyway.

So it happened like this. My wife asked me to get a gallon of milk and my son, Michael, overheard this because sometimes he hears things from far away. He hears it like a dog hears things, though it doesn't seem to work when you ask him, nicely, to get his dirty socks off the dining room table, like we were having a dinner party or something and you were the Queen.

We were going for a drive, with the windows open, because summertime has arrived in Marina del Rey. And we're going in my car.

Because he always gets to drive when we're together. I said this before: it's my car and he is enthusiastic, because he can pilot this 3,000-pound overpowered behemoth killing machine.

There was something he had to get, too. And it wasn't at the grocery store here in Marina del Rey. It was at a surf shop in Venice. Why? Because, besides having the most crowded streets and pedestrian walkways on Planet Earth, the Venice Boardwalk is where surfers shop. Michael doesn't surf. I don't surf. My wife doesn't surf. At least, she doesn't do it when I'm around.

So he starts the car, and he backs out and only drives slightly off course, and I'm thinking he just ran over part of the curb, but doesn't seem to notice, but I think: this is it. He's not competent to operate a motor vehicle. And we would no doubt kill someone and he wouldn't ever get to the surf shop.

"I'm stoked," says Michael as we ease into traffic. For some reason, Michael is always stoked. I think it has something to do with being 17 and piloting a great mass of glass, rubber and steel at unreasonable speed. And the California Department of Motor Vehicles ... etcetera.

And Michael is stoked. "I'm so stoked that I can finally drive."

He drives, sorta. Because he looks to his right and left far too often, in my opinion, while driving, but the California Department ... etcetera. And he sees things. Like "There's a Lamborghini!"

It's very pretty, Michael. Look at the road.

"I want a Maserati, because they're so low slung that you can drive under the gates at parking lots and not have to pay."

This is wisdom.

We arrive at the grocery store, and I get out of the car, which is not a Lamborghini or a Maserati, because even if I could afford one, I wouldn't have one because I have trouble with my back already and I don't want to have to get up from so near the ground.

Michael doesn't come inside. Because he's stoked.

At least if the car is not moving, he probably won't run over something nominally mammalian, like a porcupine or somebody's baby.

And it's a few minutes, that's all, before I'm climbing back into my car with a totally stoked teenager and we are off to the surf shop. In Venice. On the Boardwalk.

"There's a shopping cart!" But he turns the wheel and I don't have to shell out \$500 at the body shop to pay for a stoked individual who can't really drive, though the California Department you know the rest.

"There's a smoke shop," he says, looking off to the right. "They sell vapes but most of their stuff is for stoners," he tells me.

Dear God. Don't let him be high.

The rear end of a Volkswagen approaches at dangerous velocity. But we stop in time. And since we're at a stoplight, he looks right ahead at the road. "I think they're making stoplights longer," he says. More wisdom. They're only taking longer for you, I think. But I don't say anything because, gosh, Dad, bring me down.

After a long, long time in Michael minutes, the light turns green and we're motoring away from the grocery store, down a stretch of highway with few cars and a wonderful plethora of things to look at. From the side windows.

"You can see Downtown!" he exclaims, and now he's got his arm across my face as he points out over the ocean, because, you know, the city of Los Angeles is in the ocean. "Can you see it?"

I see a Del Taco.

"Keep your eyes on the road, Buddy." I can hear the wheels crossing the lines into another lane, but Michael quickly corrects, and I think, I'm going to die. He's going to find a lamppost, even though they stopped making those about a century ago, when Bruce Springsteen was popular, but no matter. He will find a lamppost, and he will kill us and some pedestrians, too, and maybe some other mammals. Like a lemur or something.

We pull up at a stoplight. A yellow Camaro pulls up alongside and the driver gives Michael the look. The look that says, my car is faster than yours and we're going to race. And Michael looks right back the same way.

"Michael. We're driving a Prius." It doesn't matter. He's looking straight ahead, waiting for the light to change and this is the point where we would have revved the engine, if we had one and when the light turns green, we move forward carefully, allowing the Prius to attain a very sensible speed, as the Camaro roars into the distance.

"Woah, Dad. Cool down" And then he thinks about it. "I bet we're getting better gas mileage."

After an hour of sheer terror, we arrive in Venice. The part of it where it's full of pedestrians and bicycles and lot and lots of other cars, drivers all looking around for a legal place to park. And I find one.

"Michael, pull into that spot. That spot right there."

He looks at me like I'm crazy. "We won't fit in there. If any part of your car is in the red zone on the curb, you'll get a ticket." He says this with an air of authority, which the California Department of Motor



Not my Prius: A Lamborghini, distracting for Michael but not low enough to evade parking gates.

Vehicles gave to him with his driver's license.

"No," I say. "Pull in there. There's plenty of space."

Reluctantly, he pulls into the space and doesn't hit any parked cars.

"We're in the red. We're going to get a ticket."

A statement of fact, until I get out of the passenger seat, and go up to the front of the car, and lo and behold, we are safely in the green, But Michael gets out and looks, too. And by golly I'm right. I do not gloat because that would just "bring me down, Dad." And so I pay the parking meter. I have no idea how long we will be in the surf shop. I don't know why we

went to the surf shop anyway. I don't ask.

We walk a half mile or so, to the Boardwalk, and pass, oh, maybe a thousand surf shops, but Michael just looks forward, something that he often doesn't do on the road.

And we finally stop at the "right" surf shop and Michael and I walk in, and it looks like any little surf shop.

He makes a bedline and picks out a necklace of pukka shells. He put them on and turns to smile at me with his pukka shells around his neck. Like he had just knitted them or something, and I think, maybe I can take the milk and walk home.

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