

SPEEDWHEELS 3000
THE
RACE
AGAINST
CRIME

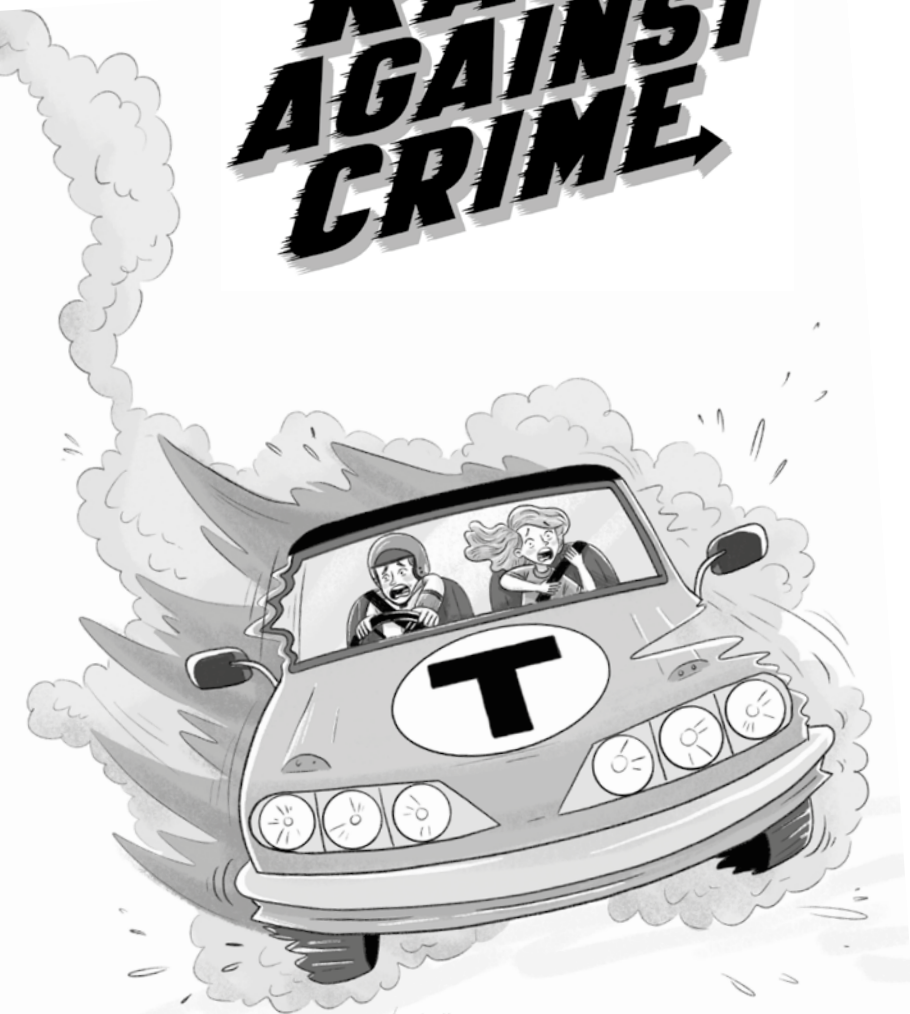
"The Fast and the Funniest!"
Christopher Edge



JENNY PEARSON

Illustrated by KATIE KEAR and NICK EAST

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AGAINST
CRIME



For Rose Dwyer, a brilliant kid and the best
PA an author could ever hope for.

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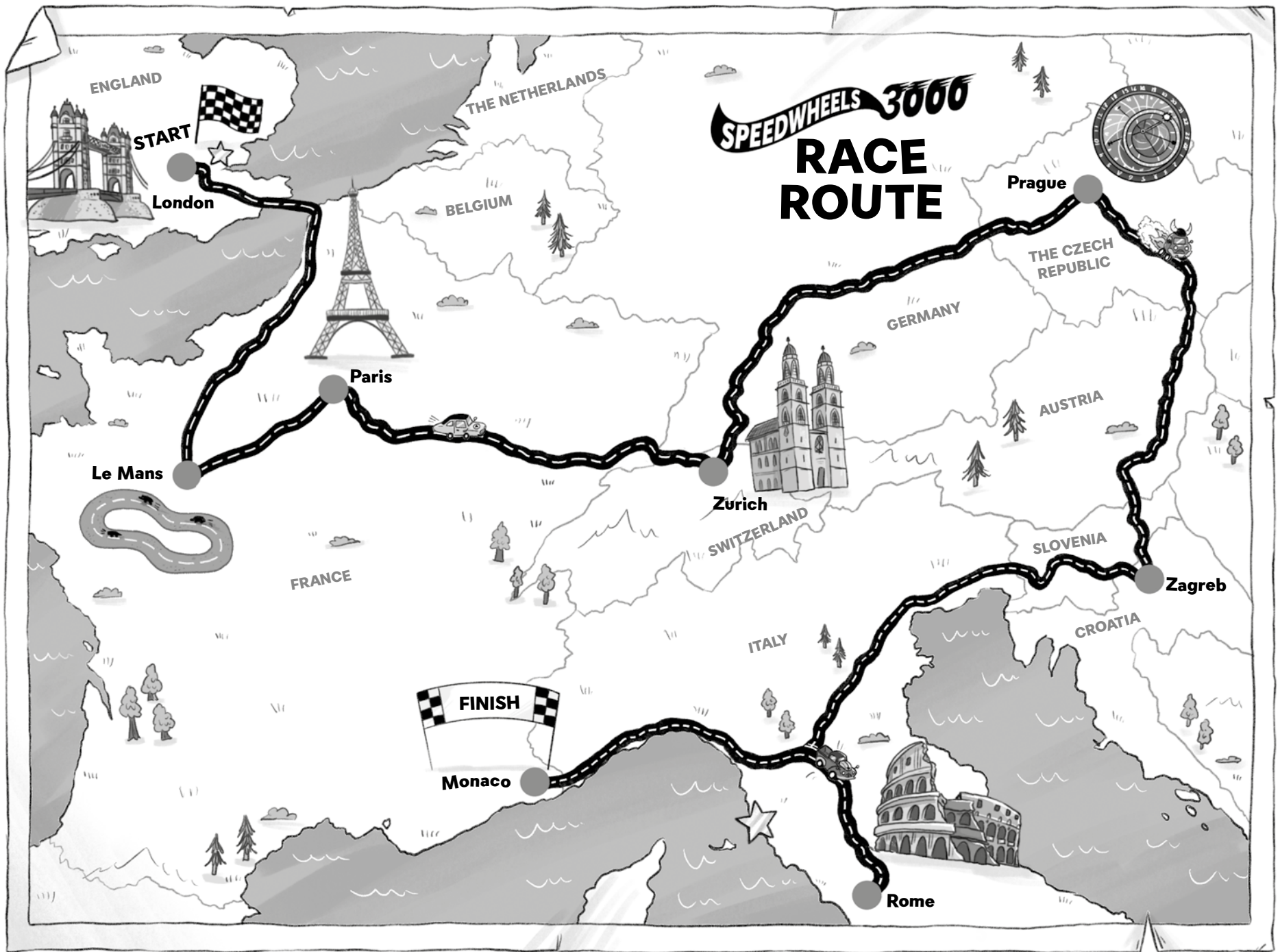


SPEEDWHEELS 3000 **THE** **RACE** **AGAINST** **CRIME**

ILLUSTRATED BY KATIE KEAR AND NICK EAST

JENNY PEARSON





THE VIKING



Nationality: Norwegian
Age: 38
Height: 6 ft 6 ins
Fun fact: Can play the ukulele.
Sponsor: None
Car: 1950s Jotnar
Races won: 1
Speedwheels Rating: 81/100

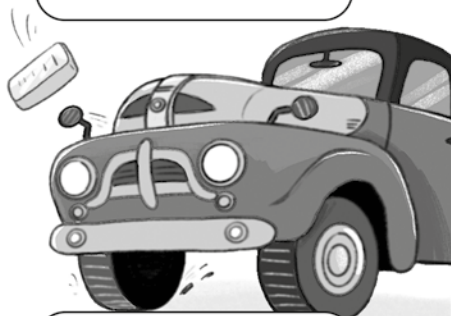


MEET THE SPEEDWHEELS 3000 RACERS

DONOVAN WITT



Nationality: American
Age: 32
Height: 6 ft 3 ins
Fun fact: World-famous NBA basketball player (retired).
Sponsor: Gazz-o-line Energy Drink
Car: 1950s Big Guzzler pickup truck
Races won: 6
Speedwheels Rating: 96/100



CAROLINE ZIPPER



Nationality: British
Age: 48
Height: 5 ft 2 ins
Fun fact: Gained fame when she hand-delivered a carjacker to Truro police station.
Sponsor: West Country Farm Supplies
Car: 1970s Grand Roamer 88
Races won: 1
Speedwheels Rating: 80/100



TONY CLUTTERBUCK

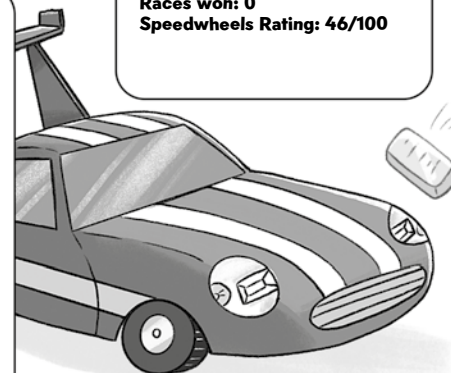


Nationality: British
Height: 5 ft 10 ins
Age: 47
Fun fact: Can wiggle his ears.
Sponsor: Dagenham Guttering & East London Plumbing Ltd
Car: Conquest 2000
Races won: 0
Speedwheels Rating: 46/100

MARGOT PHILIPPE



Nationality: French
Age: Undisclosed but the oldest ever Speedwheels racer
Height: 5 ft 5 ins
Fun fact: Was an actor in the 1960s and played croquet for France.
Sponsor: The Cod Liver Co
Car: Stanhard XV
Races won: 6
Speedwheels Rating: 92/100



EVIE CLUTTERBUCK



Nationality: British
Age: 11 $\frac{1}{2}$
Height: 4 ft 10 ins
Fun fact: Supremely good at bottle flipping.
Sponsor: Dagenham Guttering & East London Plumbing Ltd
Car: Conquest 2000
Races won: 0 (apart from the noodle race at a school swimming gala)
Speedwheels Rating: Unrated





RULES FOR RACERS OF THIS YEAR'S



1. WHERE IN THE WORLD?!

Fill up those tanks – the world's wackiest 3,000 mile road race is headed for Europe! Setting off from London, you must check in at Speedwheels stations in the fabulous cities of Paris, Le Mans, Zurich, Prague, Zagreb, Rome and Monaco. Miss a station and miss out on the trophy!

2. HAVE YOU GOT THE SKILL TO THRILL?

The famously zany race challenges will occur in each new country and will be revealed when you reach the checkpoints.

3. HAVE YOU GOT THE NEED FOR SPEED?

Embrace your inner need for speed – it's a race after all! But obey speed limits. We mean it!

4. VROOM VROOM VROOOOM TO VICTORY!

Points are awarded for the time taken to complete each leg and for the challenge results.

5. PIT STOP!

We don't want you dozing at the wheel, so rest breaks will be enforced. For the latter part of the race, from Zagreb to the finish at the racecourse in Monaco, you can choose your own rest spots.

5. GO YOUR OWN WAY!

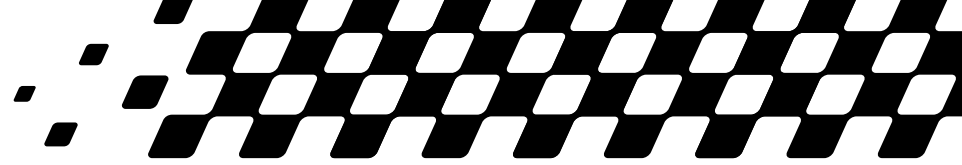
The use of satnavs is not permitted – get those road maps ready!

7. NEVER LEAVE A MAN BEHIND!

The same driver and co-driver (if applicable) must complete the race in their original vehicle.

**BREAKING OF RULES MAY RESULT
IN FINES, DEDUCTION OF POINTS
AND IN SOME CASES
DISQUALIFICATION!**





You're under starter's orders

Buckle up, strap yourselves in and grab your racing helmets because I, Evie Clutterbuck, am going to tell you about the **Speedwheels 3000** and how it changed me and my dad for ever.

Now, the **Speedwheels 3000** is the most **exciting**, most **famously bonkers** car race in the **whole world. Full stop.** If you haven't heard of it, who even are you? An alien? Because everybody on this planet knows about Speedwheels. Drivers cover approximately 3,000 miles and **speed** their way through seven countries in Europe in their self-modified cars and compete in crazy car challenges to become the **ultimate Speedwheels racer**. A title that my dad, Tony Clutterbuck, has wanted to claim his entire life. A title that I was desperate to help him win.

I promise you that I'm not going over the top when I say my dad thinks about *nothing* but Speedwheels. My dad doesn't talk much, but when he does, it's all about car engines and tyre pressures, the other drivers and the best routes through the Apennine Mountains in Italy. Which, as it transpired, may have been less dangerous than the one that I mapped out – but more of that later.

So, yes, my dad is super obsessed with Speedwheels. I swear that sometimes I even hear him making car engine noises in his sleep. I guess, if you want to be a champion you have to be dedicated and you have to be committed to the cause above *everything* else. *Everyone* else. **Speedwheels 3000** means everything to my dad, it's his whole world and that's why I wanted to get involved – I wanted to be a part of that world too. Part of his world, I suppose.

I've been watching him race for as long as I can remember, and I guess his obsession turned me into a petrolhead too. I've studied all the other drivers – I've been on their fan sites and learned everything there is to know about them and their cars. But Dad has never been *that* keen on me learning about his passion. He calls me his little blond hurricane because he thinks I cause disasters wherever I go. I would have argued against that, but it is tricky to right now, considering I did cause a bit of

a **disaster**. Well, a **few disasters** really but I don't think people should dwell too long on their mistakes. It's not good for your self-confidence.

Anyway, knowing that Dad wasn't that pumped about me becoming a Speedwheels racer, I presented a very compelling case to persuade him to let me be his co-driver, on this, his **fifteenth attempt** to win the **Speedwheels 3000**.

Here were my key points:

- It would be educationally very excellent for me. What better way to learn about new countries and cultures than by speeding past them at 100 mph?
- I'd done extensive research into the drivers and the routes around Europe. I'd be a great asset!
- I had nothing else to do in the summer holidays – the **Speedwheels 3000** would be a very productive way for me to spend my time.

It would be very cool to be a champion Speedwheels racer at eleven years of age. That sort of renown could open doors for me. I'd be set up for life.

Unfortunately, while it felt like the longest conversation I'd had with him for ages, Dad was not won over by my frankly superbly comprehensive argument. He said something about it being too dangerous, that I was too young, completely inexperienced and that I knew my way around a car about as well as I knew my way around

a map. Which I told him was most excellently and he said, “Not the superlative I would use! And as you need to know about maps and cars, I’m afraid you’re not coming. Never. No way. Not a chance.”

I thought about telling him the other reason, the *real* reason I wanted to join him – that I wanted to spend some quality time with him. You see, lately, I’d been feeling like I was losing him, and I just wanted the chance to find him again. And for him to find me. Speedwheels would mean we’d have a proper chance for some father–daughter bonding. But by the time I finally plucked up the courage to say those words, he had his head back under the bonnet again. I tried anyway and said, “Dad, the thing is...I was hoping that...perhaps if I went...maybe we could...what I’m trying to say is—”

But he said, “Evie, I’m busy. I simply don’t have time for this.”

I suppose what he really meant was that he simply didn’t have time for me.

I’d like to believe that I’m a very positive person, but it was hard not to think that there might be something wrong with me for Dad to feel that way.

“Dad, look, I know you’re busy but I’m your only kid—”

I didn’t get to finish what I was going to say, because he threw down his spanner and slammed the bonnet. When

he looked at me, the expression on his face told me I’d gone too far. I *had* gone too far, and I regretted it immediately – see, I haven’t always been his only kid. There was Timmy.

Timmy was my older brother, but I never got to meet him because he died before I was born. Timmy got very sick and there was nothing anyone could do about it, and it was very, very **sad**. It makes me very, very **sad** too – both that I didn’t know him, and that Mum and Dad are still so very, very **sad** about losing him. They can try and hide the sadness from me, but I can see it. It’s a part of my family that I can’t be a part of.

Speedwheels always falls at the same time of year we lost Timmy, and Dad always retreats into himself, and the car, whenever it comes round. He makes out that he’s distracted by all the race preparations, but you don’t need to be a professional psychologist to know there’s more to it than that. And I understand that it is hard for him, I do, but this year Dad was more distant than ever, and it worried me. I think it was because, this year, Timmy would have turned seventeen, which would have meant he’d be old enough to drive. If he’d still been here, he’d have been joining Dad on the **Speedwheels 3000**.

The day after I presented my list of reasons, I thought I’d have another go at persuading him. Fortune favours

the persistent after all. I found Dad in the garage again. This time he was sitting in the front of his car. He didn't see me come in, but I saw the way he looked at the empty seat next to him and I knew what he was thinking, *Timmy should be there*. I couldn't bring my brother back, but I could try my best to fill that seat, so Dad didn't have to be on his own.

I should have explained all this to him, but I didn't know how to bring it up without making Dad even sadder. So, I just repeated all the reasons I thought I should go, and, in the end, all I did was succeed in making him angry.

"Enough, Evie. Enough," he said in a voice that shook with emotion. Then he climbed out of the car and headed for the door.

I chased after him. "Dad, I'm sorry it's—"

"Look, Evie, I could do without being hassled by you at the moment. There's so much to do and—" He stopped in the doorway and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he didn't look angry any more, he looked... I don't know, tired? Hurt? Defeated? Maybe all three. It's funny how someone's face can say so many things when they don't let their voice out.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "No, it's me who should be sorry, but I just really need to be on my own right now."

I wanted to tell him that was the last thing he needed! That lately he was *always* on his own. That when he wasn't at work, he spent every spare moment in the garage. Even when he did come out to have dinner with Mum and me, he wasn't ever with us properly. His mind was always elsewhere. I wanted to tell him that I was worried that he'd disappear so far into himself that he'd never find his way back out. But I didn't get a chance to say any of that, because he'd already gone.

So that is why I had to take matters into my own hands and sneak onto the race without him knowing. And this is also possibly why we are now dangling off a cliff in Italy, about a hundred metres above the beautiful blue Ligurian Sea with stolen bars of gold bullion in the boot of



our car, an incredibly smelly and barky dog in the back and probably in a **little spot of trouble**.

When I say probably, I mean definitely.

And when I say little spot, I mean a huge great big splodge of trouble with a capital **T**. In fact, the **R O U B L** and **E** deserve to be in capitals too. I know you're wondering why we haven't phoned for help. The answer to that is I chucked Dad's mobile out of the window during the police chase. Possibly not the cleverest thing I've ever done.

Mum would say, "Oh, Evie Clutterbuck, you strike again!" Actually, right now, if Mum saw us, she probably wouldn't be saying anything. She'd probably be doing a **lot of screaming**. Which I'm beginning to think might be a reasonable course of action. Dad screamed to start with, but we've been dangling here for a while now and he must have run out of energy for screaming because now he's sort of half-crying half-praying, which I suppose is a reasonable response too.

I'm sure it will all be fine in the end...

In fact, looking at the positives, which is something I like to do, I reckon that if we manage to get back on the road soon, we might even have a chance of crossing the finish line first and winning the bet I should never have made! How cool would that be? Granted, it's a slim chance,

but it's a chance all the same. My route so far might not have been the safest, that I cannot deny, but it certainly has been the fastest, and it did get us away from the police. We must have a huge lead. I reckon we saved loads of time when we cut through the tunnel and then did that massive jump over the ravine. Sure, Dad wasn't pleased about my "reckless route planning", and considering our current situation, he may have a point. *But* if I can figure out a way to get down from this cliff edge quickly, we might still do it. I think Dad might forgive me for almost killing him if he ends up as the **Ultimate Speedwheels racing champion**. Although, if we do survive this, he might end up in prison because of the stolen gold we've got stashed in the boot. What a predicament. But as I said, I'll think of something...

Hmmmmmm.

A solution isn't leaping into my mind at this exact moment. That's probably because I find I think better when I'm not thinking, if you know what I mean? I reckon that the best ideas just **jump** out of my head when I'm busy concentrating on something else. Don't know how that works. Could be divine intervention from a godly being, could be luck, could just be that I have an extremely powerful subconscious that has much better ideas than my non-subconscious. Don't suppose it matters. But I

think I need to stop thinking about a solution so the solution can come to me. So why don't I tell you the story about how Dad and I ended up in this slightly precarious position in the first place, while my super subconscious does its thing and comes up with a super plan?

Okay, good, that's what I'm going to do – I'll jot any important information down in my notebook and I'll go back to where it all began, before Dad even pulled up to the starting line.



It was one week to go until the **Speedwheels 3000** started and one day since my second attempt to convince Dad to let me be his co-driver. I decided to try another tack. Mum. I approached her when she was having a quiet moment reading in the sitting room to ask her to speak to him, but she just laughed, which annoyed me.

“I do not appreciate having my dreams laughed at,” I told her and put my hands on my hips to demonstrate that **this was no joke.**

Her face suddenly got very tight, and she set her book down on the arm of the sofa. “Oh, Evie, you’re serious, aren’t you?”

“Yes, *lady*, I am. I have never been more serious about anything in my whole life.” I don’t know why I said *lady*,

I've never called her that before or since. I think perhaps it was to sound lofty and important.

It didn't work though because she said, "Evie, I struggle to even let your father compete in the race – it can be quite dangerous – but he insists it's something he needs to do. It's just his way of dealing with things. You know how he gets this time of year."

"I wish he wouldn't shut us out though." I plonked myself down next to her. "And I think he's worse this year, don't you? I think it would be good for him if I went too."

She let out a big sigh and pushed my hair behind my ear. "Your father might not be able to control everything, but he can control what's going on under the bonnet of that car. However, there's no way I'm going to let someone as precious as you take part in something so dangerous. Besides, you're far too young, it's against the rules and you can't drive."

If she'd thought that would put me off, she was wrong. Danger is my middle name. Well, officially I don't have a middle name, but who is going to stop me claiming Danger? Furthermore, when it comes to rules, I have always seen them more as **guidelines** or **suggestions** than hard and fast things you have to follow. Besides, I checked them and there was nothing that officially said a minor couldn't race. And really, how hard can driving be? You

just waggle the steering wheel about and put your foot on the accelerator. But when I pointed all this out, Mum just squished my cheeks, kissed my nose and said, "You burst with spirit, Evie and I love that, but the answer is, and always will be, no."

Then she turned back to her book on slow-worms, and I knew the conversation was over. Slow-worms? Ah yes, I should probably explain that. Mum's trying to stop people building on the field behind our house and for some reason she believes the protected slow-worms that live there are the answer.

Mum's always trying to save something. A while back it was our local library, then she campaigned to keep the school lollipop man, which was a bit embarrassing when we discovered Donald had actually requested to retire early. After that, she had a bit of a crusade to save the endangered European bison. She even ran a marathon dressed as one. That got her on the front page of our local newspaper, which made me feel quite proud but also a bit horrified. Kids at school were making weird mooing noises at me for weeks. But I think her efforts must have worked because she tells me the bison are doing well now.

With it looking very unlikely that I'd convince Mum, I thought about going to the garage to speak to Dad one more time, but I knew he'd be busy and agitated and he'd

made it pretty clear he didn't want to talk to me. Besides, the week before a race he does a lot of prep. He gets completely in the pre-race zone, at least that's what he calls it. He has a lot of zones. The **practice zone**, the **lead-up zone**, the **pre-pre-race zone**, the **pre-race zone**, the **very pre-race zone**, the **starting-line zone**, the **race zone** and then the **post-race zone** (very bad zone because Dad *never* wins) and the **post-post-race zone** (where he almost gives up), then back to the **practice zone** (where he vows that next time he will definitely win). His life is one big **circle of zones**, and I don't fit in any of them. Well, up until now that is. Right at this moment, we are both in the dangling-off-a-cliff zone. I know it isn't the loveliest of situations, but I do like that we are in this zone together – although Dad told me to stop smiling about it when I said I was glad I was doing the dangling with him.

Anyway, the week before the race Dad was up to his collarbones in the pre-race zone. He was spending his time checking the weather forecast across Europe and changing his mind about what tyres to use and mapping out possible routes in his head. And reading rumours online about the other drivers and their plans.

Ooh, I should probably tell you about some of the other racers because it is possible that one or more of them are responsible for our cliff-dangling. Caroline Zipper is

definitely the reason we have Ivan the stinky-barky dog in the back. I'm not sure who is behind the stolen gold, but I have my suspicions.

As I've already mentioned her, let's start with **Caroline Zipper**. Dad calls her the newbie as she only started racing three or so years ago. The story goes that she accidentally discovered she had a talent for the sport after a criminal tried to carjack her. He got in the back, behind the driver's seat, and demanded she get out and give him her car.

But Caroline wasn't having that. Apparently, she drove down the country lanes in Cornwall where she lives at well over 100 miles an hour, avoiding sheep and cattle and oncoming tractors with handbrake turns and cutting through fields. The thief ended up begging to be let out. Caroline obliged, right outside Truro police station. She made all the front pages as he turned out to be a pretty notorious criminal.



She's one of nine women in this year's Speedwheels, but she's my favourite because I think what she did makes her a bit of a badass. Although Mum won't let me say the word ass, so I have to say bad-bottom, which I think you'll agree **somewhat detracts** from Caroline Zipper's magnificence. Her car is built from an old 1970s Ground Roamer 88. It has huge wheels, almost as big as a tractor's, but the coolest bit is the transparent bonnet where you can see the triple turbo engine she's added. When it was first manufactured, it only had a top speed of 65 mph – that's miles per hour, by the way. But now, thanks to all Caroline's modifications, it's done 119 mph and she recently said in an interview that she thinks it can go faster.

Donovan Witt is one of the many Americans in the race and Dad's biggest competition. Although, I don't think Donovan sees it like that. I don't think he is aware Dad even exists, what with Dad's best-ever placing being fourteenth. Which isn't bad considering there are over sixty racers. But as the favourite, and a bit of a star, Donovan only acknowledges drivers who make the top ten. Donovan was a super successful basketball player but moved to Speedwheels when he retired from the NBA. He is very tall, has a fade cut, and a square jaw that makes him look a bit like an Action Man figure. Dad's not a

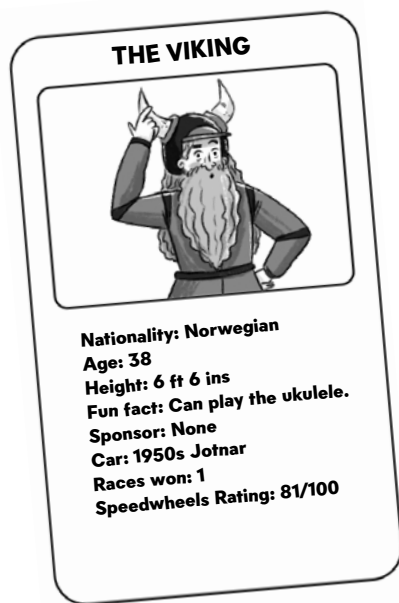
fan of Donovan's. He actually calls him Donovan Dim Witt. Although not to his face, what with Donovan not speaking to him and all.

Donovan's pickup truck is pretty cool. It's a pimped-up classic 1950s Big Guzzler. It has massive wheels and Donovan sits up in his driver's seat looking down on everyone. But its size doesn't slow it down because of the powerful engine he's installed. The original Big Guzzler had a top speed of 61 mph, but Witt's has been clocked at 130 mph! It has **eight exhausts** on the back, and it can also bounce up and down on its suspension like it's **dancing**. Dad isn't impressed, he says it does nothing to help the drive and that it's all show, but I think it looks ace. Last Speedwheels, Donovan scored top points in every one of the racing challenges, as well as crossing the finish line first. Even Dad can't say that isn't impressive.

The racing challenges? Those happen at various stages during the competition, and they add extra points to your score. Drivers don't know what the challenges are going



to be until they get there, but they are always **properly bonkers**. One year, competitors had to use their cars to knock giant inflatable footballs into a goal; another time they had these jousting poles stuck to their car bonnets and they had to drive a downhill slalom whilst trying to burst balloons. They're my favourite part of the whole race and the fans love them.



bit like a Viking, hence the name, I suppose. He has grown a long blond beard and has very blue eyes, which are rumoured to be coloured contact lenses. But without actually going up and wagging a finger on his eyeballs,

that's hard to prove. He's tall too. I'm not sure if he gave himself the nickname The Viking or if someone else did. He seems to like the whole "Viking branding" though because he stuck two horns on his racing helmet – which is factually incorrect. Viking helmets did not have horns. I emailed his fan website to point that out, but I never got a response and the horns stayed so I guess he's okay with being historically inaccurate. Makes me wonder what else he's okay with. Perhaps the procurement of stolen gold.

The Viking's car isn't what you'd expect for a man of his size. You're probably thinking he has some huge motor. But no. The Viking drives a souped-up Jotnar. It's one of only five ever built and it is quite tiny, but classic looking. In its original form, it could go a max of 80 mph, but now The Viking has seen speeds in excess of 125 mph. He looks very squashed in the driver's seat, but oh my goodness – thanks to some engine modifications and decent tyres – does that thing **rocket**! And it corners like a dream. He also has a special button he presses when he's close to the finish that gives him a huge burst of power. You'd better not be behind him when he activates it, because flames that reach about five metres in length shoot out from the back two exhausts. He's surprised many a racer by blasting by them right in the final stretch. Apparently, whenever he hits the button, he plays

Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries". If you haven't heard it, you should have a listen. It's classical, but don't let that put you off. It's epically dramatic and the brass section makes it sound like you're riding into battle. I bet it is extremely exhilarating to be in The Viking's motor with his rocket booster going and that music blaring out. But his usual silence makes him seem shiftier to me. And his refusal to talk suggests that he might have something to hide. Definitely one to consider as a suspect for the gold robbery.

Now let me tell you about **Margot Philippe** – the white-haired-wonder from France. She announced this year was



to be her **last ever race** and that she is determined to win. It was touch and go whether she'd be allowed to race this year for two reasons. Number one, she finally had to give in and get the hip replacement she'd been putting off for ages. Number two, she had to retake her driving test because she is of "advanced years".

You'd think it would be easy for one of the world's most loved and well-known Speedwheels racers to pass their test. Well, think again. See, Margot views the laws of the road much like I view any rules – more as **suggestions**. One driving test examiner quit his job after she did a high-speed doughnut outside the Arc de Triomphe, but she got there in the end.

Lots of people love Margot because she is a bit of a legend. Along with Donovan, she's had a record number of top-six finishes and raced in the **first ever Speedwheels**. She wears an all-in-one white leather driving suit and is never seen without a full face of make-up. Her motor is an old Stanhard XV sports car that she's painted red with white stripes and modified to include a **huge spoiler** – that's a sticky out bit on the back of a car that looks a bit like a fin. Her engine is probably the most powerful of all the cars because she's sponsored by a cod liver oil company, and they gave her loads of cash **AND** a secret formula to add to her petrol to make it burn more efficiently. No one knows exactly what it is, but her exhaust fumes do smell a bit fishy, so I'm making the huge leap to it being actual cod liver oil. The original Stanhard had a top speed of only 99 mph, but you can add on an extra 35 mph for Margot's upgraded version.

But listen to this, despite her popularity, I've heard in

some Speedwheels chat forums that she has form for sabotaging the other drivers' races. Every year, drivers discover that their tyres have been slashed or their fuel siphoned, or they've been blocked in by an ice-cream truck. There's never been any hard evidence to prove she's behind it, but I'm definitely not ruling Margot out of my gold-smuggling investigation.

Dad's car, the one that is, at present, gently see-sawing off a cliff, is a Conquest 2000 that was built in the 1970s and goes by the name of Toots. She's a beautiful shade of baby blue and has a black T that Dad lovingly painted in a white circle on the bonnet. It used to be my grandad's pride and joy before it was my dad's. It was what Mum described as a "heap of junk" when Dad inherited it.

Mum said Dad started his obsession with fixing the Conquest right after Timmy died, as a way to channel his grief into something else. As I said, I'm no psychologist, but it seems like Dad needed to try to fix something. And while he couldn't save Timmy, he brought Toots back to life. Dad poured a lot into his car. All of himself, Mum says. He still does.

And, no doubt, Toots is a brilliant automobile. She had a top speed of 102 mph, but with Dad's alterations to the engine and the body he's got it up to 120 mph. He almost reached 125 mph once, but the engine blew out. I especially

like it because it has six lights on the front, accelerates beautifully and is called Toots because its horn sounds much jollier than all the other cars. I'll tell you, when Donovan Witt blasts his horn, people leap six feet into the air, it's so loud. The noise Toots makes is more likely to get a passer-by to doff their cap for a polite *How do you do on this fine and splendid morning?* The other good thing about Toots is that she has ample space in the boot. Which is great for when you're trying to sneak your way onto the **Speedwheels 3000**.



INVESTIGATION NOTE:

Suspects who could be behind the gold in our boot:

- 1. The Viking – maybe has something to hide.**
- 2. Margot Philippe – prior form for sabotage.**