

# Backfire!

or

*The Trials of Stanley*



*A play for a young audience*

by

*Andrew Hilton*

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*Cover: Stephen Leigh as George, Peter Mayock as the Planner & Barrie Shore as the Scientist in the original 1972 production*

*Photo: John Moss*

## The Molecule Theatre of Science

This play was the first that I wrote while I was on the staff of the Mermaid Theatre in London in the early 1970s. It was for the company's 'Molecule Club' series of plays about elements of science for the 7-11 age group - plays I was chiefly responsible for directing at the time. They played mornings and afternoons on the Mermaid stage, usually for a fortnight, then went out on National Tours for six or eight weeks or more, always playing in theatres as their stage effects were often quite demanding.

When the Mermaid company hit serious financial difficulties in the 1980s, the Molecule Club was neatly separated from the parent body, and retitled 'The Molecule Theatre of Science'. In that form it found a new home at the Bloomsbury Theatre and briefly survived the Mermaid's collapse, but eventually had to close when its own funding began to dry up. It had always fallen between the two stools of theatre and education - with each sector passing the buck to the other - and had only received financial support from industry. But with the retirement of its charismatic advocate, Bernard (Lord) Miles and the death of his beloved Mermaid, the ties between the company and industry were fatally weakened.

To my knowledge no other company has produced any of the plays - either mine, or those by Gerald Frow or Clive King. Perhaps their qualities never merited it; but I prefer to think that it is because of their very individual nature. They were created to be performed by professional actors in conventional theatres on often elaborate sets. They cannot be taken into schools, and they certainly cannot be performed by the children themselves. At the same time they are not 'children's theatre' of the kind that can be presented commercially as pure entertainment; they have their very specific purpose, they are in a category of their own.

The script of 'Backfire' here is the one I revised extensively for its revival in 1973. In the original 1972 production, at the end of the play Stanley's petrol engine was removed and replaced with an electric one. But Ian Breach, then the (anti-car) motoring correspondent of The Guardian, in a generally favourable Guardian review, took me to task for 'falling for the idea that a band-aid job can be done on the car' by turning it electric. He even wondered if I had been leant on by some of the Molecule Club's funders - 'Messrs Esso, Ford, Lucas and Tarmac'. I doubt if Esso - or even Ford in 1972 - would have welcomed an electric revolution, but I took the criticism to heart and rewrote the end of the play to have Stanley lengthened into a bus.

The creation of the car was a painful process. An electrically-diven four-wheeler, in which the actor could lie, unseen, was commissioned and delivered. But it was grotesquely heavy and under-powered, inclined to break down, and it's turning circle was hopelessly wide for even the spacious Mermaid stage. After a few fraught performances, our designer, Susan Ayers, constructed a lightweight alternative out of plastic sheet and cane, which first Robert Kingswell and then Ian Bamforth carried on their shoulders, their heads hidden behind the opaque windscreen. Their legs were clearly seen as the motive power, but the device worked well enough.

The play shows its age. While the number of cars in the UK has trebled since 1973, the world's oil supplies are no longer forecast to dry up so imminently as was then feared. Road deaths have fallen dramatically; lead has been removed from petrol; and the electric revolution is now with us. The severe environmental costs of electric power are yet to hit the headlines, but in time they will. So it is possible that my public transport-biased revision still holds water ...

A.H.

February 2021

*Backfire!* was first performed at the Mermaid Theatre, London on 30th October 1972, with the following company:

Stanley	Robert Kingswell
George	Stephen Leigh
Planner	Peter Mayock
Driver/ Pianist	Jeremy Nicholas
Scientist	Barrie Shore
Director	Andrew Hilton
Designer	Susan Ayers
Composer	Colin Tarn
Scientific Adviser	Graham Chedd
Production Manager	Forbes Nelson
Stage Manager	Roger Lawrence
Deputy Stage Manager	T'Marshall Bissett
Assistant Stage Manager	Dot Rendell

The production then went on a National Tour.

The revised version was first performed at the Mermaid on 29th January 1973, followed by another national tour, with the following company:

Stanley	Ian Bamforth
Mrs Thribb & Professor von Schmell	Elayne Sharling
Henry Thribb	Bruce Alexander
George	David Janson
Minister of Planning & Police Constable	Robert Whelan
Director	Andrew Hilton
Designer	Susan Ayers
Composer	Colin Tarn
Scientific Adviser	Graham Chedd
Production Manager	Forbes Nelson
Company & Stage Manager	John David Cutts
Deputy Stage Manager	Jenny Frazer
Assistant Stage Manager	Christopher Burke

## Characters

STANLEY, a small modern sports car, Cockney and aggressive

MRS THRIBB, a housewife

HENRY THRIBB, her son, Assistant to the Minister of Planning

GEORGE, a young builder

PROFESSOR VON SCHMELL, a research scientist at the Ministry of Dirty Air

THE MINISTER OF PLANNING

A POLICE CONSTABLE

*London 1973*



# Act One

## Scene 1

*A London street. To one side, the Thribbs' house. To the other, a building site with - among other things - a wheelbarrow full of concrete blocks and a small fork-lift truck. In the background a distant view of the polluted city. It is morning.*

**Stanley** is asleep outside the Thribbs' front door. **Mrs Thribb** is heard inside the house:

*Mrs Thribb* [Off] Hurry up, Henry, you'll be late!

**Henry** enters from the house, eating a piece of toast, bowler hat under his arm.

*Henry* I'm just off! Bye, mother!

*Mrs Thribb* [Off] Bye, dear!

*Henry* Right, I'm all set ... Stanley!

*Stanley opens his eyes a little, grunts and goes back to sleep. Mrs Thribb appears at the door with a briefcase marked 'Ministry of Planning'.*

*Mrs Thribb* You forgot something! Silly boy!

*She throws the case to Henry and exits.*

*Henry* Ah yes - thanks! Now, Stanley, what's the time? Good heavens, almost ten o'clock! Come on, old chap, wake up - we shall have to fly!

*Stanley* [Opening his eyes] Eh? I'm not flying anywhere. I feel terrible. Oohhh, my head!  
*He staggers about as he has a hangover.*

Can't you go in by bus, just for once?

*Henry* Go in by bus? Stanley, I want to get there this morning, not next week. Anyway, it costs me enough to keep you on the road without having to fork out for bus fares as well. Now, come on, don't be stubborn. The Minister's going to drop in before lunch. I'm supposed to have finished that plan. He'll be furious.

*He climbs into Stanley.*

*Stanley* Oh, all right. But why I should have to slog into town with a splitting headache, I really don't know.

*Unsuccessful starting noises.*

*Henry* Stanley!

*Stanley* [Irritably] I can't help it. I told you, I feel rotten. Catch a bus!

*Henry* Oh, don't be absurd! I know what you need. Who'd own a motor car?

*He goes back into the house.*

*Stanley* You would! - He wouldn't know where he was without me. This is going to be a right day and a half, I can see!

*Enter George, on a bike, whistling. He dismounts at the building-site, hangs his lunch-pack on a nail and starts to unload the blocks from the wheelbarrow.*

'Mornin', sunshine!

George            *[Turning]* Morn - *[Seeing no-one]* That's odd.

*He shrugs and gets back to work. Enter **Henry** with a jug of water, and a tin of Liver Salts.*

Henry            Here we are, Stanley. This should sort you out. Good dose of these - *[Seeing George staring at him]* Ah, good morning!

*He hides the tin behind his back.*

George            Morning.

Henry            Just topping up the radiator, don't you know.

George            *[Still staring hard]* Yes?

Henry            Mm. Got rather hot. Overheating, I think.

*Jug in one hand, tin behind his back in the other, he makes no move for the radiator cap.*

George            Then you'd best put some in, hadn't you?

Henry            Yes, I had.

*Pause. Then George turns away. Hurriedly, Henry hands the jug to Stanley.*

                         Hold that.

Stanley            What?

Henry            Sshh!

*Glancing furtively over Stanley's bonnet at George, he starts to spoon the liver salts into the jug.*

Stanley            'Ere - what's this you're givin' me?

Henry            Liver salts.

Stanley            LIVER SALTS!

Henry            Sshhh!

George            Are you all right? You do know where the radiator is, don't you?

Stanley            I wouldn't bet on it.

George            Eh?

Henry            Oh, nothing. I mean, of course I do. - Shut up, Stanley. - No, I'm fine. You carry on ....er ... ?

George            George.

Henry            Ah, George. No, you carry on - no problem at all.

George            O.K.

*He turns back to his work. Henry unscrews the radiator cap.*

Henry            Here we go, Stanley ...

Stanley            Ugh! It's revolting - 'Enry, stop! Aagh, it's going up me nose!

George            Hey, who said that? Is this street haunted, or something?

Henry            Mm? W-Who said what?

George            Who said 'It's going up me nose'?

Henry            Really? Someone say that? How extraordinary. I didn't hear a thing.

Stanley No, nor did I.

George Didn't you - it's the car! The car spoke!

Henry The car? Oh, surely not. You must be imagining things. Are you feeling - ?

George I'm not imagining things.

Stanley Of course not.

George I don't imagine things.

Stanley What a suggestion!

George I heard that car speak.

Stanley That's right, sunshine. You stick to your guns.

George Thank you - What? Now don't tell me you didn't hear that!

Henry Oh, all right, I admit, he does speak - you know, from time to time.

George I'd never have believed it! I've never heard of that before.

Henry. No, I don't suppose you have - haven't you? Really? It's quite normal, you know. Oh yes, almost an everyday occurrence. Only your top quality cars, of course - twin carburettors, overdrive, leather seats, built-in stereo, voice - mm, all part of the sporty equipment. Gives the car that individual flavour. Nice piece of work, isn't he? Goes like a dream - belts up the motorways, zips through the traffic. Indispensable to a man like me. Yes, we're quite an impressive team, aren't we, Stanley?

Stanley Oh yes!

### **Song - Driving**

Henry *Stanley's my proudest possession  
so noisy and sporty and fun!  
His engine's so brutally powerful  
walkers who see him just run!*

Stanley *Cyclists had better beware us  
so be warned if you hear us at hand.  
Buses we leave far behind us,  
tearing our way through the land!*

Both *Oh, vroom, vroom, vroom goes the engine,  
beep, beep, beep goes the horn!  
Just take off the brake  
and we're (whistle)airborne!  
Our partnership is thriving,  
it's our principle joy,  
we admit,  
that's it,  
that's driving!*

Henry *Made to my own specification,  
this engine's the best that you'll see,  
sporting these twin carburettors,  
tuned to their finest degree!*

Stanley *I'm the envy of many six-seaters*

*as I dodge through the queues down in town,  
and speeding along on the highway  
I'm the pride of the car-driving man!*

*Both* Oh, vroom, vroom etc ...

*As the song ends the Stanley, now with Henry inside, almost knocks George down.*

*Henry* Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I just got a bit carried away.

*George* It's me as nearly got carried away. You want to be a bit more careful!

*Henry* Yes, of course.

*George* They can be dangerous things at the best of times, these cars, but if you drive them like that you're going to be in real trouble.

*Stanley* Yah! Mind your own business!

*He revs. Clouds of exhaust smoke.*

*Henry* Shut up, Stanley.

*George* And, come to that, what about all this smoke? You can't go around pumping all that out.

*Henry* Why ever not?

*George* It's not healthy. You're fouling up the air!

*Henry* A few puffs of smoke? What harm could that do? Sorry, George, can't stop. I shall be in terrible trouble at this rate. Come on, Stanley!

*He gets into the car and they set off. George blocks the way with his wheelbarrow.*

*George* Oh no, you don't!

*Henry* Oh, come on, old chap. Don't be like that. I'm awfully late as it is. You see, I work at the Ministry of Planning. We've been working on a new road plan for months. I'm supposed to have it finished this morning. We don't make any more smoke than anyone else, you know.

*George is unmoved.*

Oh well. Then I shall just have to move it myself.

*As Henry moves towards the barrow, George climbs into it and folds his arms.*

*[To Stanley]* What do I do now?

*Stanley* I dunno. Should've taken my advice in the first place and caught a bus. Now you're really lumbered.

*Henry* A bus? Of course. I might just make it in time. 63, isn't it? Just around the corner? See you later - must dash.

*He hurries off.*

*George* Here - come back!

*Stanley* Hey, you can't desert me now ... Coward!

*George* Fancy leaving you like that!

*Stanley* Yeah, typical of 'Enry.

*George* Still, I expect we'll get along without him. You can speak for yourself, can't

you?

*Stanley* What do you mean - speak for myself? You're not going to have a go at me now, are you?

*George* Why not? You're the guilty party, aren't you? It's you that's making the smoke.

*Stanley* Well, yes, but I mean ... It's a bit tough, isn't it?

*George* I don't see why. You're not a child, are you?

*Stanley* Certainly not!

*George* You're a responsible human being. So you can speak for yourself.

*Stanley* Er ... I'm not sure about that ...

*George* So what have you got to say for yourself?

*Stanley* About what?

*George* About all this smoke you make.

*Stanley* Well, it's just a normal amount of smoke. I mean, you can't stop me pushing out a bit of smoke, can you? I have to, don't I?

*George* Why?

*Stanley* Eh? Well, it's how I work isn't it? I burn petrol. That's what makes me go. And burning petrol makes a bit of smoke. I can't see what harm it does. What's a few puffs of smoke to all the air in the world? It smells a bit, I know, but lots of people like that - particularly the smell from a highly tuned engine like mine.

*George* Yes, but it's more than a smell. There are poisonous fumes in it, aren't there?

*Stanley* Poisonous fumes? Get away! I don't see anyone dropping down poisoned. What's poisonous about it?

*George* Well, there's er ... and um ...

*Stanley hoots triumphantly.*

*Stanley* Yah! No evidence! You don't know what you're talking about!

*George* Oh, all right, I don't. So we must find someone who does.

*Stanley* What?

*George* We must get you analysed. A sort of blood test. The Ministry of Dirty Air's the place. Come on, follow me!

*Stanley* You're joking - I can't leave here!

*George* Why not? Run out of petrol, have you?

*Stanley* No, of course not. But 'Enry'll be back soon - wonder where I've got to.

*George* He's only just gone to work.

*Stanley* He won't be there long. Coffee break, a quick lunch and then off for a long weekend - that's his Friday.

*George* Then he'll just have to fret. Come on. You're not going to wangle your way out of this one.

*Stanley* Oh, that ever I was born!

**Music.** *George and Stanley set off in circuits of the stage as the next scene is set.*

## Scene 2

*The Ministry of Dirty Air. A wall-size computer: lights that can flash, tape-wheels, and a narrow paper-roll print-out. Beside it, large graphs marked 'Lead' and 'Carbon Monoxide'. To one side, a tripod-mounted telescope.*

*Enter **Professor Von Schmell**, white-coated, carrying a clipboard and pen. She first presses various buttons on the computer, setting the lights flashing and the tape-wheels turning. She then turns away to write on her clipboard. The start of a print-out is signalled by a long beep. She scans it.*

*Schmell* Carbon monoxide pollution, Great Britain 1973 ... Major causes ... factories ... domestic sources ...

*The print-out stops.*

power stations ... *[Tearing it off]* Nothing new here, I'm afraid. And still six million tons unaccounted for!

*The print-out begins again. It is brief. She tears it off and reads:*

What's this? Something else ... Steam trains? We've not used steam trains in this country for years!

*She presses a reject button vigorously.*

Think again, my friend. This will not do.

*The computer flashes apologetically.*

I should think so!

*Another brief print-out. She tears it off.*

"Humblest apologies. Won't happen again. Human error." I did not buy you to make human errors. You're a computer - you're supposed to avoid them. Hopeless! I shall have to get you replaced, you know.

*The lights flash contrition. As Schmell begins to transfer the figures from the the print-outs to the two graphs, enter **George** and **Stanley**. George coughs nervously.*

*George* Excuse me - Professor von Schmell?

*Schmell* That's right. What can I do for you? I'm afraid I am rather busy.

*George* Yes, of course, but I just wondered if - if perhaps you could give Stanley here a bit of a looking over. He's none too healthy, I reckon.

*Schmell* I'm sorry, but I think you must have come to the wrong department. I am a chemist, not a doctor.

*George* Ah, no, Professor - Stanley's the car, you see.

*Schmell* *[Looking up]* The car? Ah yes, very interesting. But as I say, I am a chemist. Neither a doctor - nor a garage mechanic! Now, if you'll excuse me ...

*George* But I think Stanley might interest you as a chemist, Professor.

*Pause.*

*Schmell* What's your name?

*George* George.

*Schmell* Well, George, you must understand that here at the Ministry of Dirty Air we are engaged on very important research. We have no time to waste on trifles.

*Stanley* Charming!

*Schmell* I beg your pardon!

*Stanley* Oh, nothing.

*Schmell* I should think so! So if you'll excuse me -

*George* But I think this may be important too, Professor.

*Pause.*

*Schmell* Oh very well. But you had better be right.

*She walks over to the car. A wolf whistle from Stanley.*

We'll have none of that, please!

*Stanley* Sorry.

*Schmell* Stanley, is it?

*Stanley* Stan.

*Schmell* If you wish. Now - Stan - what is the trouble?

*Stanley* Nothing, Professor. Fit as a fiddle.

*Schmell* I see. Let's have a look, shall we?

*She opens the bonnet and peers in.*

This seems quite normal to me. Could you rev a little, please?

*Stanley revs. Smoke.*

Yes, very good. I can see nothing wrong here. That's the healthiest throat I've heard in a long time.

*George* Yes, but -

*Schmell* Firing well, are you, Stanley? Not overheating? Oil clean?

*Stanley* Yes. Never felt better.

*He revs hard to prove his point. Clouds of smoke.*

*Schmell* Well, George, what is it then?

*George* All this smoke, Professor. All these exhaust fumes. Surely they can't be healthy?

*Schmell* Oh, a mere drop in the ocean. If you worked here, if you knew how much filth and how many poisonous chemicals there were floating about in our air, ruining our health and blackening our buildings, you wouldn't worry your head over a few puffs of smoke from a car. Why, we calculate it all in millions of tons. The car is insignificant.

*Stanley* There you are, George. What did I tell you?

*Schmell* Our job here is to find out what's responsible and who's to blame. Then and not before can we start to get our air cleaner again. So you see I can't take time off to worry about the odd puff of smoke from a car.

*Stanley* Thank goodness for that!

- Schmell* I have quite enough on my hands trying to account for all the lead and carbon monoxide we find. It's getting quite worrying.
- George* Are they dangerous?
- Schmell* They don't exactly make us drop down dead in the street, but they certainly are very bad for us. Carbon monoxide can make us tired and slow and not see very well. And it can indeed be dangerous for old people and people who aren't very healthy anyway.
- George* And lead?
- Schmell* Equally bad, I'm afraid. There isn't as much of it, but it builds up in our bodies, you see. Once we've breathed it in we don't get rid of it.
- George* Oh.
- Schmell* So most of us these days have far more lead in our bodies than our parents and grandparents had.
- George* But where does it all come from?
- Schmell* That's the curious thing, George. I've found many sources, of course - factories and so on - but there are still 600,000 tons of lead and six million tons of carbon monoxide unaccounted for. I've obviously missed at least one major source. However, I am working on a very exciting theory.
- George* What's that?
- Schmell* Lunar interference!
- George* Lunar interference?
- Schmell* Yes, I think the moon may be raining these chemicals down on us. It is a distinct possibility - and you know every avenue must be explored. Now I have only to assemble the evidence and convince the Space Authority that it must be investigated. I might even go myself.
- George* Where to?
- Schmell* To the moon, of course!
- George* I see. So you - you won't have time for a quick look, then?
- Schmell* At what?
- George* Stanley's fumes.
- Stanley* You never give up, do you?
- Schmell* Oh, very well. If only to get some peace! But I don't know *what* you expect me to find.
- She unhooks an intake tube on the side of the computer.*
- Just back up a little, could you, Stanley?
- Stanley* Oh, all right.
- Schmell* Now I'm just going to take a small sample from your exhaust.
- Stanley* 'Ey, 'ang on - it's not a needle job, is it?
- Schmell* No needles. Hold that there, will you, George?
- George holds the tube over the exhaust pipe. Schmell walks over to the control panel.*

Now, Stanley, just rev hard.

*Grumbling incoherently, Stanley revs very weakly.*

George Oh come on, Stan, you can do better than that.

*Stanley revs harder.*

Schmell That's better. Splendid!

*Lights start to flash*

Right! Enough! Now, George, the smoke will have gone through this tube and passed over the electronic analysers inside the computer. In a few seconds they should tell us what they have made of the sample.

*Print-out signal. Print-out.*

Here we are ... Now let's see ... yes, a little smoke, of course ... and some small traces of common chemicals ... what? Carbon monoxide?

George Really, Professor?

Schmell Yes! ... And lead, too! This is quite extraordinary.

George How much, Professor?

Schmell Much more than I had imagined. In fact, substantial amounts. What it would all add up to, of course, I don't know. How many cars are there in Britain, George, do you know?

Stanley About ten million. There you are - straight from the horse's mouth.

Schmell Really? That many? Then it could be quite serious. The computer will work it out for us ... now, let's see ...

*She enters figures on the keyboard, reading from the print-out.*

Carbon monoxide ... and lead ... from approximately ten million cars ...

*Lights begin to flash, and gather speed, noises sound and a large red warning light comes on.*

Oh no, what's happening? It can't take it ...

*She presses the escape button repeatedly.*

It's no use - it's going to explode. Take cover!

*As the computer explodes it disgorges a long print-out. Silence.*

George Are you all right, Professor?

Schmell Yes, of course, but my computer - it's ruined!

George *[Gathering up the print-out]* Look at this! ... I can't understand it. What does it say?

Schmell It's very difficult - it's all jumbled up ... No, here we are ... Lead, 600,000 tons a year; carbon monoxide, 6 million tons a year! It's there - all of it! It's quite fantastic! It's not the moon after all. It's the car - it's you, Stanley!

Stanley Whoops! I've copped it now!

### **Song - Pollution**

Schmell *At last I think I've found the answer  
to the problem that's been driving me insane!*

*It's the car I should have studied closer,  
it's the car that really is to blame!*

*I've found lead and carbon monoxide  
in quantities too big to be ignored.  
They're poisonous!  
They're dirt we really can't afford!*

*Pollution, pollution,  
whatever's the solution?  
Pollution, pollution,  
Whatever can we do?*

*I thought 'twas lunar interference  
that was causing this environmental mess.  
Now I know that theory had no credence,  
I was wrong I really must confess.*

*So my years of constant labour  
are coming to an unexpected close.  
It's Stanley!  
It's the car we really should expose.*

*Pollution, pollution etc ...*

George Well, Professor, what can we do?

Schmell There must be something, but I don't know what. Do you, Stanley?

Stanley I wouldn't tell you if I did. Anyway, what's the point? They're making way for more cars all the time. We'll outnumber you pretty soon. Then where'll you be?

*He chuckles.*

George Who's making way for more cars?

Stanley The planners! 'Enry and all that lot, who'd you think?

Schmell The planners, of course! That's where we must go, George - the Ministry of Planning. We must tell them what we've found. Come on George, Stanley, there's not a moment to be lost!

Stanley Oh, why did I open my big mouth? 'Enry Thribb, 'ere we come!

*All three circle the stage as we move to the next scene ...*

## Scene 3

*An office in the Ministry of Planning. On the wall a large map of Great Britain with a network of stick-on motorways. By it a stepladder. On a desk a phone, a large model of an apartment block on stilts, and a pile of roads ready to apply to the map.*

*Enter **Henry**, hot and flushed.*

Henry What a nightmare! Fancy changing its route! I haven't used the 63 bus since I was at school. Five miles in the wrong direction! And look at the time - almost noon! The Minister'll be here any minute. Where are those roads? ... Ah yes, the M107 and the A530 - they'll do to start with. Let's see ...

*He climbs the stepladder with the two roads.*

The M107, from Dundee ... to Fort William ... It's hopeless, I'll never get it on, there just isn't room! This whole scheme is mad.

*The phone rings.*

I'm coming! ... Thribb. Ah, good morning, Minister. Mm, what? No, of course I haven't just got in. I've been here all morning. You're coming down? Yes, of course, sir! See you in a few moments!

*He hangs up, dashes to the map, trying to fit the two roads on any old how, despairs, goes back to the pile of roads, picks them all up and looks around for somewhere to hide them.*

*Minister* [Off] Thribb! Thribb!

*Henry* Almost ready, Minister!

*As a last resort he stuffs the roads under his jacket. Enter the **Minister of Planning**, rotund and self-important, evidently dressed for an occasion.*

*Minister* Ah, there you are, Thribb.

*Henry* Hello, Minister.

*Minister* Today's the day, what? 'Roads and Motorways in the year 2000'. Our complete plan, ready for presentation to the Prime Minister herself. Oh, I've dreamt of this day, Thribb.

*Henry* Yes, Minister.

*Minister* Yearned for it, given it twenty years of my life. Ever since that dreadful evening I got soaked to the skin waiting for a non-existent bus in the Fulham Road. That's it, I thought! The death of public transport. Washed up, played out, a thing of the past! We must look to the future!

*Henry* Oh, absolutely, Minister -

*Minister* You and I can't waste our time waiting in the rain for buses that don't turn up, can we, Thribb?

*Henry* No, of course not, Minister.

*Minister* We can't go on crawling into work on those smelly old suburban trains, can we, Thribb?

*Henry* No, Minister.

*Minister* So what do we do?

*Henry* Er ... what do we do? ... er, I er ...

*Minister* Come on, Thribb, come on, what do we do?

*Henry* Oh - we all get cars, Minister.

*Minister* Right, Thribb. We all get cars! For which [*pointing at the map*] our new roads provide the space.

*Henry* [*Swallowing hard*] Yes, Minister.

*Minister* And those dreadful buses?

*Henry* We scrap them

*Minister* And all that useless railway track?

*Henry* We tear it up.

- Minister* We tear it up! Tear it up and lay roads in its place. More space for your car, more space for my car, more space for everyone's cars.
- Henry* I hope so, Minister.
- Minister* That's the future I've dreamt of. A car for every man, woman and child in the British Isles. And under our plan, completed, checked, signed, sealed and delivered on this very day, the whole operation will be complete by the year 2,000. In only 27 years time! A mere twinkling of an eye. It's genius, Thribb. Sheer, unadulterated genius!
- Henry* Yes, Minister.
- Minister* Is my tie straight, Thribb?
- Henry* Perfect, Minister.
- Minister* Of course, credit where credit's due. I could never have brought it off without you.
- Henry* Oh well, I ...
- Minister* No, no, the spade work, you've done the spade work. Put our roads on the map, sorted out the puzzles, worked out the detail, fitted in the byroads, the flyovers, the underpasses and so on -
- Henry* Well, yes, some of them ...
- Minister* *[Oblivious, patting him on the back]* No mean feat, Henry. Oh yes, you've done your bit. Stomach ache?
- Henry* What, Minister? Oh no - just a bit chilly this morning -
- Minister* Of course, this will mean promotion, you know.
- Henry* Really, Minister?
- Minister* Oh yes. They'll knight me, of course. Nowhere to promote me to, pension me off, what? Ha ha!
- Henry* *[Dutifully]* Ha ha ...
- Minister* Now ... past noon! I must go. The Prime Minister awaits. The hour has come!
- Pause.*
- Henry* Well, Thribb?
- Henry* Y-Yes, Minister?
- Minister* Where is it?
- Henry* W-Where's w-what, M-Minister?
- Minister* The plan, Thribb, the plan. 'Roads and Motorways in the Year 2000.' The complete breakdown. For the Prime Minister.
- Henry* I-I-I-I ... Well, you see, sir, there's ... er - oh dear!
- Minister* Well?
- Henry* There's been a hitch, Minister.
- Minister* There's what?
- Henry* There's been a hitch - or two.
- Minister* What? There can't possibly have been a hitch. Today's the day. The plan's to be

presented. The summit of my career ... New Year Honours ... knighthood ... at least!

*Henry* But, Minister, there isn't enough room! All those roads we made -

*He opens his jacket and the roads fall out.*

- I couldn't get them all on the map!

*Minister* This is disastrous. We shall be ruined! There must be a way, you fool, there must be. Have you taken every spare inch?

*Henry* Of course, Minister - and some that weren't spare as well.

*Minister* But have you explored every possibility, left not a stone unturned?

*Henry* Er ...

*Minister* Well, have you?

*Henry* Well there is *one* possibility, Minister ...

*Minister* I knew it, I knew there must be a way ... Go on!

*Henry* We could all live ... at sea, Minister.

*Minister* Eh? At sea? What, in - in *ships*?

*Henry* Oh no, Minister, you don't understand. In skyscrapers, on legs! Like this [*this model*]. Yes, cars on the land, people on the sea. Simple, no more argument -

*Minister* Thribb -

*Henry* All the cars would be driven by remote control. So you could drive your car up and down the country all day without ever having to budge from in front of your television -

*Minister* Thribb! You're a fool, a nincompoop! It's absurd. Who on earth wants to live at sea? I don't know why I ever employed you. I should have done it all myself.

*He picks up a handful of roads.*

Of course all these can be got on the map. Plenty of room.

*Henry* Careful, Minister - it's very fragile. Weeks of work.

*Minister* What's this space here?

*Henry* Houses, Minister.

*Minister* Take it. They can live in their cars. What's this space here?

*Henry* Best farming land, Minister.

*Minister* Take it, Thribb. We'll import our food. What's that space there?

*Henry* A National Park, Minister.

*Enter Schmell, George and Stanley.*

*Minister* Take it. What use are moors and mountains if you can't drive to them? Take it, all of it. - Good morning. Do come in.

*Mumbled replies as he powers onward.*

We've got to be ruthless, Thribb. No compromise, no shilly-shallying. Nothing must stand in the way of the car.

*Stanley* Hear hear!

*Not knowing where to look the Minister addresses this to George:*

*Minister* Thank you.

*George* But -

*Henry* But, Minister, *[aside]* people are getting very angry. It's bad enough now, but when they see this plan they'll go berserk - they'll revolt!

*Minister* Revolt? Who'll revolt? These people?

*Henry* Yes, Minister - these and lots more. People whose homes disappear, farmers who lose their land. I don't think they can take much more.

*Minister* They want cars, don't they?

*Henry* Yes, of course, Minister.

*Minister* They can see, can't they, that if we're all to have cars we've got to make room for them - got to have more roads?

*Henry* Well, I don't think they quite realise the size of the problem.

*Minister* They don't realise the size of the problem? Of course they don't! They're dolts, buffoons, nincompoops. They should leave it all to us. Who is in possession of the facts, Thribb?

*Henry* We are, Minister.

*Minister* We are. Who have spent their lives studying the facts and working on the solution?

*Henry* We have, Minister.

*Minister* Exactly. We have. And so the people must be told. Correct?

*Henry* I suppose so, Minister.

*Minister* We lead, Thribb. The people follow. So no half measures, the plan must be completed.

*Henry* Yes, Minister.

*Minister* I shall put the Prime Minister off until tomorrow.

*Henry* Tomorrow? Is that all?

*Minister* Noon tomorrow, not a minute longer, or she'll smell a rat. You'll deal with these people, won't you, Thribb? Be ruthless with them. Remember, we are in the right!

*Henry* Yes, Minister.

*Minister* *[To the others]* So pleased to have met you. Thribb here will answer your query.

*He exits.*

*Henry* Now don't you start, George. I couldn't bear it. He's asking the impossible. It can't be done.

*Schmell* I'm sorry? I don't understand.

*George* Oh, Henry, this is Professor von Schmell. Professor - Henry Thribb, Stanley's owner.

- Schmell* I am very pleased to meet you.
- Henry* How d'you do? Well, you see, Professor, the Minister expects me to fit another two hundred roads on that map by noon tomorrow. There's hardly enough room for that many footpaths, let alone roads.
- George* But what's the point?
- Henry* So that by the year 2000 every man, woman and child in the British Isles can own a car. That would be about 50 or 60 million cars!
- Geo & Sch* What?
- Henry* Yes, it's crazy. We should just disappear under traffic. There's be roads and cars everywhere.
- George* But isn't it bad enough now, with only 10 million cars?
- Henry* Of course it is. And it's getting worse every year, even without his silly plan. The number of cars will have doubled by 1980 anyway. Yes, 20 million in seven years time at the rate we're going. We shall have pulled down thousands more buildings, taken more precious acres of farmland to build roads and still they'll be more crowded than they are now. We're just going to be one big traffic jam!
- Song - Traffic!**
- All* *Traffic, traffic, traffic, traffic,  
traffic, traffic, traffic, traffic,  
traffic, traffic, traffic, traffic,  
jamming up the land!  
Motorways multiply and flyovers soar,  
residential areas ruined by the score!  
The car's on the increase,  
far more than we planned.  
The situation's critical,  
really out of hand.  
Traffic, traffic, traffic, traffic,  
Traffic, traffic, traffic, traffic -*
- Henry* *I am the Planner and I perch by this map,  
clutching motorways in my lap,  
and from this angle  
I'm to sort out the tangle  
for the modern motoring chap.*
- All* *Traffic etc ...*
- Henry* *I am assailed by the claims of farming men,  
who need all of their land for food,  
so I sit in the air  
just tearing my hair  
and wondering what to do!*
- All* *Traffic etc ...*
- Henry* *But it's not only farmers who ring to protest,  
But teachers and housewives, students and the rest.  
They don't want the builders  
to cover the land*

*with the motorways they detest!*

*Reprise Chorus and Henry's first verse simultaneously.*

*As the song ends, the road system falls from the map onto the floor.*

*Henry*            That does it! I resign. The car can go hang. I shall buy myself a hot-air balloon and float around the world. Where's the phone? I'll tell the Minister at once.

*George*            But you mustn't give up now! We need your help. The Professor here has just made the most astonishing discovery.

*Henry*            What's that?

*Schmell*           I have found that the car is one of the greatest causes of air pollution in the world. Just think what it would be like if there were twice or three times as many cars pumping their fumes into our air.

*Henry*            That's terrible. But how can we stop it? Everyone wants a car. No-one will listen. The Minister's bound to get his way in the end.

*George*            He mustn't, Henry. We'll have to make people listen. We've got to bring the car to trial. Before it's too late.

*Henry*            Trial? But how are we going to do that? I mean, where can we do it? The Old Bailey?

*Stanley*           You're not getting me in any court!

*Schmell*           No, no - not a trial like that. A sort of official enquiry, to establish the facts. It should be done in public, on the scene of the problem - in the street, really.

*George*            I know where we can go - knock you up the very thing. Professor, Henry, prepare to give evidence. Stanley, prepare to meet thy doom!

**Music.** *George grabs the stepladder and all four circle the stage as we move back to the street.*

## Scene 4

*The street outside the Thribbs' house.*

*Enter **George, Henry, Schmell** and **Stanley**.*

*George*            This'll do, won't it, Henry? Everything we need - space, a few odds and ends to knock up a witness box and a bench.

*Henry*            Yes, I suppose so - just as long as we don't disturb my mother. She can't stand noise.

*Stanley*           She makes enough herself!

*Henry*            And if she spots us, she'll send me straight back to work.

*George*            Don't worry - we'll be quiet enough.

*Schmell*           Your mother? I don't understand.

*Henry*            This where I live, Professor - that house, there.

*Stanley*           If you can call it living? Some of us have to stay out in the cold.

*Henry*            Oh, shut up, Stanley!

*Schmell* Well, I don't know about your mother, but this seems fine to me. So how do we start - the judge's bench?

*George* Yes, I thought this [*the stepladder*]. He can sit on the top. And I can give him a hammer - you know, to call the court to order.

*Henry* Good. What's next?

*Schmell* A witness box?

*George* I know - my wheelbarrow ... Just up-end it like this ... How's that?

*Schmell* Splendid.

*Stanley* I've never seen anything so ridiculous in all my life. If you think I'm going to make a fool of myself, sitting in a wheelbarrow, or halfway up a ladder, you've got another think coming.

*Henry* [*Taking George aside*] George, what are we going to do with Stanley? I mean he might try to escape. He can be very wilful sometimes.

*Schmell* He's right, George. We must have a dock of some kind. What's that strange yellow machine over there?

*George* That's my fork-lift.

*Schmell* Well, couldn't we tie him to it?

*George* Wait, no. No need to tie him to it ...

*He brings the fork-lift center.*

*Stanley* 'Ere, what's this? Tying who to what? What's going on?

*George* It's all right, Stan. We're just going to lift you into your dock. Come on, Henry, Professor!

*Stanley* Eh? What? On that! Help! I'm off!

*He tries to escape but is stopped and manhandled onto the lift.*

No, George, I shall be sick, I shall get vertigo. I can't stand heights!

*The lift rises slowly.*

Ahhhhhhh! Heeeeeelp!

*Enter the **Police Constable**.*

*P.C.* Hello, ello, ello - what's goin' on hyar then, eh?

*Stanley* You might well ask, Officer. I never thought I'd be so glad to see a policeman!

*P.C.* I think we're up to a bit of mischief, haren't we? Ho, yes. Can we explain ourselves, I ask?

*George* Well, you see, Officer -

*P.C.* Yew can't block up the public 'ighway like this, yew know. Dear me, no. What about the motor traffic, eh?

*George* But this is a cul-de-sac, Officer.

*P.C.* I don't care what kind of day it is, my lad. Yew can't hinterfere with the flow of the traffic.

*George* No, a cul-de-sac - this road - it comes to a dead end. There, see.

- P.C.* *[Peering]* Ho yes, so it does. Now isn't that interestin'? But, you see, my lad, what if your motor vehicle was to want to come along 'ere like so, right to the end, and then turn round and come right back again - what then, I ask?
- Stanley* Yeah, what then, George?
- George* That'd be a bit pointless, wouldn't it?
- P.C.* Our's not to reason why, lad - hoh no - and the fact remains that were a motor vehicle to wish to drive to the end of this road, turn right round and come right back again, yew would be hobstructin' it from so doin', wouldn't yew? So move along, please - yew too, Madam. There's a good girl -
- Schmell* But, Officer, we are conducting a very important enquiry. A trial, really.
- P.C.* A trial? Are you pullin' my leg, madam?
- Schmell* Of course not, Officer!
- P.C.* *[Loosening his collar]* Yes, well this is most hirregular, I must say ... Of course, if I can speak to the judge we might be able to - to er establish some sort of authority for these goins on ...
- Silence*
- I see. No judge. Well, then move along now, please. No judge , er no authority, no trial. Come on, sir, madam -
- George* But Officer -
- P.C.* Yes?
- George* You're the judge.
- P.C.* Eh?
- George* Yes, you. The ideal man for the job. Cool, judicious, dignified ...
- Hen & Sch* Yes, absolutely!
- P.C.* I see your point. Er - what's it all about, then?
- George* We're trying to establish whether or not the car, as represented by Stanley here, is a public nuisance.
- P.C.* Yes, I see *[loosening his collar further]*. Judge, eh? Mm. Well, I think we may be able to work something out. 'Ad you a bench in mind then - a judge's bench?
- Henry* Yes, the ladder. You can sit on the top.
- P.C.* Ho, very nice. Very tasteful. I - I'll just get the feel of it, if you'll excuse me?
- He takes off his jacket and climbs the ladder.*
- Ho, yes. Quite adequate. Thank you.
- Stanley* 'Ere, where's 'is wig? You can't have a judge without a wig.
- Schmell* There must be something we could use, George.
- George* Hang on ...
- He picks up a rag from amongst his building materials and shakes the dust out of it.*
- How about this?
- He gives it to the P.C., who hangs his helmet from the top of the ladder and drapes the rag over*

*his head.*

*P.C.* You're very kind, I'm sure.

*George* Right. Have we forgotten anything? *[To audience]* Have we?

*Stanley* You're not kidding you've forgotten something - a jury! I'm not being tried without a jury!

*George, Henry & Schmell look blank.*

*P.C.* Er, if I might make a suggestion?

*His eyebrows vigorously signal 'the audience'.*

*George* Of course! ... I don't suppose you'd like to be the jury, would you? Would you? Are you sure? Right. Well, I'll present the case for the prosecution, so we're ready!

### **Song - Order in Court!**

*All* We've judge and we've jury  
and witnesses ready,  
we're going to try the car!  
We've set up a court  
of the finest sort  
and the prisoner's at the bar.

*The P.C. unfolds a son-sheet for the chorus:*

*So, order in court,  
swear the witnesses in,  
let's get to the bottom  
of this jam that we're in.  
Let's get to the bottom  
of this jam that we're in!*

*We've Planner to guide us  
and Scientist too  
we're going to try the car.  
We'll assemble a case  
for the car to face,  
and the prisoner's at the bar!*

*So, order in court! etc ...*

*So, come all and join us,  
to sort out the problem,  
we're going to try the car.  
It's for us to debate  
and decide the fate  
of the prisoner at the bar.*

*So, order in court! etc ...*

*Blackout.*

*End of Act One.*

# Act Two

## Scene 1

*The stage is set as in the last scene, but only **Stanley** is present. He is asleep on the fork-lift.*

*Enter **P.C.** and **George**. P.C. climbs the ladder, carrying a hammer and a notebook, sits and knocks three times.*

P.C. Silence in Court!. We shall now 'ear the charges and hevidence against the car.

*A quiet snore from Stanley.*

Is the defendant awake?

*A louder snore.*

Stanley!

*Stanley opens his eyes and revs grumpily.*

That's more like it. Now, Stanley, bein' a car of sound mind you are 'ere to answer charges of - now where are we? - ho, yes, charges of bein' in sundry ways a 'public nuisance'. 'Ave you anythin' to say before we proceed?

Stanley No. Nothing.

P.C. Very well. Are you ready to present the evidence, George?

George Yes, my lord.

P.C. Then what is your first charge?

George That the car is a very dangerous piece of machinery, my lord. Why, only this morning Stanley nearly knocked me down, right here in the street. And that sort of thing is happening every day.

Stanley Pedestrians should be more careful.

George Yes, but so should cars. Streets are for people as well, you know. Anyway, my lord, it's not just pedestrians that are in danger. Thousands of drivers and their passengers are killed and injured every year - just because cars are built badly and driven dangerously.

P.C. *Thousands* of people killed, did you say, George? Just 'ow many do you mean?

George All in all in the British Isles, my lord, it's almost 8,000 killed and many more seriously injured every year.

P.C. 8,000 killed? Good 'eavens! That's about - er [*peering out at the audience as if he is counting them*] sixteen times the number of people in this court today!

George Yes, my lord, exactly. Something's got to be done about it.

P.C. Indeed it 'as. Stanley, this would seem to be a very grave charge indeed. 8,000 deaths on the road every year, not to mention a lot of hinjuries as well. 'Ave you anythin' the say in reply?

Stanley I can't think of anythin' offhand, no. Only *I* haven't killed anyone yet.

P.C. I'm very glad to 'ear it. And I sincerely 'ope you never do. Well, that seems clear enough. Perhaps we should proceed to the next charge, George?

George Yes, my lord. I should now like to call my first witness, Professor von Schmell!

P.C. Call Professor von Schmell!

*Enter **Schmell** to the witness box.*

Professor von Schmell, do you swear by that wheelbarrow to tell the truth?

Schmell Yes, my lord, I do.

Stanley 'Ere, I object! I object!

P.C. Object? What about? The Professor's 'ardly begun.

Stanley You can't swear by a wheelbarrow. It's ridiculous! Yah! Trial invalid!

*He revs triumphantly.*

P.C. *[Hammering vigorously]* Order! Order! The defendant's engine will be immobilised if he does not restrain himself. Objection overruled. The wheelbarrow is part of the very foundation of this court.

Stanley All right, keep yer wig on!

P.C. Prosecution may proceed.

George Thank you, my lord. Now, Professor, you are a scientist at the Ministry of Dirty Air?

Schmell That is correct.

George And you have been tracing the sources of certain 'air pollutants', as you call them.

Schmell Yes. My own chief interest has been in lead and carbon monoxide, two poisonous substances found particularly in city air.

George Until today, Professor, what results had you produced?

Schmell I had found many major sources but large amounts of both substances remained unaccounted for. To be precise, 600,000 tons of lead and 6 million tons of carbon monoxide. It was most puzzling. I was pursuing a lunar theory but, of course, that no longer seems necessary.

George Why is that, Professor?

Schmell Because my examination of Stanley's exhaust revealed that the car has been to blame all along.

P.C. Really, Professor? What evidence 'ave you to this effect?

Schmell My tests produced these results, my lord.

*Holding on the end, she throws the roll of print-out across the court to George.*

P.C. Very impressive. I must say, that's the longest piece of evidence I've ever 'eard.

*A 'raspberry from Stanley'.*

Thank you, Professor. Is that all, George?

Schmell No, my lord. There is something else. Waste!

P.C. Waste? Could yew explain, please?

Schmell Certainly, my lord. The car wastes raw materials.

- George* Which ones, Professor?
- Schmell* The most important is the oil from which we make the car's petrol. World supplies of oil seem to be running out very fast - there may be none left in twenty years time if we don't cut back. And the car uses it so wastefully!
- P.C.* No oil left in twenty years? That's terrible. What else does the car waste?
- Schmell* There are the metals, my lord, with which we make the car - mainly steel, of course, but also quite rare metals like chromium. We waste terrific amounts of these because we throw away thousands and thousands of cars every year.
- Stanley* I wish someone would throw you away!
- P.C.* Stanley!
- Stanley* Sorry.
- P.C.* This is fascinatin', Professor. I really 'ad no idea of these problems, no idea at all. Can you reply to any of the Professor's charges, Stanley?
- Stanley* How d'you mean - can I reply?
- P.C.* Well, do you question 'er findins - do you deny that you pollute the air and waste raw materials?
- Stanley* No, I suppose not. But isn't there a new kind of engine you could put in me that isn't as dirty as my petrol engine? I thought I'd heard something about an electric one.
- Schmell* Yes, there are people trying to make an electric engine for cars, but it seems to create as many problems as it solves. We can't get enough power out of batteries to drive a car very far and, anyway, ten million batteries would soon use up some of the rare materials needed to make them.
- Stanley* Oh.
- Schmell* Other kinds of engine, my lord, all have similar drawbacks.
- P.C.* I see. Well, Professor, in view of these findins, 'ave you any recommendation to make to the court?
- Schmell* That is a very difficult question to answer, my lord, but I really can see no alternative but to ban the car.
- Stanley* You what?
- P.C.* Ban the car!
- Schmell* Yes, I'm afraid so, Stanley.
- P.C.* Good 'eavens!

### **Song - Sorry, Stanley**

*Schmell* *I'm sorry to say  
I see no other way  
but to ban the car from the road.  
How else can we leave  
the air that breathe  
fit for the future to know?  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*P.C.* Thank you, Professor. I'm sure the court will take your evidence into consideration. That is all.

*Schmell* Thank you, my lord.

*She exits.*

*P.C.* Well, Stanley, what about that then? A rather shocking conclusion, that.

*Stanley* You're not kidding.

*P.C.* In fact, I have never before presided over a case quite like this.

*Stanley* 'Ave you ever before presided over a case?

*P.C.* What? Ah - no, perhaps not. Shall we carry on? Have you any more charges to bring, George?

*George* Yes, I have, my lord. I should like to call my next witness, Henry Thribb.

*P.C.* Call 'Enry Thribb!

*Enter **Henry** to the witness box.*

Mr Thribb, do yew swear by that wheelbarrow to tell the truth?

*Henry* I do, my lord.

*P.C.* Carry on, George. Smartly now.

*George* Thank you, my lord. Mr Thribb, as an official at the Ministry of Planning, what is your opinion of the car?

*Henry* The car, my lord, is a tyrant!

*Stanley* 'Ere, steady on, 'Enry!

*Henry* Every year it gobbles up more and more precious land that we need for growing our food and building new houses on. There seems to be no limit to it. Every year, my lord, there are thousands more cars, so every year I'm asked for more motorways, more bypasses, more multi-storey car parks - well, where's it all going to end? I've pulled down thousands of houses, I've changed narrow streets into wide roads, I've taken thousands of acres of good farming land. In fact, I've bowed to the car's every wish! But still I have failed to satisfy its greed. And at the same time I've managed to annoy town people and country people alike. I have come to the conclusion, my lord, that all these years I have been wasting my time trying to make way for the car. Nothing uses up so much space to so little purpose.

*Stanley* 'Ere, I object! Not fair!

*P.C.* All right, Stanley, all right. I'll 'andle this. Are you suggestin', Mr Thribb, that the car is no use?

*Henry* Not entirely, my lord. But the more cars we have, the less use they seem to be. Stanley, think of all the time we've wasted in traffic jams, all those miles we've crawled along at ten miles an hour. Now, unless I absolutely cover the land with roads, that's going to happen more and more. Cars just take up so much space. Did you know, my lord, that three out of five cars coming into London in the rush-hour carry only one person? The average bus is carrying forty-five!

*P.C.* I see. Now, if I can get my hmathematics correct, I should say that if this entire court room, bein' I should say a round five hundred people, was comin' into London at nine o'clock in the morning, we might be accommodated by ten or eleven buses or, alternatively, no fewer than ... three hundred and fifty cars! Tellin' figures, I'm afraid, Stanley.

*Henry* They are indeed, my lord. And, you see, the more good wide roads I build leading into our city centres the more cars pile in to jam them up. So either we put up with the jams or tear the centre itself to shreds to make room for all the cars. Either way it makes life a misery for the people who live and work there. And cities should be good places to live, my lord.

*P.C.* Well, Stanley?

*Stanley* 'E's changing 'is tune a bit, if I may say so. I've told 'im time and time again I don't like crawling into town ev'ry morning - does me no good at all. But he's never taken any notice. All this stuff about buses - I though 'e'd forgotten they existed.

*Henry* Stanley's quite right there, my lord. I have relied on him quite needlessly. I see that now.

*P.C.* Yes. Well then, Mr Thribb, what are we goin' to do about this 'ere problem?

*Henry* I ... Sorry, Stanley, old chap, but I can think of no other way out - I think we shall just have to ban the car, my lord.

*Stanley* You as well? Huh, me own driver!

### **Song - So, sorry, Stanley 2**

*Henry* *I'm sorry to say  
I see no other way  
but to ban the car from the road.  
How else can we plan  
a beautiful land?  
How else can we leave  
the air that we breathe  
fit for the future to know?  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.  
  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*P.C.* Yes, well, I must say I find all this 'ere very odd. What I'd like to know is 'ow are we all goin' to get along without you, Stanley?

*Stanley* 'Ear, 'ear!

*P.C.* Hit's all very well talkin' about buses and so on, but there aren't enough for all of us, and they don't all go where we want them to go, either. Or when, for that matter. Still, perhaps we shall come round to that anon. Er, thank you, Mr Thribb - that is all for now.

*Henry* Thank you, my lord.

*Henry exits.*

*P.C.* Now, George, are there any more charges?

George 'Ow about 'drivin' 'Enry off 'is nut? I don't mind bein' accused of that.

*He revs loudly, hoots and chuckles.*

P.C. Order, Stanley, order!

Mrs Thribb [*Off*] Henry? Henry, is that you?

Stanley Oh, oh, trouble!

*Enter Mrs Thribb from the house.*

Mrs Thribb Henry, what is this terrible noise - Good heavens, what on earth's all this? What are you doing up there, Stanley?

Stanley You might well ask!

Mrs Thribb And where's Henry? Would someone please explain what is going on outside my house?

P.C. Calm down there, please, madam. What you 'ave, in fact, so rudely interrupted is a trial. I was just about to ask the prosecution to sum up, if yew must know -

Mrs Thribb A trial? Here, in the street? I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life. What's that silly rag you've got on your head?

P.C. This, madam, is my wig.

Mrs Thribb Ha! Wig, indeed!

P.C. And I'll thank you kindly to mind 'ow you -

Mrs Thribb Stanley, come down at once! Come on, down you come!

Stanley I can't, Mrs Thribb. I'm stuck up 'ere.

Mrs Thribb [*To George*] Will you let that car down?

P.C. No, madam, 'e will not. Kindly mind your own business! Yew may not hinterfere with the proceedins of this court. If you 'ave anythin' to say in evidence then yew may be called to the witness box in the usual manner. Otherwise, madam, good day!

Mrs Thribb I - I've never been so insulted in all my life. Why, if my Henry was here, he would go straight to the police.

*P.C. dons his helmet.*

P.C. Er ... yes, madam?

Mrs Thribb Oh, I beg your pardon, Officer - I didn't notice. What's ... what's this trial of yours all about, then?

P.C. 'My lord'.

Mrs Thribb I'm sorry. My lord.

P.C. That's all right, madam, don't mention it. This trial is investigatin' the motor car, as represented by Stanley 'ere. 'E stands accused of pollutin' the air, wastin' space and jammin' up our cities, bein' dangerous and wastin' raw materials such as oil and steel. Does that hanswer your question?

Mrs Thribb Have you raised the matter of noise, my lord?

P.C. Noise, madam? We are 'ere to discuss problems of motor traffic, not sonic boom.

*Mrs Thribb* But motor traffic's noisy, isn't it? I would have thought so. I could see some point in putting the car on trial for that.

*George* I think Mrs Thribb's right there, my lord.

*P.C.* Really? Oh. Then do you wish to pursue this matter?

*George* I think we should, my lord. I'd clean forgotten about it, to be honest. But the noise from traffic does seem to be pretty bad these days.

*P.C.* Very well. You 'ave, of course, evidence to present to the court, Mrs Thribb? Facts, figures, statistics and so on?

*Mrs Thribb* I'm afraid not, my lord. I'm no sound engineer.

*P.C.* I suppose not, madam. Then you're in trouble there, George. I can't ask the jury to consider unsupported opinion.

*George* Of course not, my lord. So I'd like to call my next witness.

*P.C.* Eh? Who?

*George* The sound engineer.

*P.C.* The sound engineer. [*Doubting George's sanity*] Yes ... er, 'ad you anyone particular in mind?

*George* No, my lord.

*P.C.* I see. Well ... Call the Sound Engineer!

*Silence.*

I thought you were chancin' your arm a bit there, George.

*George* You didn't call loudly enough, my lord. [*The the jury*] You'll help me call him louder, won't you? Yes? Right. 'Call the Sound Engineer'. One, two, three - CALL THE SOUND ENGINEER! Now listen ...

*From the Sound Machine offstage, a faint frequency sweep noise approaches.*

*Enter Henry, glancing nervously towards his mother, as a Sound Engineer, bedecked with wires, plugs and screwdrivers, pushing the machine. He is wearing a warehouse coat and headphones which exaggerate his assumed deafness. He is absorbed, fiddling with the controls. He scribbles in a grubby little notebook.*

*Mrs Thribb* Good heavens, how extraordinary!

*Henry* Afternoon! What can I do for you, then?

*George* You're called.

*Henry* Eh? [*Taking off the headphones*] I'm what?

*P.C.* Yew are called to give hevidence in this 'ere trial.

*Henry* Really? Trial? I see. What's it all about, then?

*P.C.* This 'ere car, Stanley, is bein' investigated to establish whether or not he's a public nuisance.

*Henry* Public nuisance? That's a bit strong, isn't it? Neither use nor ornament, maybe - stuck up there like that - but a public nuisance ... ?

*P.C.* Yew don't understand, Mr er ...?

*Henry* Just call me Sound.

- P.C.* Ah, Mr Sound. You see, Stanley is charged with bein' dangerous and with pois'nin' the air and gobblin' up too much space and raw materials. You 'ave been called to 'elp us establish whether or not 'e makes a deafenin' racket into the bargain.
- Henry* Oh, I see.
- P.C.* Can your machine make the necessary analysis?
- Henry* Oh yes, your honour. Built for the purpose. Come down here and take a look ... this meter here, you see, registers yer actual level of noise. Now yer orange zone, starting at 55 noise level units, is where yer noise becomes a bit annoying. You know, you have to raise yer voice a little to make yourself heard over it. And over a long period - like all day in the factory or office or at school - it becomes very wearing and might give you a bit of a headache, like. But yer red area, starting at 85 noise level units, now this is even worse. You have to shout to make yourself heard over this, and over a long time it might do permanent damage to your ears - oh, yes. So anything that makes this level of noise really is a public nuisance, no mistake.
- P.C.* Could you test the sound Stanley makes?
- Henry* Not while he's stuck up there, yer honour. Could you bring him down and let him drive round a bit?
- P.C.* Oh yes, of course.
- George* Right, my lord.
- Henry* I'll just be plugging in my microphone.
- George lowers Stanley to the ground.*
- Stanley* Firm ground at last!
- Henry* Actually, members of the jury ... You are the jury, aren't you? Thought so. Could you help me with this test? Yes? Thank you very much - you're very kind. Well, just keep your eyes on this meter. Watch it very closely. The needle will start to move as soon as Stanley starts his engine. Now, so as we know where we are, would you like to shout out the numbers as it reaches them - you know, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 and so on. Thanks. Oh, and I almost forgot - when the needle stops moving could you let me know by shouting out ... er ... 'it's stopped!?' Right? Good. This nice lady will help you, won't you, madam?
- Mrs Thrubb* Yes, of course.
- Henry* Right, Stanley, I'm switching on - off you go!
- Henry switches on his machine and Stanley starts his engine and drives round the street. The needle creeps up to 75 and stops.*
- Mrs Thrubb* [*Leading the audience*] 5, 10, 15 [*etc*] ... 65, 70, 75 ... it's stopped!
- Henry* Eh? Has it stopped? Hold it, Stanley.
- Stanley stops.*
- What was it then?
- Mrs Thrubb* [*Leading the audience if necessary*] 75.
- Henry* 75! Into the orange zone, eh Stanley? You just scrape through then, don't you. Close shave though.

*Mrs Thribb* Surely it's not as simple as that? Stanley's noise is only a part of the noise made by a street full of traffic.

*P.C.* Very true, Mrs Thribb, very true.

*Mrs Thribb* Can your machine produce the noise that a lot of cars make, my man?

*Henry* Well, I suppose I might be able to build you up a sort of street sound. Had you anywhere particular in mind?

*Mrs Thribb* How about Oxford Street, London?

*Henry* Oxford Street? Ooh, that's a bit of a tall order, that is - very busy. Still, we can try. Let's start with some other kind of noise, shall we? Not traffic, but something quite quiet that you might hear in Oxford Street. What do you suggest, madam?

*Mrs Thribb* Why not start with people? Get this thing into perspective.

*Henry* People? I don't know if my machine does people. Wait a moment ...

*He searches the machine's library silently, headphones on.*

*P.C.* Well? Well?

*Henry* Yes, you're in luck ... here you are. See how this takes your fancy ... People shopping in Oxford Street!

*He plays the sound of shoppers in a city street.*

So how does that read, then?

*Mrs Thribb* [*Leading*] 5, 10, 15, 20 ... 50, 55 - it's stopped!

*Henry switches it off.*

*Henry* What was it? 55? Really?

*Mrs Thribb* Yes. Noisy people!

*Henry* [*Writing in his notebook*] Fifty ... five ... units. Thank you. We should put some vehicles in now, shouldn't we? How about a motor bike or two? Yes? Right. Here we go. People plus motorbikes, Oxford Street, London. On!

*Mrs Thribb* 5, 10, 15, 20 ... 75, 80 - it's stopped!

*Henry* What was it? 80! Good heavens!

*He switches off.*

We are getting on, aren't we? Eight ...ty ... units. Well, I think it's time for yer complete traffic sound now ...

*Mrs Thribb* Certainly, yes.

*Henry* I'll tell you what, members of the jury, because this nice lady here has been so helpful, shall we let her listen to this one through the headphones? So that she'll get [*significantly*] the full effect. Shall we? Right.

*Mrs Thribb* Oh I say, that's terribly kind of you. You know, young man, you'd have a lot in common with my son Henry. Though you do seem to be rather more gracious - and intelligent. [*Taking the headphones*] Thank you.

*Henry* It's a pleasure, madam. Are we ready, then? Yer complete Oxford Street rush-hour traffic sound. Mind yer ears, watch the meter, and on!

*Deafening noise. As the needle crosses into the red zone an alarm bell rings. Mrs Thribb*

*screams and throws off the headphones. Henry looks proudly on. When the audience shouts "It's stopped!" - at 95 - Henry switches the machine off.*

I thought that might give you a bit of a start. What was it? 95? Goodness gracious me! If I'm not mistaken that must be the highest traffic noise ever recorded in the British Isles.

*Mrs Thribb* I should think so! It was ghastly, terrible! Surely, my lord, we cannot be expected to put up with that kind of din?

*P.C.* Er, no ...

*Henry* Listen to that little lot for a few hours a day and you'll soon get a bit deaf.

*P.C.* Really, Mr Sound?

*Henry* Eh? Oh, yes, yer honour, believe you me. Was that the kind of evidence you was after then, George?

*George* Oh yes, that was very impressive. Thank you very much.

*Henry* Not a bad little machine, is she? I'll say ta ta then. Bye, madam. See you again no doubt. Bye, Stanley. Bye, all.

*He leaves with his machine.*

*P.C.* Well, Stanley, what can you say to that little lot, then?

*Stanley* I think I could probably be made to be a lot quieter than I am.

*P.C.* 'Ow's that, then?

*George* There's a better kind of muffler we could put on his exhaust pipe, my lord. That would cut the noise down, but it wouldn't solve the problem altogether, of course.

*Mrs Thribb* My lord, that's just beating about the bush. There's only one real answer - we must ban the car from the road!

*Stanley* 'Ere we go again.

### **Song - So, sorry, Stanley 3**

*Mrs Thribb* *I'm sorry to say  
I see no other way  
but to ban the car from the road.  
How else can we save  
The quiet we crave?  
How else can we plan  
a beautiful land?  
How else can we leave  
the air that we breathe  
fit for the future to know?  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*Mrs Thribb* Well, my lord, that's my opinion, for what it's worth. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go in and think about Henry's tea. He'll be home from the office shortly.

*P.C.* Certainly, madam. Yew run along. We'll manage.

*Mrs Thribb* Thank you, my lord. Good day.

*She goes into her house.*

*P.C.* Phew! Quite a lady, George.

*George* Yes. Poor old Henry.

*P.C.* Still it hain't Mrs Thribb what's on trial today. Are you ready to sum up?

*George* Yes, my lord.

*P.C.* Then carry on.

*George* Members of the jury, you've heard all about the problems the car creates for us. Its dirt, it's noise, and all the space and raw materials it wastes. And this morning you saw me narrowly escape being one of the eight thousand or so people to be killed every year on the road. And you've seen that most of these problems are very difficult to solve. In fact, we haven't found a complete solution to one of them. I don't want to see Stanley go - I don't suppose you do, either - but what do we do?

#### **Song - So, sorry, Stanley 4**

*George* *I'm sorry to say  
I see no other way  
but to ban the car from the road.  
How else can we make  
our city streets safe?  
How else can we save  
The quiet we crave?  
How else can we plan  
a beautiful land?  
How else can we leave  
the air that we breathe  
fit for the future to know?  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.  
  
So, sorry, Stanley, what can we do?  
We shall just have to live our lives without you.*

*Stanley* Well, I object, I object!

*George* But, Stanley -

*Stanley* What are you going to do without me? Come on, George, we all want to know. It's all very well talking about wasting time in traffic jams, but if you get rid of me just like that lots of people will have to walk to work every day.

*P.C.* Very true too, Stanley. No, George, this won't do at all. Yew can't ask the jury to ban the car without offerin' some alternative. Some hother way of gettin' about.

*George* But people managed without cars a hundred years ago, my lord.

*P.C.* Yes, George, but the world 'as changed since then. People didn't used to move about so much, except them rich enough to own an 'orse an' carriage. We don't want to give up our means of gettin' about, George. That'd be like steppin' back into the past.

- George*            Couldn't we all ride bicycles? That's how I get about.
- P.C.*                Maybe so, and very useful they are too. I use a bicycle myself from time to time. But 'ave you ever tried takin' your family on your bicycle? 'Ave you ever tried ridin' twenty miles to work in the mornin' and twenty miles back in the evenin' in all kinds of weather? Does your old grandmother ride a bicycle? You've got to take these things into consideration, George. Hasn't he, members of the jury? Oh yes.
- George*            Then we must improve our public transport, my lord. I know it's not so good now, but that's because so many people own cars and don't bother about it anymore - planners included. Surely we could make it a lot better. Think how well the buses would run if the roads weren't jammed up with cars.
- P.C.*                That's all very well, George, but you 'ave to persuade the court that this sort of thing can be done. Sounds like quite an 'eadache to me, organisin' all that lot.
- George*            Could I call Henry back again, my lord? He must know about these things?
- P.C.*                Well, I've no objection to that. 'Ave you, Stanley?
- Stanley*            'Spose not. He'll be wanting 'is tea soon, anyway.
- P.C.*                Right. Call 'Enry Thribb!
- Henry enters warily.*
- Henry*            Has she gone?
- George*            She's busy with your tea now. It's quite safe.
- Henry*            Phew!
- George*            Now, Henry, the court isn't going to consider banning the car unless we can come up with something to replace it.
- Henry*            I see. That sounds reasonable. It's a bit of a problem though, isn't it? Have you any ideas, George?
- George*            I thought perhaps we could replace it with public transport. You know, lots more buses and trains. Maybe there are other things we could do as well. Have any members of the jury any ideas? Have you?
- Ad lib. George sums up the suggestions.*
- How about all those, my lord? Does that sound any more hopeful?
- P.C.*                I think I'd like to 'ear Mr Thribb's expert opinion before committin' myself on that one.
- Henry*            I think some of those things are possible, my lord. And public transport may be the main solution. But I'm afraid the Minister has set his heart against it.
- George*            Then we'll just have to persuade him to change his mind.
- Henry*            Who - you and me?
- George*            No, all of us. All of us who are fed up of having our lives ruled by the car.
- Henry*            Oh, I see. Well, we could certainly try, my lord.
- P.C.*                Yes ... I'm sure we could, if that's what the people want. But I think you've overlooked one thing.
- Henry*            What's that, my lord?

*P.C.* You see, I 'ave an aunt. Very nice woman, she 'is. A favourite of mine, to be honest, Aunt Lindy ... Anyway she lives in Wales, right up in the 'ills, you see, several miles from the next 'ouse. Now would we let 'er keep 'er car? I mean, you'd not be thinkin' of givin' 'er a bus all of 'er own, would you?

*Henry* Oh no, my lord. That would be rather pointless, wouldn't it? But you see, we don't want to take people's cars away from them so much as stop them driving them in those areas where public transport can do the job in their place. That would be mainly in our towns and cities - at first, anyway. Your aunt could still use her car in the Welsh hills as long as it remained the only way she could get about.

*P.C.* I see. Yes, that seems to make sense. She'll be very glad to 'ear it, I'm sure. Thank you, Mr Thribb.

*Henry leaves the witness box, but does not exit.*

Is that all then, George? Have you anythin' more to add?

*George* I don't think so, my lord. It's up to you and the jury now.

*Stanley* 'Ere, 'alf a mo - where does this leave me then? I don't belong to anyone's aunt in Wales. I've 'ardly been out of London in me life.

*P.C.* Well now, Stanley, I think it'd 'ave to be the knacker's yard then, wouldn't it?

*Stanley* 'Ey? No! I don't want to go to the knacker's! [*To the jury*] You don't want me to go to the knacker's, do you? ... No!

*George* My lord - I have an idea!

*P.C.* You're goin' to need one too, aren't you?

*George* Could I call back Professor von Schmell?

*P.C.* Very well. Call Professor von Schmell!

*Enter Schmell to the witness box.*

*George* Professor, before we ask the court to decide whether or not we should replace the car in our towns and cities with public transport, Stanley would like to know what would become of him if we did.

*Schmell* Why, wouldn't he have to be scrapped?

*Stanley* Charming!

*George* Well, many cars would have to be scrapped, obviously, but I wondered if, in Stanley's case, there isn't an alternative?

*Stanley* Firing squad?

*Schmell* I don't understand.

*George* Excuse me a moment, my lord ...

*He whispers to Schmell.*

*Stanley* 'Ere, what's goin' on? We can't 'ave whisperin', my lord. Not in a court of law!

*P.C.* Er ...

*George* Could you perform it, Professor?

*Schmell* With the necessary tools and materials, yes, of course.

- Stanley* Tools an' materials ... !
- George* Permission to perform an operation on Stanley, my lord?
- Stanley* Not on your life!
- P.C.* Oooh, I don't know about that. Sounds a bit drastic, considerin' the case is yet to be decided.
- Schmell* The operation would be reversible, my lord. We could restore Stanley to his present state with no damage done, if he so wished.
- Stanley* You bet I'll wish!
- P.C.* I see. In that case the court 'as no objection. Carry on.
- Stanley* Don't mind me, I'm sure!
- George* I'll get everything you need, Professor ...
- He exits with the wheelbarrow.*
- Schmell* I forgot. I shall need a screen of some kind. I cannot possibly perform a delicate operation like this in public.
- Henry* I might be able to help you there, Professor, if I can creep into the house without my mother noticing.
- Schmell* Oh good. Do try, won't you?



*Robert Whelan as the P.C. in the 1973 production*

*Henry goes into the house. **George** enters with the wheelbarrow full of materials.*

*George* Here you are, Professor. Will these things do?

*Schmell* Yes, I think so ... Yes, splendid!

*She picks out a grease gun.*

Now, Stanley, I'm just going to give you a little injection. Just to make you feel numb - like going to the dentist.

*Stanley* Oh no, I thought this was comin'. I can't stand needles, never could ... ahhh!

*Henry enters carrying a hospital screen.*

*Henry* Will this do?

*Schmell* Perfect. Set it up, will you ... Right, let's begin ...

**Music.** *With Stanley largely hidden behind the screen, but tools appearing over the top - including electric saw and drill - improvise an operation to turn Stanley into a bus.*

Operation complete! Stanley the bus!

*Stanley is revealed.*

Now, Stanley, how do you feel?

*Stanley* Ohhhhh! Is it all over, Prof? I feel a bit wobbly on my old wheels. A bit heavy round the back as well.

*Schmell* Yes, Stanley. You're much longer now.

*Stanley* Longer? 'Ow's that then?

*George* You're a bus, Stanley. A great shining red bus!

*Stanley* Eh? You're kiddin', aren't you? I can't see back there. *[To audience]* 'E's 'aving' me on, isn't 'e? Am I a bus? Really? Well, I never!

*Schmell* Just try moving forward a little, Stanley.

*Stanley* O.K., Prof - here we go ...

*He moves backwards.*

*Schmell* Wrong way. Try again.

*Stanley* Still a bit groggy, you see. So ... forwards ...

**Music.** *He moves forwards a little and then circles the stage.*

'Ey, I like this, Prof. This is all right, this bus lark. I might come over to your side after all, George. Yes, my lord, I think I'll stay like this - if 'Enry can get along without me, 'eh, 'Enry?

*P.C.* We'll get you put on his route, Stanley. 63 is it, Mr Thribb?

*Henry* No, my lord, not any longer it seems. It's the 45.

*P.C.* Oh, changed, 'as it? Can't say I'd noticed. Not my route, mind. 45 it is then.

*Henry* Thank you, my lord!

*P.C.* Thank you, Mr Thribb. You'll be settin' a good example there.

*He comes down from the ladder.*

**Music.**

Well, members of the jury, there we are. We've all 'ad our bit of a say, 'aven't we? I think George and the Professor and Mr Thribb 'ere 'ave won me over to their way of thinkin', but what about you? Now you may think that the car's so useful it's worth putting up with all these problems. After all, however good

they are, buses and trains can never be quite the same as your own car, can they? And perhaps if we fitted mufflers and cleaners on cars they'd be a bit quieter and pump out less dirt. We might even persuade people to drive them more carefully and so not have as many accidents. But that's not all the problems solved, is it? If cars are too useful to be banned from our towns and cities, aren't more and more people goin' to buy them? Then where would we be, with twenty or thirty million cars instead of only ten? Well, it's for you to decide really, because it's what you'll all want when you're a bit older that the Minister will have to take notice of one day. So now I think I'd better send you all way to talk it over.

### **Song - The Day of Change**

*P.C. Stanley's trials are almost done  
but no side's lost and no side's won.  
We've still to decide on what's to become  
of the many other million.*

*All So talk it over, work it out,  
let's learn for ourselves  
what the fuss is about,  
for that's the way  
to bring the day  
of change in.*

*George I've put the case as best I can  
against the car, against our Stan  
but now's to decide on whether to ban  
all the many other million.*

*All So, talk it over etc ...*

*Hen & Schm Perhaps you feel the same as us,  
let's ride to school by bike or bus!  
Or perhaps you feel the car's a plus  
like so many other million.*

*All So talk it over etc ...*

*Goodbyes.*

*The End*