

## FOUR BY FOUR BY FOUR

On many of the main roads around the country, a railway line runs parallel to it. Passengers in cars and railway carriages can enjoy the same stunning views and panoramas as they travel on the way to the same destination. These journeys may take us past beautiful views, historic sites, unknown objects, wild animals, interesting gatherings and amusing sights. The question that might be asked, though, is this: is it better to travel by train or by car?

Train travel (certainly in most countries) is quicker than by car; there are no other vehicles on the tracks to slow the train down; there are no road blocks, speed traps, traffic jams, blind corners or steep hills to negotiate, all too often behind slow moving cars or lorries. The train will stick to strict deadlines and timetables, pausing every now and then at stations, but the route is clear and determined; we know we will reach this station by this time, the next station by another time, the end point by the stated time. It is all smooth and clear. Clickety-click, clickety-click, clickety-click, the journey is steady, straight-forward and fixed. In fact, passengers can just sit there and idly pass the time; we can enjoy the view, have a sleep (often caused by the regular clickety-click of the journey) and even get up and walk around. We just get on the train and go where we are told; it is all sorted.

Car travel, on the other hand, certainly may face more challenges, uncertainties and obstacles but (especially with a four by four vehicle) it gives us the freedom to explore uncharted territory and the licence to go wherever we may want to go. There are no limits to where we can go or for how long; if we see something of interest off the road, we can go and look at it for as long as we want. We are not held back by other people nor need we hold others back. The challenge of rough terrain gives us excitement and enjoyment, while the monotony is broken up with ups and downs, with lefts and rights. Once we have explored something interesting, we can simply get back on the main road again. We are not confined by time frames or by a pre-determined route. We do not see something interesting flash past our eyes and wonder what on earth it was; we go and find out what it was.

So which do we prefer? It is a pretty fair bet to say that most people, given the choice, would prefer to travel in a four-by-four than by a train, even if the train enabled us to reach our destination faster.

It is a sad situation that many of our schools are taking our children forward by train as opposed to a four-by-four. Many of our schools operate as a train, going down fixed tracks from which there can be no deviations, be the tracks simply the curriculum, the syllabus, the traditions. "This is the way we are going and this is the way we will continue to go." Teachers go through the syllabus, the text book, chapter by chapter, station by station. It does not matter if someone is struggling; we carry on as we have a timetable to keep. It does not matter if a pupil asks an intriguing question or notices something of great interest that is not within the curriculum or syllabus; we will ride on exactly as the textbook, the worksheet or the scheme insists. It is flat, boring, repetitive, sleep-engendering - clickety-click, textbook-test, textbook-test, textbook-test.

What would the journey be like for our children if they travelled the education road by four-by-four? What if, firstly, when something interesting arises, albeit off the tracks, we go and explore it? Will not our lives be richer for it and our journey more meaningful? What if, secondly, we gave our children the opportunity to explore new terrain simply because it is there? What if, thirdly, there were no limits to what we could study in the particular topic? What if, fourthly, we realised that our picture of the topic will be enriched by looking at it from a different angle, in more detail, with more time? Which would we prefer? Given the choice, it is a pretty fair bet to say that most pupils would prefer a four-by-four education.

Both means of travel will get us to the same destination, that is the exam hall, but the experiences on the way will have been very different. Which is the more enjoyable means? Which is the more beneficial? Which is the more memorable? Rigid education, sticking to the tracks, may get the pupils there, safe, but they will have learned nothing of significance on the way. It is the journey, not the destination, which matters most. Let us take them by a four by four for the four reasons given!