

May 2004

States visited	Florida (twice), Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut
Countries visited	Curacao
Miles flown	11,408

Anyway – Saturday morning I am in a little more philosophical mood than Friday night (see April for details) and despite the rain get ready to go to the track – packed up all my wedding stuff – the frock that I had made from the gorgeous grey silk that I had bought in Southern India and the gold sandals (yes – ME !) that I had bought to go with it.... And off to the track I went. Got there around 10.30am and caught up with Splinter Group racing for awhile – infact as I arrived I bumped into Scott Johnson and his new girlfriend and a couple of other people. There was a club car event on the infield all day and they were disappointed that I had not brought the Mog – of course with the grotty weather and me having to go direct to the wedding and the fact that the Mog is not a good “torrential rain” car they *almost* understood. I hung out with Stacey for awhile while she got frustrated with her electrical gremlin that was causing a misfire (Ben was on his way with a new distributor cap for it) so I went into the infield to catch up with the Mog crowd. They were just coming back from the lunchtime touring on the track. It must have been fun. I hung out with them for awhile and then headed back. Waited around and boy was the weather changeable – one minute sunshine and the next it poured torrentially. Unfortunately the rain created a track delay so I ended up running off to get changed AS Stacey went out for qualifying. I dashed to the wedding and was amazed that I looked almost presentable. Got there 5 minutes before the wedding at 5pm and it was very sweet – on the pergola next to the clear blue water of the pool – lots of family from both sides there and bunches of friends. Amanda wore a cream knee-length dress and Sam wore a kilt – they looked great and totally happy – it was very cute and was good to see them so happy. Unfortunately I was really exhausted and started to get a headache after around 2 hours and rather than make a scene I quietly snuck out. They were having a great time and I’m sure they wouldn’t have noticed that I had left. I got home and chilled out. Sunday I went back to the track and watched Stacey come from 26th to 12th (second in class) and SuperDave come from 12th to 1st – hoorah! It was awesome to watch them do so well and I screamed and screamed!



SuperDave and his entire fan club on the podium at the Walter Mitty

The evening was spent out for dinner with the second of the two candidates for the Body Engineer job (the first was Friday – he was fine, although I found him a little arrogant and the fact that he told us the evening before the interview that he met his Atlanta-based girlfriend at *her* wedding (the groom was a really good friend of his I was a little shocked at the admission and the fact that he felt it was fine to tell us all about it.)) The second couldn’t have been more different – he was the drippiest person I have met in awhile – great choices . . . and I had to get up at 6am

to be at work to meet the drippy guy to make sure that he was in the right place for his first interview. These were the two people that we had to choose from – oh great.

So – Monday I have two engineers coming in to town from Germany – I affectionately call them my germs (they don't understand but all my friends find it hilarious) One of them (Ralf) is described by my partners in Germany as their "special" friend – as in they don't get on well with him. Well – he sent me an e-mail before he came which was really nice and friendly. Prior to flying over the other germ (Elmar who I keep trying to call Elmo for some reason) gave me his credit card details so I could book all the travel arrangements - foolish man – amazing that he would give a complete stranger (and a woman at that !) all his credit card details. Anyway – I picked them up from the airport and took them back to the office – both really nice people and Ralf is soooo cute – this was going to be a great week! Monday I dropped them off at the hotel with strict instructions to be ready for me to pick them up at 7am the following morning for a trip to Fort Lauderdale. So – up the next morning and pick them up and our fist trek through Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson airport – e-ticketing was a riot with people who have never done it before – especially with the mad morning rush. So – Fort Lauderdale and to the dealership – spent the day there working on a car and then flew back for around 10pm. The following day we started at the office worked all day had a late lunch and then went back to the airport for a 5pm flight to Newark. Thankfully we landed before the monster storm hit but we drove through it for an hour and a half to get to Stamford. We had a nightmare trying to find the hotel and drove around several times before we finally found it. Decided to skip dinner and as the low beer warning lights were on we ended up at the bar for an hour re-filling. The following day we actually found the dealership without too much trouble and spent the day testing for a different issue. We wanted to check out some other vehicles so spent half an hour driving around trying to find where they were – we eventually had to go back to the dealership to get somebody to take us there – the funny thing was that the directions we had been given were completely wrong !

Had salad for lunch in a little park (I was on the phone for most of the day taking calls from the tech field guys for some reason) and then back to the dealership to drop off the keys for the vehicles we had tested and then into the car to get to Newark – I left around an hour and a half to get there – well it took over two and a half just stuck in traffic on the I95 for hours – no need to get stressed at all as there were two more flights after that and we didn't have anything too critical to get back to. So we missed our flight – infact we nearly missed the flight after our flight as we got to the check-in desk 30 minutes before the flight went and we had to skip to the front of the security queue. Managed to actually get the flight – unfortunately it was pretty full so we all had middle seats – I had Ralf directly behind me and as he is 6'2" tall and was sat next to the guy who I always see at check-in and think "please not next to me" – he was at least 300lbs ! I was kind and didn't recline my seat on the flight (yes – he was cute enough to make that sacrifice). I got to the office at 10pm and did some work until Joanna called me – she was coming in on the flight after mine – it was very ironic as if we'd have missed the second flight we'd have been on the same flight. Joanna was coming in to town to do a make-over piece for the magazine that she works for (Figure) – they were making over 3 women in Atlanta since they have a very spread readership and the articles had started to become a little New-York-centric. I picked her up from the airport at 10.30pm and went home and sat on the deck, drank beer and caught up until around 1am. I had to pick up my germs Friday morning to take them to another dealership – they were running late (Elmo was on the phone again) so I had coffee with them and then took them to the dealership. Then I had to go to Lanier Middle School to support their Careers Day – I'd been co-erced into it by Stacey some time back. It was hilarious as they put me in between the child-protection attorney and the police guy. The kids had set questions, one of which was "why do you like your job?" – I was sat between two people whose answers were "I like helping people" – and my answer was "because I like driving fast cars!" – gosh how shallow of me. Elmo and Ralf had left some stuff in my car so we spent ages co-coordinating getting them to the school to pick it up – it was hilarious. At lunch Stacey picked me up so I could really experience her world – I got to do 8th Grade lunch duty with her. Interesting. The rest of the afternoon was more of the same – it was funny since most of the other people there really wanted to have one of the posters that I brought but sent the kids to ask me for them (something to do with the fact that they think I'm shallow). Oh well – anyway I met up with Stacey afterwards and we chilled for a bit and then I

staggered home – had enough time to shower and water my plants and then I had to go straight out again to meet Joanna and her make-over women. It was very odd – we met at the Atlanta Fish Market and only as we started to order it came out that one woman did not eat fish at all and the other one didn't eat shellfish. Since Joanna had given them plenty of warning they could have said something in advance and we could have changed plans – I actually thought it was a little rude of them. Dinner was fine and finished at 9pm. We came back, walked over to Moe's and Joe's and talked over beers and met a couple of friends of mine and their friends. Back home and chilled in the sitting room, went to bed around 1am again.

Saturday morning up a little later and picked Stacey up to go to British Car Day. I was torn about helping her out with a ride since I really wanted to take the Morgan but as we were only going to stay for an hour or so I thought I could take the flak from the Johnsons (as it happened Scott didn't take his car as it wouldn't start for the second time in 2 weeks !) Randy forgave me as I had brought Stacey with me. We wandered about in the bright sunshine looking at cars for awhile and then got bored so left and took Stacey home. Joanna had a 2pm appointment back at the salon to get her hair coloured for free (hoorah) – I scarfed some lunch and then went and watched – what a process – I could never do it for sure - let's be honest – it was never going to be an option since I've never coloured my hair and I haven't got any less lazy in my old age. Afterwards Joanna got some lunch and then we drove around Buckhead checking out all the fancy houses trying to decide which one we would have.



Joanna and Stacey at British car day



Joanna in her new car outside her new house

Got home with enough time to get the Morgan out and get her to the airport – mad dash via the Martin Luther King reflecting pool, where I believe she had a little reflection for me. Took her to the wrong terminal (sorry !) and hope that she got her plane. Back into town to catch up with Deb and Marla for salad and the movies –we went to see “Connie and Carla” which was trite but funny and worked for me.

I also had some great news – Stefan had promised me that I would be going to Germany on business around the same time as the early June wedding I was invited to back in Feb – well then they changed everything last week and I'm not going until late June – boy was I stuck - I tried to get a plane ticket but at over \$1,000 I couldn't justify it for a weekend, and I didn't have enough airmiles to fly there - at such short notice I needed double miles, which I do not have. Marla mentioned this at dinner and Deb offered to give me the airmiles that I needed – well Delta don't let you transfer them so she just got me the whole ticket - how awesome is that? So I am going after all – flying in and out of Zurich as it's nearer the wedding. I'm so thrilled that I can make it since it's a tiny wedding – only 40 people are invited.

Sunday I did almost nothing – cut the grass, finished putting all my photos into albums (except the big ones) framed my enlargements and hung them on my walls in my bedroom and generally organised and sorted stuff. Went to meet Stefan and the germs for dinner at Houston's – Mother's Day they were quoting a 2-hour wait so we met at the Highland Tap in my neighbourhood instead – I got to sit opposite Ralf all evening (mmmm) and we had a laugh. I am amazed that they are still talking to me as we did mad crazy hours and schedules and I gave them very little time to themselves I did 51 hours in 4 days with them and we all did 10 hours on Friday as well.

They were very good-natured though and we had fun – Monday was a catch-up day for me and we discussed everything we had done and the next steps with Stefan – I took Ralf to the airport and then went back to work to finish up some of the outstanding stuff due for Tuesday. I didn't leave work until 8pm – another 14-hour day for me.

Tuesday was an early start and on our way to Phoenix – landed and got to the dealership around 11am. The plan was to test wiper blades on 13 vehicles, take some force and angle measurements and replace the blades and test the batteries. This meant organising the vehicles to go to the wash bay to test the blades, then scoot them all around the carpark and then set them up for battery testing (leaving them for an hour to “go to sleep”). It was quite a bit hot and jumping in and out of cars that had been sitting for ages was somewhat uncomfortable but it had to be done. After 4 hours we had finally tested everything we needed to do and got ready to move on. Our next dealership was in Las Vegas and the plan was to drive there that afternoon – so we got in the minivan (my oh my !) that they gave me as a rental and drive over there – it's a long way and after 4 hours we finally go to the Hoover dam. Since it was after dark there was nowhere to park and therefore no way to get to the really good vantage points (although it's pretty spectacular at night all lit up) so we hung out there for about half an hour before getting on our way to Vegas



Hoover dam



“The Strip”

Las Vegas is in “interesting” place for sure – all the bright lights and fancy stuff, along with dust and a howling gale. We got to the hotel at around 10pm and staggered out for a wander down the strip – I was really tired having done all of the driving and lasted around ½ hour in the dust-laden storm that was all around us - I had been up and working/travelling for 19 hours by now. Elmar decided to hang out for longer so I went to bed – I couldn't even find anywhere to eat. To be honest I didn't like the hotel (New York, New York) as they were very rude at check-in so I was just incredibly glad to get out of there. The dealership in Las Vegas is very nice and the guys there were incredibly helpful – we got the wash bay guys to help out so we managed to get through testing at around 3pm, which was good as I had made arrangements to meet with a friend in San Diego at around 7.30pm.

So, back in the minivan (hoorah!) and through the desert to get to San Diego. It's a long drive and I was blasting along at around 86 when I got stopped by a police man – now they are notoriously nasty in California, and I decided not to risk it when he asked for the rental agreement and my licence so I gave him my US license (in a company car I'd got for the UK license every time !). Anyway, with a couple of “I'm terribly sorry's” and “I was only following the flow of traffic's” the nice guy actually let me off. Elmar was sitting in the passenger's seat absolutely silent as he was sure that I was going to get a huge ticket. So got into San Diego at right around 7.20 and abandoned Elmar to the car – he wanted to do some more shopping and I got showered and changed and into the bar for 7.30pm. The bartender offered me a couple of free tickets to the

baseball, which was a 2-block walk away so when Jon picked me up we went directly to the game. The seats were great and we had fun – even stayed until the end and then went out for dinner.



Thursday morning the boat wasn't scheduled until 6pm so I took Elmar and dropped him off at Seaworld and I got back in time to meet Jon for brunch and a leisurely stroll along the seafont and even watched my 'boat' sail past to the port, which was quite strange to watch – it's pretty big ! The morning was really very pleasant and sunny and just mellowing out was good for me. I was dropped off at 3pm and got some work done before having to pick Elmar back up and go to the port. Met John and Jay, who are extremely familiar with my by now, since this is my 3rd visit there, they are great fun so I love to visit. The boat finally was ready to discharge at 6pm. After my last visit we decided that trying to find the 125 vehicle out of 240 was a waste of time and we decided to measure every one of them..... we finally got finished by 10.30pm, dashed back for dinner and straight to bed. Up at 6am for a 7.30 flight and I waved Elmo off at Atlanta airport to get directly onto his return flight to Germany. Finally I was germ-free – I had to do a few more hours at work, but germ-free !

The weekend was quiet with dinner on Friday with Sheena and all her friends – ended up back at her place chilling out and drinking red wine. Saturday was actually a slow morning and tons and tons of jobs that needed doing - bills to pay and so forth. I was supposed to be going to Birmingham for the motorbike races and to go for dinner with Kate Saturday night and meet Dan and his friends Sunday but the weather was not conducive to flying a small plane so they half-cancelled – Dan was thinking about coming down to go hiking Sunday but that fell through as well so I ended up just chilling out and doing not much of a muchness. Bliss ! Sunday night was "Shake in the Park" – the Atlanta Shakespeare society did "A Midsummer's Night's Dream" – so Stacey, Marla and her friend and I all braved the weather (it had been pouring about half an hour before we left) to go to the park and watch the performance – I thought it was well done but it started late and they got very confused by it all. I ended up having to give a synopsis based on "curly-haired girl, pony-tailed girl, dude-guy, and sunglasses guy" as they couldn't even get the names Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demitruis. Needless to say we went home early as they were bored..... next time I'll go on my own I think.

This week was my germ-free week – which pretty much all week to get my computer to even begin to work properly. GREAT!

Tuesday I won tickets to the baseball and Deb came with me – it was funny watching – I kept saying "We (the Braves) are crap" since we had not scored a single run and the Arizona Diamondbacks had 2 runs – anyway in the last innings everybody started to get really hyped (I

couldn't work out why – a game with a low score is a really dull game to me) – eventually it became clear – the Diamondbacks pitcher was about to pitch a “perfect game” – a game with not only no runs from the opposing team, but one with no hits (as in not one person even got on base) – I was amazed since the entire stadium were behind this guy - as in they were totally cheering for the opposition to beat us !!!! He managed the final pitch and everybody went crazy. I only found out later that this feat has only been achieved 17 times in the whole history of Major-League Baseball. So there I was complaining about how boring it was when I was at an historic moment. Oops.

Friday I went to Madama Butterfly with Marylin and Lisa – it was good, although the part where one of the props guys was wandering about the stage moving a small cardboard boat up and down (as if on waves) perplexed me somewhat...

Saturday was NASCAR day – I've been in training for weeks to be sure that I didn't embarrass Stacey and we didn't get beer poured all over us. We drove up in a car covered in “we are only going for the hotties” and other statements on it (a reference to the fact that we were only watching the cute guys).



Hottie Tour



Me, Stacey and Michael with the cars

Started out by visiting her friend Michael who is responsible for the logistics of the Hendrick's (a race team) showcars – he geared us up – hats and shirts and sweatshirts and things – I had been nominated to support Jimmie Johnson (by Stacey) – a good choice since he was a Hendrick's guy and she knew that Michael would have tons of 'gear'. We got a private tour of the show cars and even got to climb in one and start it up – what a wonderful noise !!!!



Eleanor drives a NASCAR



Stacey and I get into the spirit

We get dropped off at the track and do the rounds of the product-trucks with Stacey buying earrings for both of the guys that she was supporting so she was wearing a 24 in one ear and an 8 in the other - apparently this is very funny as she supports Dale Earnhardt Junior and Jeff Gordon and they are both on different teams. Anyway – the seats we had were in the gods so

had great view of the entire track. It was a money-only race so it was very aggressive – I had a riot watching it – they do 40 laps then they reverse the order of the top x (x being a random number) – it's all very odd. Anyway – my 'boy' got in a crash and didn't make the end of the race but it ended up watching all these cars whizz about by floodlighting at nearly midnight the noise and the atmosphere were amazing and I thoroughly enjoyed it – even if, to all intents and purposes they were driving around in circles..... Walked back to Michael's to pick up the car and then go to the hotel at around 3am. It was such a lot of fun.

Sunday we got up late-ish and meandered back. Helped Super-Dave put the body onto the Morgan that he is re-building for his son and talking up to the Morgan meet in W.Virginia in July. Got home and I had enough time to throw my washing on and then I was back on a plane to Fort Lauderdale to meet my next germ. He's actually a really nice guy – called Emil. We met (after both being delayed by storms – he came in from Germ-land via Washington DC) and got to the hotel just in time to grab a very late meal at the bar alongside these enormous boats in the marina. We were sat next to a boat that had not only 2 jetskis, but a small helicopter sat on the back deck. Puts my white plastic K-Mart tables and chair on my back deck to shame really. So – Monday we visited two different dealers to talk to them about cab tops (he was here as a result of my lengthy investigation in Feb on cab tops). Evening at the hotel – sat by the pool and swam and relaxed and then early to bed since we had a 7.30am flight. Met at 6.00 am and off to the airport – back in to work and a full day ahead. Wednesday we flew in the early morning to Dallas to see another dealer where we replaced a top and window and took all day. I had managed to get hold of Mark and Andrea – whose wedding I went to last April and we all had dinner together. It was the first time since the wedding I'd seen them so there was a lot of catching up to do – it was a lot of fun ! Another early flight on Thursday and another dealer visit Thursday afternoon. Friday was an office day and Emil left a little early.

Friday night I stayed at Deb's as she lives close to Marta and I had a very early flight. I'd gotten a very severe dose of the FI's after my last trip to San Diego and decided that I needed a break and really wanted to go and see Suzy and Mark and go diving – so I booked a flight in a fit of pique one evening. The prices vacillate greatly on the web and if you catch it at the right moment there can be a \$200 difference – I got it at the right time eventually. Saturday morning I was up at 4.45am and Deb gave me a lift to Marta (I wanted to walk but she insisted) – trains were running earlier than I had thought so I got to the southbound line by 5.10am. Unfortunately the trains were not running - 'mechanical faults' but they didn't tell us for over 20 minutes so I dashed upstairs and flagged down a taxi with two other guys who were going to Canada. We got to the airport at 6.00am and there was a massive queue – I tried the e-ticket and got bounced and then when I got to the front of my queue I was told to get into another one – which was about a mile long. I got mad at this point and went to talk to one of the check-in chicks who refused to speak to me as I had not been at the front of the queue. Making me miss my flight (and then my connection) was NOT going to be a happening thing in my life so thankfully someone let me in in front of them and I was ticketed and done in less than 2 minutes – stupid bitch. I'm never flying American again – making me miss my flights was only going to cause **me** aggravation and make a re-booking hell for somebody else since there is only one flight to Curacao from Miami a day. Grrr. So – easy flight and long connection wait and I was in Curacao and Mark was hugging me at the airport exit – hoorah – I was there !

Curacao is going to have a section all on it's own as there are so many pictures . . .