

# DRIVING LESSONS



‘Right, Mr Burton,’ says the driving instructor, with the distinctive leathery purr of someone born and bred in Los Angeles.

‘It’s Button, actually,’ I correct him, settling in behind the wheel of the Honda Accord, ready for my lesson. ‘Jenson Button.’

‘Ginseng Button?’

I try again. ‘Jenson Button.’

‘Of course!’ he explodes. ‘It’s your English accent. Jenson Button. Jen-son But-ton. Right. Got it. Okay, Mr But-ton, so you’re here today so that we can get you up to speed on your LA driving ahead of your test, is that right?’

‘Yes,’ I reply.

What I’ve discovered since moving in with Brittny is that making my way around LA isn’t simply a case of staying on the right-hand side of the road and hoping for the best. There are tons of little things you need to know, like the fact that you’re permitted to turn right at a red stop light, or the odd way you have to deal with cycle lanes, and I need to know all this in order to get my Californian driving licence. It doesn’t matter where

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you're from, or what you do for a living, you need a Californian driving licence if you want to use the roads.

In actual fact, it will turn out that I don't really need to learn this stuff for the test when it eventually happens, because the test consists of me very nervously driving around Fontana for a bit, with the examiner saying, 'It's fifty here, it's fifty, you can go faster,' out of the side of her mouth, and then passing me on all aspects of the test apart from one – braking. I'd braked too late, apparently.

'I didn't brake too late,' I will moan to Brittany afterwards.

'You always brake too late,' she responds, long-sufferingly.

But that's to come. Right now, I just need to get the hang of the road systems in my adopted home of LA, and the best way of doing that is by having an actual driving lesson. On the one hand, this is uncharacteristically sensible of me. On the other hand, I still have the shame of failing my first UK driving test branded on my heart so I want to get it right. Besides, Britt's dad is a Californian Highway Patrol officer so I need to keep my nose clean.

'Okay, Mr But-ton, let's try moving off, shall we?' says the instructor. We get rolling and as we drive it occurs to me that this is only my fourth-ever driving lesson, and there's been a twenty-year gap between this one and the first three, when my instructor was Roger Brunt, who used to race against my dad in autocross. It wasn't Roger's fault that I went on to fail. I was too cocky, that was my problem.

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‘You’re doing well,’ the instructor assures me, before asking, ‘What is it that you do for a living, Mr But-ton?’

‘Actually, I’m a driver,’ I tell him.

He’s thinking. *Pizza delivery? Uber? UPS?*

‘A racing driver,’ I add, helpfully.

‘A racing driver? Wow,’ he says. He lapses into silence but when I steal a glance over at him I can see that he’s googling me.

‘Wow,’ he says at last, holding up the phone. ‘Is this you?’

‘Yeah,’ I say, ‘that’s me.’

He squints at the phone. ‘Says here that you’ve retired from Form-ula One. Is that right?’

‘Well...’ I say.