

The Red Vespa

by Joseph Patterson

Scott ran his hands over the worn plastic of his steering wheel as he pulled off the used car lot and into traffic. It was only his second time driving the 2005 Chevy Silverado, and the transmission was just as slippery as he remembered it being during the test drive. The coffee stains on the cloth seats had been ran over with numerous chemicals that had failed to put a dent in them. The smell of fuel entered the cab when he pressed hard on the accelerator. The floor mats were stained with cigarette burns and black tar that refused to come off their surface. Greg Goldberg's business card still rested on the dash, the dealership owner's info in bold gold letters along with the smaller print "no refunds". Three hundred thousand miles had spun across the odometer so far, and if he was lucky another hundred thousand would before it was through.

The smell of fuel faded as he squeaked to a stop at a nearly abandoned intersection, his nose instead filled with the smell of stale cigarettes. Perhaps someone had missed a butt or two that had fallen in between the seats? Scott began to crank the window down, replacing the acrid stench with the smell of the hot highway.

\$8,000. Eight thousand dollars. Eighty, one-hundred dollar bills. His bank account was empty now, all for the sake of a 4.3L V6 on a steel frame transformed from the cash. How many summers had it taken to save up enough money for this, his first car? Too many. Others had spent their money on Call of Duty, a Drake album, twelve packs of natty light, cartons of cigarettes, cans of grizzly, or the titty bar.

Not Scott!

Extra shifts waiting tables, Saturdays spent mowing lawns for the neighbors, Sundays volunteering for Church. There was no time for frivolous things, and now he had the fruits of his labor to show for it. His brand new, used, truck.

It was his truck, though, no one else's. And no one could take it away from him. Scott owned it outright.

The engine gurgled as the light turned green and then sputtered as it rushed to keep up with the speed limit. Scott eyed something red and white in his rear-view mirror, though it was difficult to make out through the bubbled and peeling back window tinting.

His engine gurgled and the brakes screamed in protest as he settled into the intersection and the red and white object to his rear pulled up alongside him in the left lane. Candy apple red, silver trim, black leather. The scooter that pulled up next to him was striking, though completely out of place alongside the black pick-up. The man sitting atop the Vespa was aging, with only thin silver wisps of long hair trailing behind his full white beard beneath aviator sunglasses. He came to a stop and waved politely as he noticed Scott eyeing his Italian scooter. Scott politely waved back. "Nice day for a ride?" Scott asked, glancing back to the red light.

"Sure is!" replied the old man jovially. "I've been waiting for a day like this for months! It's been so cold; I just bought this thing in December. Can you believe it? Only \$8,000 for this. It's a 1965!"

"Wow, only that much? Must have been a real steal." Scott had no idea what a Vespa should cost new, let alone old, but something bothered him. That old scooter cost the same as his brand new, used, truck? It was nice certainly, but was it that nice?

"And it runs like a dream! I barely use any gas, two stroke engine, and it has pretty good get-up too! My wife says I spend too much on stuff like this, but that's why I bought us that fourth home in Florida. Hah-ha!"

"Hah, yeah." Scott found himself feeling somewhat irritated, but he wasn't sure exactly why anymore.

The light flipped from red to green and the old man waved one last time to him as he accelerated forward. Scott gripped

hard on his steering wheel; his face felt warm. Did the old man think he was better than him, maybe? That must have been it.

He pressed down the accelerator to the floor and the V6 sputtered, a small cloud of oily smoke rising behind the Chevy. His brand new, used, truck shifted slowly from first to second as he began to catch up to the candy apple red blur ahead of him. There were no more intersections for several miles, and no state troopers had been camped out when his dad had dropped him off at the car lot. That old man was going to get a face full of coal for thinking his scooter was better than his truck!

The transmission slipped its way from second to fourth and sputtered a bit as he pushed to pull up on the Vespa. He felt the distance shrinking between them as the engine's oil light blinked itself on then off and his seat shook from the vibration of the engine in the chassis. His engine continued to roar defiantly and sputter silver smoke, but the old man on the scooter didn't seem to even notice him. Even more irritating, it didn't seem like he was catching up to the vespa anymore.

Everything seemed to happen all at once, then. His left blinker turned itself on, then off. His radio pumped out AM static at maximum volume before settling into the FM band on a local country station. Scott found his senses overwhelmed as he fumbled to turn the stereo off. Just as soon as it was, his windshield was spewed with rust-tinged soapy water, and he could no longer see. The last thing Scott saw was the red Vespa pulling ahead of the Chevy. Scott pressed lightly on his brakes and gave up the chase to address his electrical issues. He gently slid to a stop on the highway's shoulder.

Still angry and irritated that he hadn't had a chance to roll coal over the old man and his Scooter, he got out of the pick-up to see if he could catch one last sight of the Vespa. As his sneakers hit the pavement, he eyed the construction and road closed signs almost directly in front of him. His eyes drifted up the road where the bridge had been washed out for more than a few months now, and thanked God that he had pulled over before continuing to follow the red Vespa.

Scott frowned and then his eyes widened as he watched a candy apple red streak vanish over the horizon of the washed-out bridge.