

## Why I Moved to Powell River *by Joanna Dunbar*



When I turned 16 my mother decided I should learn to drive. We went out for a lesson in her small green Hillman. The car's name was an omen. The only lesson I remember is "learning to start on a hill," or not.

Surely it was the little Hillman car that was having the trouble, continuing to roll further and further backwards, and closer and closer to the cars parked along the side of the hill. It was a nightmare—push with one foot while lifting with the other. I just couldn't do it. My mother remained silent throughout this very jerky and alarming process.

Release clutch while applying gas. Stall. Roll backwards. Start the car again. Release clutch while applying gas...stall, roll backwards. Several times this happened until we were one inch away from the parked vehicles. "I'll take over now," she finally said.

We changed places with great difficulty, climbing over the gearshift. What humiliation! What relief! Nothing more was ever said. I did eventually get my license. Fortunately, starting on a hill didn't come up during the road test.

I returned to driving a standard in 2006—at age 62. What was I thinking? I wasn't thinking about starting on hills. Living in the flat country outside of Edmonton it didn't really come up. Even when driving in Edmonton I found ways to avoid the river valley's steep hills, by taking a circuitous route, driving east even though my destination was actually south. I wondered how many of the other drivers on the High Level Bridge also suffered from hill phobia.

Then we came to Powell River for a holiday, crossing over from Comox. My mechanic had just installed a new clutch before we left Alberta. Leaving the ferry at Westview of course we were first in line and, of course, there was a red light at Marine. The incline looked like a mountain. "Oh no!" I said out loud. Panic set in. Waiting, waiting for the light to change. Slowly lifting the clutch. Slowly, slowly applying the gas. Would we never move? We actually seemed to hover. Slowly, slowly, lift one foot, push the other and ZOOM! We were finally off, leaving behind a bit of burnt rubber, carrying with us a strong burning smell. It quickly disappeared and who knew?

Maybe this is why I moved to Powell River—for more practice starting on hills. I'm pretty good now, a moment of panic and then ZOOM! Off I go.