



The Hundred-Mile-An-Hour Dog

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Chapter 1

Streaker is a mixed-up kind of dog. You can see from her thin body and powerful legs that she's got a lot of greyhound blood in her, along with quite a bit of Ferrari and a large chunk of whirlwind.

Nobody in our family likes walking her and this is hardly surprising. Streaker can out-accelerate a torpedo. She can do 100 mph in the blink of an eye. She's usually vanished over the far horizon long before you have time to yell - 'Streaker!'

Dad refuses to walk her, point-blank. 'I've got backache,' is his usual excuse, though how this stops him from walking I really haven't a clue.

I tried something similar once myself. 'I've got front-ache,' I said. Mum gave me a chilly glare and handed me the dog-lead. She'll do anything to get out of walking Streaker too, and that is how the whole thing started. I ended up having the craziest Easter holiday you can imagine.

'Trevor...' said Mum one morning at the beginning of the holiday, and she gave me one of her really big, innocent smiles.

'Trevor...' (I should have guessed she was up to something); 'Trevor — I'll give you thirty pounds if you walk Streaker every day this holiday.'

Thirty pounds! As you can imagine, my eyes boggled a bit. I just about had to shove them back in their sockets. I was so astonished I never twigged that what my mother was actually suggesting was MAJOR BRIBERY.

'It's the Easter holiday,' she continued, climbing on to her exercise-bike and pulling a pink sweat band round her forehead.

'You've nothing better to do.'

'Thirty pounds?' I repeated. 'Walk her every day for two weeks?' Mum nodded and began to pedal. I sat down to have a think. Thirty pounds was a lot of money. I could do loads of things with that.

On the other hand - and this was the big crunch — I would have to walk Streaker.

Now, if someone came up to you in the street and said, 'Hey! What's the worst torture you can think of?' you might suggest boiling in oil, or having to watch golf on TV with your dad, or even the nine times table — which is one of my own personal nightmares. But without a doubt I would have to say — walking Streaker. This was going to be a big decision for me.

I reckoned there had to be some way of controlling Streaker. After all, she was only a dog. Humans are cleverer than animals. Humans have bigger brains. Humans rule the animal kingdom.

I seem to remember that just as I was thinking this, Streaker came hurtling in from the kitchen and landed on my lap like a mini-meteorite. We both crashed on the floor, where she sat on my chest looking very pleased with herself.

Mum carried on quietly pedalling all this time. She must have known I'd give in. 'I'll do it,' I said. Mum gave a strange squeak and one of her feet slipped off a pedal. For some reason she looked even more pleased with herself than Streaker did.

'Can I have some money now?' I asked. (See? I'm not stupid.)

'Of course not.' (Mum's not stupid either.)

'How about half now and half when I finish?'

Mum free-wheeled. 'At the end of the holiday, when the job is finished, I'll give you the money.' So that was that. I had agreed to walk the dog every day for two weeks, and that turned out to be only one of my problems that Easter. I must have been totally mad.

CHAPTER 2

I watched this film about a tank battle once. There were all these invincible armour-plated tanks. They were even bazooka-proof. The heroes were losing (of course), until Colonel Clever-clogs (I forget his real name) came up with his BRILLIANT PLAN. 'We must use the tank's own strength against itself,' he said. 'If it's impossible for a shell to get through all that armour plate, it must be impossible for a shell to get out. We shall blow them up from the inside.'

And that's exactly what they did — brilliant film! Dad didn't like it of course. He doesn't like noisy action films with lots of explosions. He prefers watching golf, but have you *ever* seen an exciting golf match? I reckon golf would be a lot more fun if there were a couple of tanks playing and a few explosions. It would be quite interesting to see a nice big tank rumble across the green, square up on the tee, lift its powerful barrel and shoot golf balls right across the golf-course.

So, what has all this got to do with Streaker? Well, I spent ages trying to work out the best way of dealing with the dog. I asked myself: what does Streaker do best?

There were several answers to this:

1. Make a pig of herself.
2. Dig huge holes in the lawn.
3. Smell.

But I reckoned that the one thing she really shone at was speed. Streaker was a rocket on four legs. Maybe I could use her fantastic speed to my own ends. And that was when I remembered my roller-skates.

I hadn't used them for months. (I hadn't seen them for months.) All I had to do was hang on to Streaker's lead and that way she would get exercised and I'd get a free ride. You've got to admit it was a pretty jammy idea. Mum and Dad didn't think much of it though.

Mum sat at the lunch table in silence, eating her 99 per cent fat-free yoghurt that tasted like washing-up water. She obviously wasn't impressed. (She didn't think much of the yoghurt either.)

'I know your clever ideas, Trevor,' said Dad. 'They never work.'

'Yes they do,' I protested.

'Look what happened when you tried to build an assault course in your bedroom.'

Parents have this amazing way of bringing your most spectacular failures into general conversation, don't they? I could feel myself turning bright red.

'That wasn't my fault. I didn't know that fixing a squiddly bit of rope to the ceiling would bring all the plaster down.' Dad grunted and Mum pushed the remains of her yoghurt across the table.

'Would you like to finish it for me?' she asked.

'Why do you keep trying to poison me?' I wanted to know. Mum gave me a wan smile and chewed the end of a celery stick.

I was determined to prove them wrong. I launched a major expeditionary search into the bowels of my wardrobe and eventually managed to find both roller-skates. I spun the wheels and they gave off a very satisfying *whssssh*. How could this plan fail?

I kept Streaker tied to the gatepost while I put on my skates. Then I carefully unwound the lead from the gate, wrapped it round one wrist and crouched low behind her. 'OK, Streaker — lift off!'

She hardly needed any encouragement. Her front paws churned away just like they do in cartoons and we were off, with Streaker's ears streaming out behind her like jet-trails, I was amazed by her strength and speed. Even pulling me didn't prevent her from quickly reaching something that felt like Mach one. Her legs pounded the pavement and she barked happily as we flew along. She loved it. I simply held on to the lead and felt the wind racing through my hair.

We skidded round the corner in great style and Streaker headed up the main road towards the street market. I reckoned it was time for her to slow down a bit, but of course I didn't have any

brakes, and neither did the dog. Anyhow, by this time Streaker had switched to turbo-boost and there was no stopping her.

We hit the market at maximum speed, scattering shoppers in every direction. I held on for dear life as we zigzagged through the startled crowd, careering wildly from one side to the other. It was all I could do to stay upright.

Streaker suddenly swerved violently to one side to avoid a mesmerized old lady. I had to fling out one arm as a counter-balance and somehow I managed to get her handbag stuck on it.

'Help! I've been robbed! Stop that boy! He's taken my bag!'

In no time at all the whole market seemed to be after me, but there was no way I could stop and explain. Streaker was really enjoying herself. There's nothing she likes more than a good chase. She doesn't even care if she's chasing or being chased. We went screaming round corners so fast that my skates started to smoke. We lurched into stalls, sending them tumbling over and spilling their contents every which way, crashed into people and bounced off them, and all the time the crowd behind was getting bigger and bigger and noisier and noisier.

'Stop that boy!'

'He's stolen an old bag's lady — I mean an old lady's bag!'

'Get the bag-snatcher!'

Streaker whizzed round the next corner so fast that she rolled over and over, and of course I just carried straight on and smashed headlong into a rack of dresses. Before I knew it I was hauled to my feet by a very angry mob. Not only was I still clutching the old lady's handbag. But I had a rather stunning flower-print sun-dress draped fetchingly over one shoulder.

To cut a long story short, I was carted off to the police station, along with Streaker. She sat tentatively in the corner and looked completely innocent while I was almost arrested. Just to make matters worse, the policeman on desk-duty was Sergeant Smugg. He lives just up the road from us and he's got three Alsatians. (Personally speaking, I think half an Alsatian is a bit too much, but three!)

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