

# Can he fix it?

There was oil coming out of the fire hose, and, at the same time, grey gunk was crawling from the top of the motor. The Green Goddess was sick, but that was the end of the journey. The spring was at the beginning. It seemed to uncoil interminably, and as it did so the little cogs and gears scattered over the floor leaving the motor in pieces and an eight-year-old me in deep trouble. In those far off days boys had real toys, not virtual ones that depend on keyboard or joystick skills. This was manly stuff – Meccano: ‘The toy that grows with the boy.’ Girls were of course not allowed a look in as they were confined to dolls and miniature nurses’ uniforms.

Meccano then consisted of strips of metal with holes punched in them, axles and gear wheels – a far cry from the exotic plastic shapes and mouldings of modern Meccano sets, which in the sales pitch are now directed to ‘children’ and not just to the boy.

**“The solution that caught my eye was so bizarre that it not only appeared to be a quick way of making sure that this printer never saw another A4 page, but also would ensure my reputation as a mender would be ruined for the rest of my life”**

Part of my Meccano set consisted of a large clockwork motor which could be connected to the cranes, tanks and trains that *the boy* had made. And that was my nemesis. The motor had four tempting screws that held it together which I could not resist undoing with my Meccano screwdriver. The rest is history – and stamped me forever with the reputation of a wrecker of all things mechanical.

Throughout the remainder of my childhood, whenever I tried to mend anything, the grown-ups would remind me about the Meccano motor and I would wilt in shame. That was a long time before I tried to cook my printer.

On my first honeymoon I decided (on the romantic isle of Capri) that the European voltage was different from ours, so I adjusted my new bride’s hairdryer to 120 volts. The result was briefly spectacular: it became a hair burner before it gave up the ghost and expired amid a shower of sparks and a strong smell of melting plastic. So far I have avoided a similar catastrophe with

wife number two, but it will only be a matter of time.

Over the years I have remained undaunted and occasionally repaired things effectively. But my track record remains unimpressive: I have put together flat-pack furniture (only for it to become flat again), put up shelves that are several degrees from the horizontal and plunged the house into darkness when attempting to install a new wall socket.

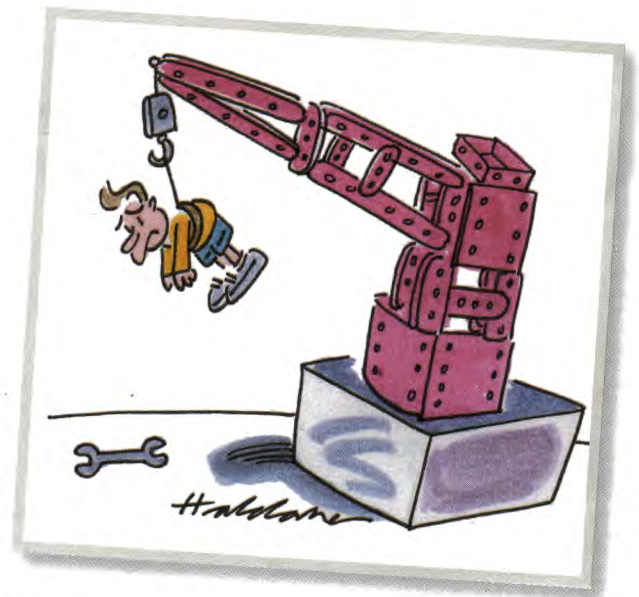
Yet when our high-powered ride-on lawnmower (complete with go faster stripes – max speed 3mph) kept dying on me in the middle of the lawn I was determined not to be defeated by a mere machine or my past failures, and I was certainly not about to pay for the dealers to come out, take one look, pronounce its condition to be terminal and tell me that I need a new mower.

With the instruction manual in one hand and an adjustable spanner in the other, I worked my way along the fuel system. Everything seemed fine but the problem was not solved. In desperation I unscrewed the pipe from the fuel tank (drenching myself in the process) only to discover it blocked by the decomposed remains of a moth which had (in some kind of mothy logic) thought that it might be fun to have a drink of petrol.

With the moth removed, the mower once again runs perfectly and I am able to create perfect stripes on the lawn – or would if there was any grass to cut in our drought-ridden Norfolk.

## Problem printer

I am sure that you would not expect me to have any success in fixing a laser printer which had stopped working. It had been sitting stubbornly with two yellow warning lights on. It would not even print a test message, and it certainly did not respond to the computer. It is two years old, so out of



guarantee. I quickly checked it for moths and found none. It did not seem to have any springs either.

When in doubt, turn to the internet. Inevitably there were about 60,000 different suggestions for restoring that model of printer to fully functioning state. The solution that caught my eye was so bizarre that it not only appeared to be a quick way of making sure that this printer never saw another A4 page, but also would ensure that my reputation as a mender would be ruined for the rest of my life.

All I had to do was: pull the plastic side of the printer off (without breaking it); locate the printed circuit formatter board; pull its wires off; unscrew its four screws (hoping there is no spring underneath); remove said board; heat an oven to 350 degrees; cook the board for eight minutes (or until medium rare); and let it cool down and reassemble the printer.

You might think that any ordinary solicitor needs to be locked up for taking such wanton actions against an innocent printer, especially as the same solicitor was about to disappear underneath a Green Goddess fire engine and empty three gallons of gunk from the sump to try to get it in working order ready for the fire-fighting season. The story so far is that used engine oil mixed with water is not an adequate substitute for conventional hair spray, but it certainly makes the follicles stay plastered to the top of my head.

And, as for the printer, it is now churning out A4 pages like a dream, and they do not even look singed – just as well as there is no nearby working Green Goddess to douse the flames – yet, but Barr the mechanic is onto the case...

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