

KAMIKAZE SUPPER

IF YOU LIVE out in the sticks, why resort to the Spar, Gateway or Waitrose for your supper? Donning green wellies, or merely jumping into your car, supper is freely available. But shh! - creep up quietly or tonight's cooking pot will remain empty.

As you round the corner of the road, with the forest looming up on the left, the first hint of your prey is heard. No clarion call floating through the foliage, no melodic chants in the air. Rather, our feathered friend lets out a warning shriek as you approach. Sounds like a skunk with a hernia. Or maybe the intermittent turns of a ratchet screwdriver. We have entered the kingdom of the pheasant. This shy retiring member of the feathered suicide squad is lurking among the season's dying nettles and chastened blackberries.

The ground is a tangle of summer's departed bounty, but it conceals a myriad of rhythmic peckers as pheasant beaks dip in search of food. Their squawks echo across the road to their partners among the stubble. The two groups seem destined to meet, generally right in the middle of the road. Just when you think your tyres will encounter nothing more challenging than a lick of tarmac, or maybe last week's hedgehog, out comes the first headless chicken.

A close scientific study of these creatures reveals that they have three methods of moving. Firstly there is the Connect Three Action. This is when the two legs are clearly connected to the neck so that every step

The Sod Jobber

forward is accompanied by the synchronised bobbing of the head. Secondly there is the Zigzag Action. This is closely associated with the approach of a human being and consists of a wildly erratic series of steps that owes more to the Ministry of Silly Walks than to measured progress. The aim seems to be to escape as quickly as possible whilst putting the greatest yardage under its claws. Finally there is the Fooled You Action. This one leaves the motorist guessing. Our cranially-challenged pheasant leaves the wood slowly, picks up speed as you approach but then suddenly realises that he can't reach the stubble haven. The result is a U-turn that would gladden the heart of the government.

Still, the supper menu is still incomplete, so that leaves you unsatisfied, foot perched over the accelerator, eyebrows resting on the steering wheel as you await the next potential victim. Meanwhile over in the fields the chicks peck metronomically. Perhaps they're too young to be allowed out to play with the traffic. Ah, but the fun of the chase, the pumping of adrenalin, the sporting chance and the lure of the gastric juices. Come to think of it, a journey through Shipton's perennial roadworks and past the forest must be the automobile version of getting tarred and feathered!

But enough of these musings. Up the stairs floats a delectable and unmistakable aroma, that mixture of burning rubber and warm flesh.

Time to fetch my napkin.