

## Getting the look

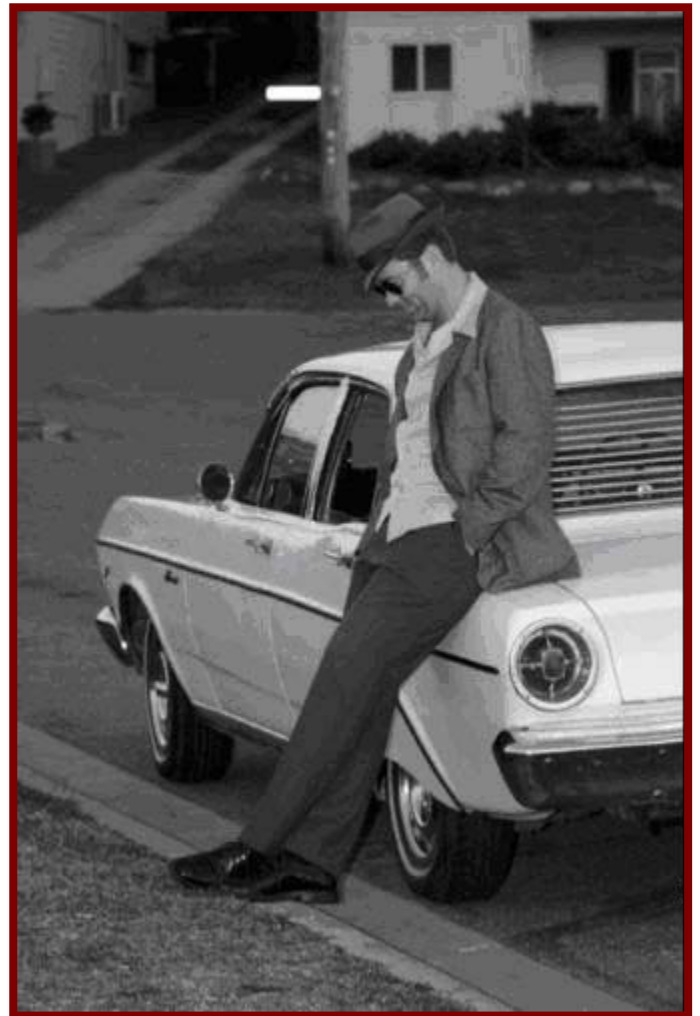
By Laird Darren Gallagher

*'Quick Kids, sit up straight there is a police car right behind us!'*

Remember this? It used to fascinate me as a small child. I would ask my father 'What are we doing wrong?' and he would say, 'Nothing, but sit still please'. It's like in some ways my father thinks that the police hold grudges against him for speeding offences that he has been caught for in the past, so he has to be extra careful now.

Certainly gives stock to that idea that you get nervous when you are being watched, even more so if being watched by someone with whom you have a history. Ooh I could feel some of you flinch then. We have all had one at some point in time and it can be very unnerving to have the performance watchdog peering constantly over your shoulder in the form of someone that you feel doesn't like you - just waiting for something to be 'out of place'.

True enough, it can be a hard line to walk as budding service folk sometimes because we are a small and possibly misunderstood demographic of people and we all have our little tales of entanglements with disciplinarians. On several occasions even just driving, I've been pulled over in my 67 Ford by the police just because they were bored and wanted to check out my car in a complimentary sense as opposed a critical one. Should this annoy me or



flatter me? For the police - and for that matter, all people - to really understand you, it's important that they understand the things that drive your behaviour. For arguments sake, is the look of a classic car improved by a guy and gal that have some fitting period Rock'n'Roll threads on? Absolutely - it's part of the picture. Just as a fireman wouldn't jump in the truck without the right uniform or an English gent wouldn't get in his MG without a tweed coat and hat, nor should we forget that our uniforms will often complement and reflect on us when doing different things.

As a military man and rockabilly fan, I find it a constant battle to have my hair just short enough to appease military standards, but keep it long enough that I can gel, style, spray and comb it into the look that really does set the scene when I slip the cover off my 67' and go to my Rock'n'Roll dance classes.

I know that there will be those of you that don't quite get this, so I'll explain the relevance of the car inclusion. In many ways, the relationship between an individual and their car is one of the most important they will have in their life time. If the car is cared for, respected, maintained and sheltered, then the return on this will be significant. The car will always look good to them and look good for them. It will always perform when they need it to, and is happy just being pampered and admired. However, failure to look after the car will see breakdowns and tantrums. People will walk by and think 'they don't deserve a car like that'. The truth is a good cruiser is the best 'training wheels' a person can have in preparation for any other type of relationship.

Admittedly, once our hero has reached relationship mastery and gets that special someone, we all know that his automotive affair will continue and we all know what happens if the new love finds out you've spent five bucks on them for Valentines Day and five hundred on your mechanical mistress. Actually, maybe that's what it is with the police. Maybe they sense your infidelity when they see you cruising down the road by yourself enjoying the drive and sun while the engine purrs sweet nothings into your ears. Maybe that's why you sit up straight and say, 'nothing to see here Officer'?

The long and the short of it is that the way you are perceived will often be of more importance than the truth. I understand now why when in High School there was so much pressure on kids to have the right brands, the right hair, and dare I say, the right look.

So next time you slip on that uniform – double take the mirror. Make sure things are as they should be. At least that way you will be starting the day with a clean slate, and, if nothing else, the perception of professionalism.