

STYLE AND TRAVEL

Brick Lane booty

Jenny Wilhide on picking up bargains at the world's funkiest car-boot sale

Unless you are desperate to buy a semi-useless kettle for £2, the irresistible lure of a car-boot sale is that you might find something of astonishing value hidden in the muck. The hand-painted Picasso tie, the Poussin sketch covered in kitchen grease and dust. The teddy bear missing one eye or 5p wind-up Disney toy that are worth thousands — perhaps one of the mythological missing reels of television shows such as *The Avengers* or *Dr Who*, junked by broadcasters tidying their shelves in the 1970s.

According to *Time Out*, Britons now spend about £1.4 billion a year buying stuff at car-boot sales up and down the country, and London is the most profitable place to hold one. Groups of families and friends find them a fun way to spend a Sunday. The rule of *caveat emptor* always applies, and haggling is a must, but you don't need to subscribe to PayPal to take part. Car-boot sales are supposed to be uniquely British and apparently started in the early 1980s. This is nonsense, as the idea is as old as the hills and they're identical to Continental flea-markets and American yard sales, except the goods arrive and are set out in the back of a car.

If you're looking for a unique sale, go to the Art Car Boot Fair, the annual wild and wacky gathering of British artists young and old and their mates, held in the carpark of the Truman Brewery on Brick Lane. I've been two years running with my husband because we're friends with one of the wackiest and most talented of their number — the graphic designer Vanessa Fristedt, aka Swedish Blonde.

On this year's flyer, the list of attractions includes Beach (party), Beatboxers, Burlesque and Flim-Flam — whatever that means. The afternoon is advertised as 'the most fun you'll have out of the boot of a



Robert Greene of The Rubbish Men of Soho, Vanessa Fristedt/Swedish Blonde and Millie Laws from Hackney Arts Club

car since filthy adolescence', which is probably right. Gavin Turk is quoted saying the ACBF is 'nothing like a car-boot sale' — and that is absolutely accurate. Somehow or other the organisers, sisters Karen Ashton and Helen Hayward, have got Vauxhall Motors, a sensible MOR brand if ever there was one, to sponsor it.

The first year we dawdled so long over Sunday lunch and the papers that by the time we arrived all we saw was Abigail Lane disappearing across the carpark in a tutu. So last year we went earlier and copped an eyeful of the strip-show — this group's equivalent of the bouncy castle. It was an incredibly English strip (white-blue skin, kinky nuns and shepherdesses, my husband doesn't remember them stripping but they did) accompanied by whoops and hollers of appreciation from the booters.

Despite our best efforts we were too late for the £20 mugs designed by Sarah Lucas and the biscuits baked by Gavin Turk, but we did buy a couple of great T-shirts and ate

barbequed-something washed down by ferociously alcoholic punch. It was all very naughty. Down the road in Brick Lane, the final degree shows from various art schools didn't stand a chance.

The only thing I can say for certain about the ACBF this year is that the cars themselves will be works of art. You won't find mud-coloured Escorts with their boots open here. What you will find are vintage and other autos decorated by some of the country's best and battiest creators. Inside the car boots themselves, who knows what you will find? Some artists have been specially commissioned to create in-engine artworks, tax disc b-side art, and other automobile paraphernalia.

Sam Clark and James Knight from Moro restaurant in Exmouth Market will make paella. Tracey Emin is providing some kind of undisclosed special service. Peter Blake and Abigail Lane will offer 54 prints inspired by a pack of cards. Gavin Turk is being mysterious about what he's going to sell. The actor Rhys Ifans will do something (perhaps his famous underpants trick), and Vivienne Westwood, Pam Hogg and Bethnal Green Working Men's Club are somehow involved. A tattoo artist will be on hand, and Swedish Blonde will be selling cockney broad-bean jewellery, nipple badges and Ken the C=+1 anti-Congestion Charge badges.

I don't think the cars will be for sale, but if you can buy one, you shouldn't hesitate.

Caveat emptor will still apply, but if you try to haggle, you will probably find that the seller is a much better businessperson than you.

ART CAR BOOT FAIR

www.artcarbootfair.com
Sunday, 8 July 2007, 12-6 p.m.
The Old Truman Brewery,
146 Brick Lane, London E1

