

How's her body?

By Robby Berman

I'm deep in dream about a beautiful girl when my phone rings. In the blackness of early morning I frantically grope for the receiver and hope that I might still be able to salvage my fantasy.

"What color is she?" the stranger asks.

"Blonde." I mutter and hang up, trying to continue where I left off. The phone rings again.

"How's her body?" another voice queries.

"Really sexy... slightly undersized breasts... just like I like 'em." I mumble, hang up and pull the covers over my head.

Ring! "Were there any accidents? You know, did you knock her up?" a third voice inquires, this time rupturing my reverie for good.

Thinking I might be the victim of a telecommunication dream-voyeurism cult – possibly a new Bezeq service – I sit up and demand to know, "Who is this?"

"I'm interested in buying your car," the person says. After a few seconds, my brain cells recall that yesterday, Thursday, I ordered an advertisement in the Friday paper that my Honda is for sale.

"What time is it?" I ask, knowing in my gut I am not going to like the answer.

"5:45 in the morning," he says unabashedly. "Don't you think it's a little early to be calling about a car at 5:45 Friday morning?" I bark and hang up.

Again the phone rings. I grab the

receiver and scream, "What?" hoping it's not my mom calling from the States.

"How many kilometers has she done?" a new voice asks.

"Well the advert in front of you states she's travelled 120,000 kilometers," I say with just a pinch of sarcasm, "That would be a good indication that she has travelled 120,000 kilometers."

It's only the first day my car is on the market and I am getting the picture that selling my car is not going to be an easy ride.

The phone rings. I let my answering machine pick it up. It's another potential buyer; he asks some questions and leaves his number. It rings again; another buyer. I take a shower and when I come out, the little red light on my machine is blinking with the hyperactivity of an ADHD adolescent who forgot to take his Ritalin.

I press play. Each caller fires an identical barrage of questions occasionally punctuated by the sounds of spitting sunflower-seed shells. It seems as if most callers are not serious but rather they are performing an Israeli ritual: negotiating for a car as a rite of passage into Israeli manhood. They could have been frogmen in the IDF and killed terrorists with their bare hands, but if they haven't *hondled* for a Honda they're wimps.

One message sounds like a serious buyer so I call him back. "Hi," I say, "I'm calling back about the car."

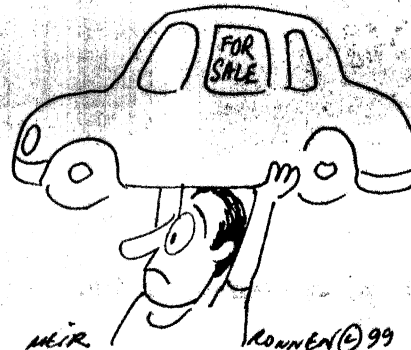
"It's no longer relevant," he says to me.

No longer relevant? What does that mean? "The car has already been sold," he says and hangs up. "But it's my car, for God's sake," I scream into the dead line.

What does this guy know that I don't know? I run to my window and look down at the street, three flights below. My car is

still there with its 'For Sale' sign in the rear window and three silhouettes are circling it, alternately kicking the tires. The person on the phone must have mistakenly thought I was asking to buy his car.

I run down 72 stairs and ask the three amigos to please stop kicking my car. "How much do you want for it?" one asks, with the tone of someone doing me a favor. "The book price." I say, explaining to him the car has never been in an accident. All three laugh in sync but continue to stare at my car.



A male octogenarian shuffles by, one arm grabbing a cane, the other a Filipino. "How much do you want for the car sonny?"

"The book price." I repeat. He cackles and shuffles off. A 14-year-old boy walking his dog demands to know how much I'm asking. I tell him to get lost.

A garbage truck barrels down Rehov Harav Berlin. The driver spots the 'For Sale' sign and slams on the brakes, sending his co-workers, who were holding on to the back of the truck, flying into the garbage. The driver rolls down his window, stares at my car in silence, and lights up a cigarette in a Clint Eastwood

type of way.

"How much?" he says, and winks at me. "Book price." I say, winking back at him, hoping he's not gay.

He turns off the engine and gets out of the truck, causing a traffic jam that waits patiently, privileged to be witness to this noble rite of passage. The garbage man circles my Honda three times alternately kicking its tires. He takes a long drag on his cigarette, throws it to the ground, and grinds it into the bitumen as if he were trying to kill a living organism.

His head remains pointed at the ground while the tip of his thumb raises his baseball cap. His eyes rise to meet mine. We stare at each other for a long minute. It seems like high noon at 7:30 in the morning on Rehov Harav Berlin. Sensing the tension the crowd has backed away from us. Suddenly, the garbage man sticks his hand inside his mottled overalls and draws a cellular phone. I'm unarmed.

The garbage man hits a pre-programmed number. "Honda Civic, gun-metal gray, not knocked up, book price."

He pauses for an answer and hangs up. He offers me half the book price but, he says, he'll pay with a suitcase full of cash in small unmarked bills.

At that moment, my American neighbor exits his house. His new car is gone. Stolen.

Another Israeli ritual. He offers to buy my car. He won't kick my tires and he will even pay with a bank check the full book price. We shake hands and the surrounding circus of characters slowly dissipates, giving me a look indicating that I disappointed them, that I cheated them out of an opportunity to enter Israeli manhood.

Truthfully, I don't care. Let them display their feathers and urinate on someone else's car.