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The ferry operator knew there'd be a crowd on Saturday, waiting in a long, curly line of Fiats, Toyota Landcruisers and mini-buses for him to transport them in his small wooden car and passenger ferry—'capacity 12 vehicles'—across the channel to the island.

Having the time of their lives...

It was young Missy's 21st and she and her arty friends from town had done the local hall up like a Tiki Lounge. She'd screamed down the road the day before—with the back of her ute laden with bamboo sticks, plastic palm trees, a totem pole, and boxes of Hawaiian leis—just as he was about to pull up the ferry's ramp. Where she'd got all that stuff from, he didn't know.

Time on their hands...

And Des junior, an abalone diver—who only has to work three months a year to fill his quota, and earn an excellent living to boot—was getting engaged to Miriam What's-her-name, a young American schoolteacher he'd met when he was climbing a mountain in Africa. Weeks ago a huge white marquee had been erected on his parent's front lawn—which had terrific views of the water—and the side paddock had been mowed and 'car park' signs attached to the fence. A new garden had been planted, and the house freshly painted—a couple of times. The first colour had looked a bit like the colour of baby poo in the afternoon sun.

Time gentlemen...

Charlie Shuttlebutt, who'd won the regional lawn bowling championships 14 years in a row, had died on the bowling green last Monday. By Tuesday lunchtime every bowling club in the southern part of the state had a note stuck up on its information board, announcing his death, and asking his bowling friends and acquaintances to get together on Saturday afternoon at the clubhouse on the island, with a good yarn and a generous plate.

Time waits for no man...

And Tina and Mark were tying the knot—finally—on the beach in front of the guesthouse. After being together for years Tina suddenly told Mark if he didn't marry her, she was out of here. She'd really meant it, her girlfriends said. And not long after, when the couple had walked into the bay and Mark had caught a 'perfect wave', he'd asked her to marry him. His friends had told him he was an idiot—you never ask a girl to marry you after you've caught a great wave! You're on a high you silly bastard! You've got rocks in your head! But secretly, Mark's friends were pleased for him—and perhaps a little jealous—Tina was a good sort.

Running out of time...

As lady bowlers, party boys, ancient aunties and Americans waited in the line of traffic to get onto the ferry, they began to get agitated. They kept glancing at their neat watches and car clocks, looking at their invitations and entries in their diaries. Their bottoms were getting numb, and they began to shift from one cheek to the other. Bowling whites were feeling crumpled, and

cheese platters were beginning to run in the warmth of the car, giving off a decidedly ripening aroma. Party dresses were sticking to backs, and polyester slacks were getting itchy around the groin. Children needed to go to the toilet—and were hungry—starving to death. But they didn't want the spare banana, they wanted the chicken-flavoured chips they'd seen at the service station they'd stopped at an hour ago.

In the nick of time...

As the ferry let down its ramp, a car engine started and—like a sound concertina, or a sound domino effect—all the other cars in the long line followed suit. The throbbing snake of cars was ready to spring into action. One car drove on to the ferry, and another, and another. Vehicles slowly began to make their way forward—but unfortunately only the length of about 12 car spaces.

Passing the time of day...

The engines of the long line of remaining cars were turned off, as the car occupants emitted huge sighs of frustration and annoyance and concern. 'Tell him we've come all the way from America,' the Americans said loudly from a hire car to no-one in particular. 'Tell him we're with the band,' Missy's friends shouted back from out the windows of a burnt-orange Kombi, parked not far behind them. 'Tell him we're the bridesmaids,' whiskered aunties chorused from out the window of a nearby mini-bus. People slowly began to climb from out of their vehicles, and make their way down to the wharf.

Running to a time-table...

As the ferry ramp was raised, and the ferry chugged away from the wharf, leaving its trail of whitewash, the occupants of the cars on board—including Aerial Macintosh and her five children from the daffodil farm on the island, who were returning from a night in town and a performance of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Richard the mechanic, who had raced up to the airport to pick up some spare parts especially flown down; several lady bowlers on their way to Charlie's farewell, and a couple of holidaymakers—climbed out of their vehicles and moved to the railing—to watch the undulating surface of the water, and feel the breeze in their hair. One of the Macintosh boys turned to the people assembled on the ferry wharf—a large group that had become not quite one joyful crowd—and waved cheerily.

There's no time like now...

The ferry operator had known young Missy since she was knee-high to a grasshopper, and old Charlie Shuttlebutt deserved a rousing send-off. Young Des was a nice kid, and as for Mark and Tina...well she was a good sort. As he looked back at the people on the wharf, and the bumper to bumper cars snaked along the road, he decided he'd scrap the Saturday time-table, and keep running return journeys until he'd cleared the mob.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Dee Prichard.*