

STEVE'S GUN-TOTIN' TRUE STORY

Fancy stopping for a brew?" I said to my wife Susan. "I'm parched."

"Good idea," she smiled. "Let's pull in at a car park." It was a horrible October night. Bitterly cold and chucking it down.

Me and Susan were driving home from Camber Sands in our trusty old camper van.

I'm an entertainer. A crooner - I travel all round the country singing golden oldies from all the greats - Elvis, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Jim Reeves.

I'd just done a gig at Poring's. I'd gone down a storm - especially with the ladies!

We'd rushed away as soon as the gig had finished. Had a long drive home to Essex.

But singing's thirsty work. If I didn't get a cuppa soon, I'd collapse!

"Oh look, there's a Little Chef, let's pull in over there," Susan suggested.

We parked up. Sue went into the back to put the stove on, while I twiddled with the radio until I found one of my old favourites.

"Smooth operator..." I sang along with Sade.

Suddenly I heard someone screaming and yelling. It was coming from the Little Chef.

I switched off the van lights for a better view. Sue turned the stove off, climbed into the front to see what was going on.

"Probably just yobboes," I started to say - but then we saw a man running out of the Little Chef, heading our way.

He was holding something. We couldn't make out what in the dark. Whatever it was, he seemed to be pointing it at us...

"Is that what I think it is?" I stuttered.

"It can't be," Sue said flatly. "We're in leafy Sussex, not Los Angeles. It must be a... stick."

"That's no stick," I yelled, starting the engine. "It's a gun!"

I floored the accelerator and we skidded out of that Little Chef, tyres screeching.

By the time we hit the M21, we'd calmed down a bit. In fact, we'd started to wonder if we'd imagined it.

I wasn't imagining the flashing blue light in my rear view mirror, though.

"What now?" I sighed, pulling onto the hard shoulder. "I'm not going to be

nicked for speeding am I?"

To my surprise, several police cars screeched to a halt all around us, blocking off the motorway.

It seemed a bit extreme. I mean, I hadn't been doing more than 70 miles an hour.

A megaphone boomed. "Get out of the vehicle! What the Hell was going on?"

I looked at Sue, lost for words. She looked as gobsmacked as I was.

"I think we'd better do as they say," she said quietly. We climbed out.

Walk into the middle of the road with your hands in the air, came the next command. "Do not make any sudden movements."

It was still raining but I could just make out the

blurry figures of policemen all around us. And they were carrying guns...

Next thing I knew, my hands were cuffed behind my back, and I was lying facedown on the motorway!

I could feel the rain soaking through my clothes as a police dog sniffed round me.

If I hadn't been so scared, I'd have been furious.

"What's going on?" I tried to ask.

"Wait till we get to the station," a policeman said. I was frisked, then bundled into the back of a police car.

I looked round frantically for Sue but she'd already been whisked off.

"Will somebody please tell me what's going

on?" I tried again, but nobody answered me.

We drove to Tunbridge Wells police station. I was taken to an interview room and told to strip. Not just my jeans and T-shirt.

Everything.

I handed over my pants and socks, stood covering my meat and two veg.

As if I hadn't already been humiliated enough!

"Here!" They chuckled me a paper jumpsuit.

I was read my rights, told I was being held on suspicion of armed robbery.

What?!

It got worse. I was fingerprinted, then taken down to a cell. Locked up.

At about 2am, I was taken to see the duty solicitor.

"Will you tell me what's going on?" I pleaded.

But he was no help either. Just listened while I told him about our

drive from Camber Sands. Finally, after what felt like hours, I heard someone unlock my cell door.

"You can go now," the policeman told me.

He took me down to the main desk. Susan was waiting there, dressed in a paper jumpsuit, too.

She flung her arms round me.

"We're releasing you on bail. Report back in a month," we were told.

"Er - can we have our clothes back?" I asked.

"They've been sent to the lab for testing."

"What about our shoes?" Sue asked.

But they'd gone, too. Sue and I crept out to the van, bereft, still in our paper jumpsuits.

In the back, I found an old pair of my stage shoes to drive home in.

I looked at the clock - 9am.

Knackered and starving, we drove back to Essex. Snuck into the house to avoid the neighbours.

Sue burst into tears. It'd been too much for her. I didn't blame her. Felt like crying myself.

For the next couple of weeks, I was worried sick. I knew I hadn't done anything wrong - but you hear about innocent men being banged up, don't you?

Then a letter came. It said we were released from bail, wouldn't have to report back to the station.

That wasn't enough for me - not after what we'd been through.

I phoned the station, demanded some answers.

Turned out the guy with the 'stick' at the Little Chef was an armed robber! He'd been holding the place up.

Someone had reported us speeding away from the scene of the crime, so the police had nicked us.

Now the real criminals had been caught, we were off the hook.

Sue just wants to forget about the whole thing. But I'll never forget the night I was mistaken for an armed robber.

And when I sing Jailhouse Rock these days, I know what I'm talking about!

• Chat contacted Kent Police, but they declined to comment.

You're nicked!

Er, but what had I done?

By Steve Travis, 50, from West Mersea, Essex



No jokes about 'criminal records' now...