

ON THE ROAD

It wasn't one of those glamour rigs: I suspect the bloke bought it cheap and fifth hand. It looked like it had come a long way, and the header it carried wasn't exactly a prize load, I fancy. It stopped outside the pub in this tiny town where we were having a drink. The driver got down, headed straight across the road, up the steps, into the bar. We were surprised: he didn't look the boozing kind, especially not on a job. Then, the far side, a youngish woman climbed slowly down: middling attractive, in T-shirt and shorts, looking somehow the other half of a couple. She carried an enormous wrench, started stoically to loosen the bolts on the bull-bars. The bloke reappeared with a bucket, filled it at the verandah tap. It's a complicated operation: drop the bull-bars, tip the bonnet forward, climb up and stand high on the mudguard, pour in the water. Three buckets that semi took. I guessed they had only twenty or thirty kilometres more to go, hoped my guess was right, and they made it before the motor seized. They worked well together: had an understanding, like, but somehow their manner suggested they'd both be happier when they'd made enough to stay on the farm. She'd be mostly in the house, but sometimes when she took his smokeoh down the paddock, might get a wrench from the toolbox, tighten a nut or two on the harvester to amuse the kids, let them see mummy knows more than kitchens, remind herself and him of the days of their exile.