



IN FAVOUR OF GLITZY, US-STYLE PROMS. GEMMA PEPLow IS ON THE GUEST LIST

The girls are worse – boys are cool and quite relaxed

SOMETIMES, Martin McLaughlin sits behind the wheel of his extended New York city taxi or his stretch Cadillac and he wonders what on earth he's doing.

The cost of fuel is rising on a weekly basis, road tax is expensive, insurance – at about £1,200 a vehicle – is not cheap.

All in all, it's not the best time to be running a fleet of luxury limousines.

Martin runs American Dream Cars, in Anstey: He has eight limousines, stretch Cadillacs and bad-boy Hummers.

On average, Martin's lucky if he gets 10 miles to the gallon from one of his fancy cars.

With petrol now at 118p per litre – maybe more by the time you read this – it's a rising cost that Martin just has to swallow.

"I don't make a great deal of money doing this," he says. "I do it because I love it."

"I have to say the girls are usually the worst behaved. Boys are usually quite relaxed and cool about it. The girls just go mad."

Martin McLaughlin

Thankfully, the advent of the school prom has been something of a financial lifesaver for Mr McLaughlin.

"I've been doing this for 10 years," said Martin, 52. "When I started, people hired our limos for birthdays or weddings or very special parties."

June and July – the end of the school term – has become one of the busiest times of the year.

"It's good for us," says Martin.

"It means this is a frantic time, but it also means we get work in the week as well as the weekend.

"As a phenomenon, we've seen it grow in the past 10 years.

"Most schools do it now and there are always students who want to do it in real style.

"That is where we come in."

But who are the worst passengers?

"It depends," said Martin. "I've been to schools all over Leicestershire and you do see a real difference in behaviour depending on where you are in the county.

"But I have to say the girls are usually the worse behaved.

"Boys are usually quite relaxed and cool about it. The girls just go mad."



OPEN NIGHT: The weather is kind to Megan Bullock, Charlotte Alloway and Sophie Bingham



HELLO BACK THERE: Charlotte Mills, Josh Winterburn and Gabbi Cross are long on style



CUTTING A DASH: Knockout frocks are a must for the girls



THUMBS UP: Max Brown



THAT'S ME! Pupils watch a slideshow of school photos



MOVING ALONG: Girls on the dancefloor at Shearsby Bath Hotel

have organised everything – I've just been there to oversee it.

"It's teaching them independence.

"Having a prom makes it a lot more special than having a disco, because they all really want to look their best. It's an opportunity to show that they are mature."

Cherlynn Houston, owner of Shearsby Bath, pops into the marquee every now and then to see what the teenagers are up to.

This is her fourth prom this summer.

She says: "It's a growing trend.

"It's nice to see them enjoying themselves and having fun.

"There's so much negative stuff said about young people at the moment, and this shows them in a really positive light."

As the dance-floor starts to fill up, the teenagers show off their moves to Whigfield's Saturday Night, before the moment everyone has been waiting for – the announcement of prom king and queen.

The 18 nominees line up

nervously on the dance-floor; the boys all macho, the girls whispering and holding hands.

There are massive cheers as David Startin and Heather Edgerton are announced and given their crowns.

"I was a bit shocked," says David. "It's really good 'cos everyone has looked forward to prom the whole year. It's been better than I expected.

"It's nice to be voted king."

Heather is modest about being

voted most popular girl in the year.

"It's a bit embarrassing going up on stage, but the prom's been really good. I've enjoyed it all," she says.

With that, she's off to join the masses on the dance-floor for the final 30 minutes.

Head teacher Angela Edwards, watching from the edge, says: "It's kind of a rite of passage. It would be very sad to just wave them off at the end of three

years, without having a send off.

"It's a very grown-up venue, so I think that makes them act in a more grown-up way than if it had been in the school hall."

As the night draws to an end with a bit of slow-dancing, the teenagers pick up their year-books, which have been hand-made by the prom committee.

Parents are waiting outside and the cameras are out again to snap the happy prom-goers.

As Liz waits at the doors, one girl gives her a massive hug.

"Thank you soooooo much, miss. It was the best night ever."

Have you got pictures from your school prom? E-mail them to: picturedesk@leicestermercury.co.uk

LOOKING THE PART: Rita Snape's dress shop does a nice line in prom dresses

HARD-PRESSED parents of teenage girls already feeling the credit crunch pinch may want to turn the page now.

A prom party may be a cheery, wonderful thing but, unsurprisingly, if you want to look the part, it's not cheap.

Rita Snape owns Solaire dress shop, in Leicester's Welford Road. A few years ago, she sold exquisite dresses only for weddings, cruises or very posh parties.

At this time of the year, Mrs

Snape's till rings to a slightly different tune. Early summer is, when mums come shopping for prom dresses.

Mrs Snape does a nice line in posh prom frocks for teenagers. They start at about £80 and go up to £200.

"The girls and mums who come here know what they want – they want a special dress which will make them feel fantastic," says Mrs Snape.

But that's not cheap is it?

"Well, there are more expens-

ive shops around. I'm not the most expensive, but, let's face it, on a night like this – a night they will remember for the rest of their lives – you want to get it right."

Despite headlines about recession, it's business as usual.

"I know there's doom and gloom out there but it seems to me that people are still in work, and if they have a daughter who has a prom, they want to treat them. Things haven't changed much for me," Mrs Snape says.



DRESSING UP: Rita Snape helps Tasia Dore, 15, choose a frock