

'Here in my car
I feel safest of all
I can lock all my doors
It's the only way to live
In cars'



From Budget Rent a Car to TVR, the highs and lows of **Gary Numan**'s career were always going to come back to his cars.

Interview **Emma E Forrest**

Photography **Neil Massey**

Short
cuts

'Here in my car I can only receive I can listen to you It keeps me stable for days In cars'

Outside Gary Numan's Stansted home sits his newly-polished jet black TVR 4.5 Cerbera, a recent reward to match the white Corvette that marked his massive success first time round. It's over twenty years since electronic music icon Gary Numan shot to fame with a clutch of number one singles including the classic "Cars", merging his distinctive styling, weird lyrics and whining drawl with cutting-edge technology. Now he's in fashion again: pop princesses Sugababes' sassy R&B tune "Freak Like Me" based on his 1979 Tubeway Army track "Are 'Friends' Electric?" made number one in 2002, and he's being name-checked by artists as diverse as Beck, DJ Hell, Afrika Bambaata and Prodigy's Liam Howlett. At the same time his new music is taking top spot on the nu-Metal charts and bringing him fans from Nine Inch Nails' frontman Trent Reznor to self-declared 'Anti-Christ superstar', Marilyn Manson. Having just released a double CD called *Hybrid* featuring remixes of old classics by current producers, and another album of all-new material due in the summer, his career is finally back up to speed after screeching to a premature halt in the '80s.

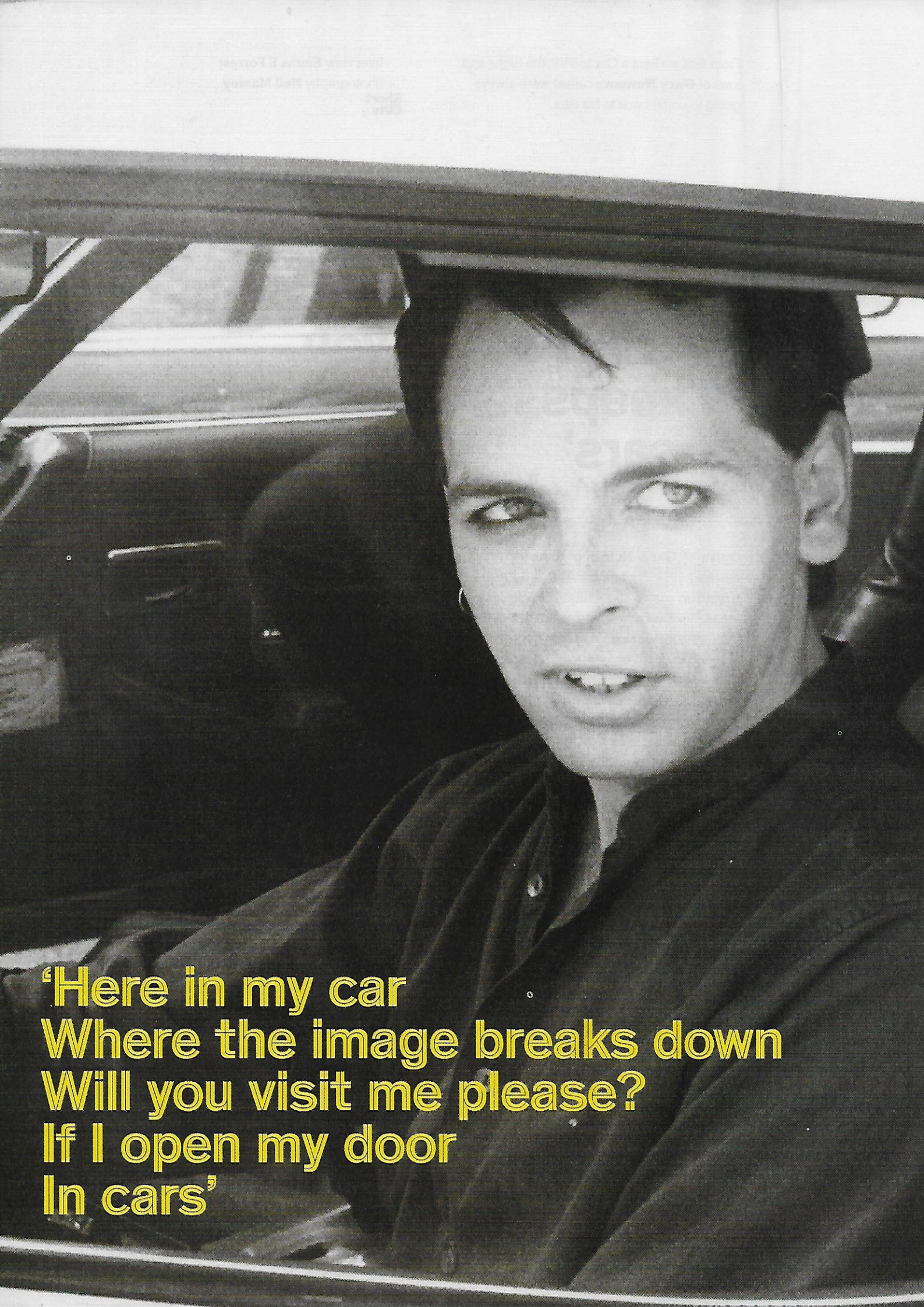
Perched on a plump settee, Gary is watching his publicist Steve munch provocatively on a white Chunky Kit Kat in his cosy living room. Gary is calorie-counting in preparation for gigs in London and Manchester. At 45, he's in good nick in his lycra T-shirt and black combats. Glance at him sideways and there's even a bit of young Frank Sinatra in his piercing blue eyes. The scarlet walls and fairy lights remind me of visiting favourite relatives at Christmas – loafing on the sofa playing with the two dogs and five cats, and gargling several rounds of tea from Gary's charismatic wife Gemma.

This is the house that Gary bought just after he made it in his early 20s. He spotted it during a flight overhead in his own plane. In the shed languishes a mini Moog that

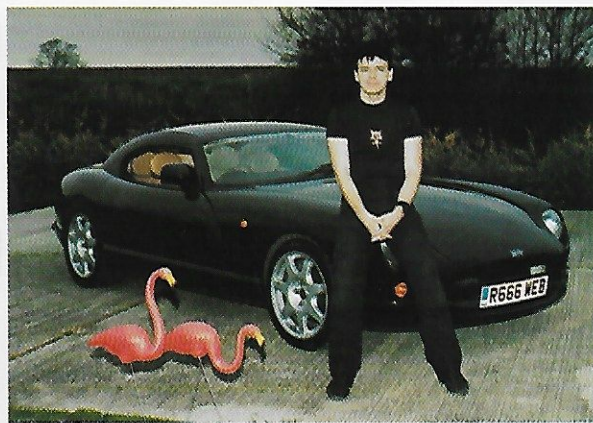
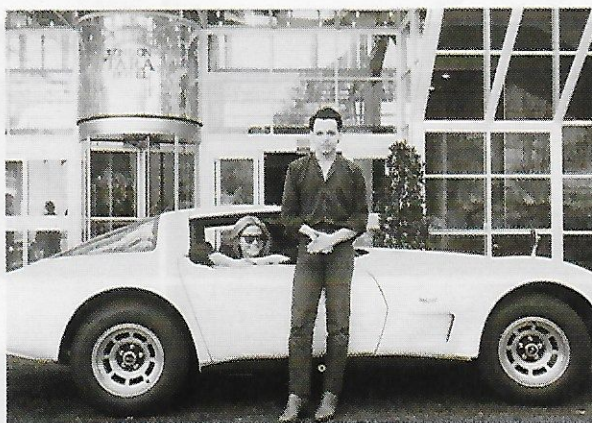
characterised his early, futuristic electronic sound. In the kitchen, Steve digs through several boxes of super-styled portraits of a space-age po-faced pop star, including a Telekon-era Gary holding aloft a light sabre, made from a tube off his mum's vacuum cleaner. Early experiences had turned an already shy teenager into an introspective young man, focusing on his music rather than getting lashed like other teens. Going out with old school friends to a club in Hampton, London, he had a run-in with his estate car. "I hadn't seen them for a few years, they had turned into these sort of drinking thugs. Of course they're all in my car, because I'm the only one with a decent car. They're pissed as farts and this fights kicks off and we get blocked into this car park. There's bricks coming through the windows, the car got trashed. One bloke offered me a fiver. 'Have that mate and give me the change back,' he says. After that I stopped going out for a while and met new friends that were more interested in music than they were in going down to clubs. It helped me to become much more insular."

It was incidents like this that informed his bleak lyrics, about half-human, half-robot 'machmen', people and cyborgs having shady experiences in parks, a pessimistic vision of the future spelt out in dark poetry. One of these was "Cars", inspired by the feeling of security engendered by the auto. "I first became aware of them when I was little," recalls Gary. "My mum and dad used to have a van and they just sat me on the engine between the two seats to keep me warm because they had no heater. I have a tendency to think of cars as being like tanks. When you get in and lock all your doors you feel safe."

The lyrics for "Cars" were inspired by an attempted attack on Gary's mother while she was in her car. "She'd been at a crossroads and some bloke tried to get in her car, luckily she had them all locked. But it did freak me out



'Here in my car
Where the image breaks down
Will you visit me please?
If I open my door
In cars'



‘Here in my car I know I’ve started to think About leaving tonight Although nothing seems right In cars’

NUMAN COVERED

Are 'Friends' Electric?

Moioko
Cars
Fear Factory, Hole (live), Beck (live)
Down in the Park
Marilyn Manson, Foo Fighters
Jimi Tenor, DJ Hell
Everyday I Die & M.E.
Smashing Pumpkins (live)

Films

The Underdog (Trevor Jackson)

I Die You Die

The Magnetic Fields

I Dream of Wires

Robert Palmer

Metal

Nine Inch Nails

Stormtrooper in Drag

St Etienne

We Have a Technical

Damon Albarn & Matt Sharp (Weezer)

NUMAN SAMPLED

Cars

Armand Van Helden – Koochy
Sugarbabes – Freak Like Me

M.E.

Basement Jaxx – Where's Your Head At

because if you don't have your doors locked somebody can get in your car, mess you about or do something horrible and there's nothing you can do about it. So from that moment, when I get into a car I lock the door and then I put my seatbelt on and it's really ingrained in me to do that." He also drew from a similar experience he had himself. "These guys were going for it, kicking the car and really trying to get me out. It was scary. To get away I drove on to the curb because it was in traffic and saw pedestrians leaping out of the way. I was just so frightened but I got away. It's not about that actual incident, it's about how you feel safe when you are protected by cars and also how you're different when you're in them."

Aptly, the track paid for Gary's first flash motor. He had turned into a star overnight, but was still living at home, driving in his dad's old Granada to interviews and gigs. Mentioning his passion for Corvettes in passing to his record company at a meeting, the following day someone at his label rang and asked him what colour he wanted. "I didn't know what he was talking about," explains Gary. "I thought he meant the video. It turns out my lawyer had been seen going into CBS, and they thought I was going to sign to CBS because the contract was coming up. So I was given the car on the understanding that I agreed to renew the option with them. I was never going anywhere else anyway, but I got a Corvette. It's the only thing that I ever got out of them really."

The media soon turned on the playboy millionaire with the fast cars, private planes, skirt-chasing antics, and other inevitable spoils of his too-much-too-fast-too-young story (even if policemen were still happy to joyride in his Ferrari

after pulling him for a spurious offence). His ill-advised public support for Thatcher and a melodramatic retirement from live shows at his peak were the kiss of death for credibility, and he slid from rated to ridiculed. He continued to write and tour for a loyal fanbase of 'Numanoids' but success slipped through his fingers and at one point he was horribly in debt. Gary still had the infamous plane and in fact had become one of the UK's top stunt pilots, his aerobatics eventually eclipsing his musical career. "I had this aeroplane and the only reason I could afford to keep it is because it did air shows. It actually earned money. The aeroplane didn't cost me anything, which is fantastic isn't it? It's a big WWII aeroplane that's quite expensive to run, but I did so many air shows with it that I actually made 80 quid profit one year." At his lowest point he had traded his Ferrari for a "little, knackered, 'Mickey Mouse' Rover, and a Granada Estate," and the nadir of his career was marked by a spell driving rental cars. "My uncle used to work for Budget Rent A Car and people like that, so he got me cars for about three years. So I had quite nice cars, but they had 'Solomons rent-a-car' or whatever written down the side of them."

While the mainstream had all but forgotten his music, the car connection continued. "Cars" was eventually used in countless ads and computer games, sampled and covered until, with the royalties off other people's number ones, he was able to afford the TVR, and use the profile to relaunch his own career. But it's in his new Mitsubishi L200 pick-up that Gary gives us a lift to Stansted airport, our bags weighed down with fun-size chocolates for the journey home.