I
t was in the early thir-
ties, Limerick had
reached the All Ire-
land Final. Money
was scarce and the
prospect of getting
to Dublin for the
match remote, until word got round
that Sweeney could provide a lorry and
driver for a modest ten shillings a head.
There would be a canvas cover in the
event of rain. After much scrumpling
and scrounging, we got the money
together and a few bob to spare. We
were off to see Limerick play Dublin.

The lorry arrived at eight-thirty a.m.
that Sunday. What a thrill we got as we
scrambled aboard and secured seats
on the forms provided! The more
senior passengers were given first pre-
ference for the comfortable positions.
The very young made cushions of their
coats on the floor. The entire avenue
turned out to wish us luck. The green
flag was raised to resounding cheers.

It was 9 o’clock when we sallied forth.
We had been to early Mass and packed
a few sandwiches. There would be
nothing to eat until after the match. The
driver was cautious; he had a heavy
load, so he decided to take the quieter
roads. We went through Cashel. We
met the Archbishop on the road, walk-
ing back from Mass. He blessed the
passing lorry. Shortly after, disaster
struck. We came to a sudden stop as a
tyre exploded. We looked at one
another in awe ... surely it wasn’t his
Lordship. There were comments about
the ancient rivalry between Tipperary
and Limerick. Paddy Mick Ryan, whose
origins were inside the Tipperary bor-
der, only laughed and said that of
course his county had enlisted super-
natural support against our team. The
driver hustled us off the lorry to stretch
our legs while he changed the wheel.
He told us to exercise our tongues too
and start pleading with Saint Christ-
opher for his support.

Soon we were on our way again. The
sun appeared and our spirits rose. On
entering the square of the next town,
our soaring spirits once again sank into
our boots; we had two more flat tyres!
It was 1 p.m. We were still forty miles
from Dublin. Our dream match was
only two hours away. The driver, with
the authority of a sergeant-major, mar-
shalled his troops and buckets of water.
Those past the age of strenuous
work joined the locals in the nearby
pub. They sipped pints and peered
through the windows while the repairs
were being carried out and we took
turns to pump up the tyres. Our elders,
two pints calmer, were loaded aboard
and we were off again, with the hearty
cheers of the locals ringing in our ears.

The next few bad patches of road
were treated with respect. Only the
elderly were allowed stay on board
while the driver steered through cut
stone chippings. He shouted encour-
agement at us. We kept up with that
lorry as if she was a stage coach carry-
ing bullions of gold.

The last few miles of our journey
seemed to grow longer, the seconds
ticked even faster. Each pothole hurt
not only our posteriors as frayed tem-
pers snapped with each toppled poise.
Ned Ryan, who was known as ‘The
Curser’, hurled maledictions on the
lorry, the roads and the driver. He, in
turn, blamed ‘the bunch of magpies’ he
had taken aboard.

We arrived in Dublin’s city centre
with four instead of six wheels intact.
There was a frantic scramble off the
lorry and a mad rush to the ‘Park’. One
man* who had taken an extra pint
jumped on a tram. It was going to the
wrong park. He later said he listened to
the match on the radio in the comfort of
a pub near the Phoenix Park. Another,
less fortunate, caught his trouser turn-
up on the lorry, struck his head on the
pavement and spent the evening in Jer-
vis Street Hospital. He got seven
stitches.

With a companion, who knew the
way, I ran like hell to the grounds. We
arrived panting brandishing our bann-
er. It was half-time. The attendant let
us in for half-price; we had to jump
over the stile. The match restarted.
Breathless though we were, we opened
our throats and let out the roar ‘Come
on Limerick’.

Nearby spectators jumped with
shock. There had been a lull in play.
They said we brought the excitement
back. The result was in doubt until the
final whistle. It was a draw. I was
relieved. The excitement of that match
was instantly replaced with the anti-
cipation of the replay.

Flat tyres were not a feature of the
journey home but, rain and sudden
gusts of wind were. We huddled
together. Outbursts of song took our
minds off the drips and trickles. Our
chorus rose to a grand crescendo when
we reached home. It was after mid-
night. Neighbours spilled out to hear
our account of the day.

Over our midnight feast of cold meat,
bread and butter and pots of tea, we fil-
led them in on the long journey and the
match. The Dublin team had had a
father and son playing; the father was
in goal. But it was the deeds of Mick
Mackey, Paddy Clohessy, Paddy Scan-
on and Mick Cross that brought the
smiles to their faces and the shrill of
excitement to our voices.

Our dreams of going to the replay
never materialised. Sweeney just
shook his head when he surveyed his
tyres. Instead, we listened to it on the
best radio in the neighbourhood. And
Limerick won next time round!

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* One of the passengers.