

Chris Coekin

The Hitcher

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As the title of this handsomely designed and produced monograph suggests, this project is quite autobiographical, following in the traditions of the road-novel (à la Jack Kerouac and Laurie Lee), as Chris Coekin hitchhikes his way across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. As well as the roadside detritus from used condoms to road-kill, Coekin documents, with a cheep automatic camera, his performance of hailing lifts from would-be drivers.

Following a witty recital of Coekin's first hitchhiking adventure in the 1980s, he presents a series of medium-format portraits of some of the drivers who gave him lifts. This process of harvesting portraits is the reverse of classic street-photography, whereby it is the photographer who seeks out potential subjects: By choosing to pick him up, it is the *subject* that has (albeit inadvertently) chosen Coekin to take their photograph. The shift from 35mm to a more substantial format is suggestive of Coekin's respect for these "Good Samaritans".

Throughout his travels, Coekin asked his drivers to answer a few questions, one of them being "why did you pick me up?" The handwritten answers to this particular question are scattered throughout the book, and are one of its most revealing aspects: It would seem that many of the drivers picked him up for company, which is refreshing throughout a population for which personal space seems to be a priority.