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So These Comics Drive to a Diner and Drink Coffee



Larry David, left, and Jerry Seinfeld in "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee."

By MIKE HALE

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Leave it to Ricky Gervais to get to the essential truth, even in someone else's Web series. "You're like a young king, aren't you?" he says, sitting across a table from Jerry Seinfeld in "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee." If Mr. Seinfeld wants to drive around in cool old cars with "some friends he's seen on the telly," well, all he has to do is pick up the phone. He's Jerry Seinfeld, for God's sake.

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Mr. Gervais, while participating in "Comedians in Cars," touches on questions that viewers might have, like, What is this exactly, and why does it exist?

With two episodes posted at comediansincarsgettingcoffee.com and at crackle.com, Sony's online-video site — the Gervais video went up on Thursday night — it looks like a jeu d'esprit, a low-stakes way to keep a hand in the game while seeing what this online thing is all about. There's not much to it, but it's got some charm and a few laughs, which is more than could be said for "The Marriage Ref."

Really, though, there's not much to it. Mr. Seinfeld obtains an old car with offbeat appeal (a 1952 Volkswagen bug, a 1967 Austin-Healey), picks up a comedian pal (Larry David,

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Ricky Gervais, left, and Jerry Seinfeld in a 1967 Austin-Healey in the second episode of "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee."

Mr. Gervais) and drives to a coffee shop ([John O'Groats](#) in Los Angeles, City Island Diner in the Bronx). The men talk and riff, occasionally approaching a fully formed joke — Mr. Gervais actually gets there, with a line about Hitler's honeymoon — and constantly, effortlessly crack each other up.

The real action of the show consists of this seemingly involuntary snorting, cackling laughter of middle-aged men so amused by each other's observations on boxers versus briefs or tea versus coffee that they rock in their seats and double over in helpless paroxysms. Mr. David is so taken by

Mr. Seinfeld's use of the word "debauched" that he actually spits his tea into the restaurant window.

Later in the 13-minute episode, Mr. David gives Mr. Seinfeld the obvious post-"Seinfeld" backhanded compliment: "You have finally done the show about nothing." In the online context, what Mr. Seinfeld has done is like a fragmentary, Dadaist take on Marc Maron's popular [podcast](#) interviews with comedians, or a freewheeling, cooler-than-thou entry in the mock-talk-show genre. Be amused by me if you will — this isn't costing me much.

Not much by Mr. Seinfeld's standards, anyway, though one thing that makes "Comedians in Cars" easy to watch — even if you don't find the comedians' intense self-regard all that amusing — is that quite a bit of thought and care has been given to how it looks.

The videos (which include a series of amusing outtakes with Mr. David) are presented in a clean, elegant template with a studiously casual pencil-drawn logo. And the filming and editing are, if you break them down, impressively complex and artful for a Web series. Multiple cameras, including three mounted inside the cars, are used simultaneously to render the free-flowing conversations seamlessly, without the staccato cuts that have become the norm in a new generation of new-school chat shows.

One other pleasure afforded by Mr. Seinfeld — whether through his wealth or the influence and control that he exerts — is a conspicuous lack of the product-placement, commercial-tie-in ethos that taints so many online series. He's only advertising himself, his friends and his love of cars and coffee, and that in itself is nearly enough to make me like his show.

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