

Tread and circuses rev up amid mechanical obsessions

MIDSUMMA CAR MAINTENANCE, EXPLOSIVES & LOVE

By Donna Jackson, Hubcap Productions,
Gasworks, 21 Graham Street, Albert
Park, until February 10
Running Time: 75 minutes (no interval)
Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

DONNA Jackson's *Car Maintenance, Explosives & Love* began at the Lonsdale Street Power Station in 1996, then toured

Australia and the world for four years. The show's revival puts four-on-the-floor in a unique blend of theatre, circus, lesbian lust and automotive obsession.

The script is strong and supple, weaving together anecdotes from childhood, lessons in car care, instructions on how to handle explosives, and an equally volatile love affair between two very different women. It's full of rage and humour and sex but, for all its physical urgency, there's a

poignancy more powerful for its lack of sentimentality.

What struck me most about the show was its accessibility. Cars are one of my spheres of cultivated ignorance. If you said my rings were going, I'd be more likely to think jewellery theft than trouble under the bonnet; and I couldn't tell you the difference between an EJ and a Barina if my life depended on it.

But Jackson uses the mechanical vocabulary with universal

purpose, the way Don De Lillo talks about the parts of a shoe in *Underworld* to show that an infatuation with technical knowledge, however obscure, can be a source of salvation when other aspects of life spin out of control.

Here Jackson's intimacy with the motor serves as a distraction from amorous discontent. And her depiction of a relationship, charted episodically from birth to death, is finely observed.

The circus parts of the show,

which range from poi (juggling balls on ropes) to aerial acrobatics, are less accomplished than the theatrical side. Yet they add texture to the performance — the physical delicacy of some of the interludes starkly contrasts with the coarseness of Jackson's alter ego and there's always a thrill in watching sparks fly from an angle-grinder.

Car Maintenance is expertly directed by Andrea Lemon, who relishes the flaws in the glass of

this fractured narrative, and keeps the action flowing. My only complaint is that occasionally the physical and textual aspects of the show weren't welded together, making some of the circus action gratuitous.

But this is an energetic, funny, and ultimately moving piece from a performer of remarkable versatility.

LINK

▶ www.midsumma.org.au



Wheel time: Donna Jackson.