

I Just Explained the "Red Car Theory" To My Guy Friends—and They All Agreed It's Why They're Chronically Single

OPPORTUNITIES, LIKE RED CARS, ARE EVERYWHERE—WE JUST FAIL TO NOTICE THEM



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It was a Friday night. The girls and I were seated at [Double Chicken Please](#)—a trendy downtown spot that serves cocktails with names like Key Lime Pie and Japanese Cold Noodles. Across from us were three of my closest guy friends—each of whom, I swear, were pulled from the first 20 minutes of any rom-com.

First, there was Ethan, the carefree FinTech guy who viewed relationships as [unnecessary attachments](#). Then, there was Jason, the struggling musician who was hung up on his ex. And finally, we had Ryan, the [investment banker](#) who consistently ended his relationships after a month or two.

The conversation had drifted, as it often did, to who we were dating. "So, what exactly would it take for each of you to settle down?" I asked. I knew their answers would either make me laugh or roll my eyes.

"Margot Robbie in *Wolf of Wall Street*," Ethan quipped, his smirk practically daring me to argue. I held my tongue in the name of research.

Jason, the hopeless romantic of our group, shrugged wistfully. “She’d have to make me feel like Claire did. You know, the spark. That thing.” (Claire, by the way, was his ex from college. She’s now engaged and living in St. Louis.)

Ryan took a swig of his IPA, contemplating as if he were running a cost-benefit analysis. “It’s simple, really. She has to check the boxes—funny, smart, active—similar interests. There’s no point in wasting time on someone who doesn’t.”

I sat back in our booth, taking them all in. They were smart guys, great guys, but something about their answers felt...off. They weren’t looking for partners—they were scanning for unicorns. “You know what this reminds me of?” I posed. “**The Red Car Theory**.”

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“It’s a TikTok thing,” I explained. “Here’s how it works. Imagine I promised you fifty bucks for every red car you noticed on your cab ride home tonight. You’d suddenly see them everywhere, right? But on a regular day, without that incentive, you’d barely notice them. It’s not that the red cars weren’t there—they were. You just weren’t looking for them.”

“And?” Ethan asked, raising an eyebrow.

“And the same thing applies to dating. We’re so busy scanning for the ‘right’ traits—the perfect height, the dream job, the flawless match to our sense of humor—that we don’t notice the potential partners all around us. We’re blind to the red cars because we’re only looking for silver ones.”

Take it from the [TikTok above](#), which sums up Red Car Theory perfectly: **Opportunities, like red cars, are everywhere—we just fail to notice them. The second you start looking for them, they appear. Love is no different.** The value here lies in its simplicity. It's not about compromising what you want; it's about broadening your perspective. The more you actively seek out possibilities—whether in dating, career or life in general—the more likely you are to notice them.

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"Sounds like settling," Jason countered, crossing his arms.

Yet, before I could jump down his throat, my friend Hailey piped up. "I don't think it's settling," she said. "It's reframing." See, Hailey was the only person at the table who was in a committed relationship. "When I met Garrett," she began, "he was everything I told myself I didn't want. I even met him at a happy hour I didn't want to go to. He was quiet, kind of shy and awkward, and he'd just started a job as a graphic designer." This is when I thought, *yup—he's definitely not the [finance bro](#) I thought she'd end up with.*

"He didn't check any of her boxes," I clarified.

"Not a single one," Hailey backed. "I used to say I'd only date someone who was outgoing, career-driven, confident... honestly a more masculine version of me. But Garrett isn't that guy." She was right—he was far from the [goofy Golden Retriever boyfriend](#) she used to say she wanted. "Truthfully, at first I thought there was no way it would work. But then we started talking, and I realized he was exactly what I needed."

Ethan raised an eyebrow. "Let me guess—he won you over with his sparkling personality."

"Actually, yeah," Hailey said, undeterred by his sarcasm. "He didn't try to be the center of attention. He just listened in a way no one else had." And when I asked her to give an example, she said, "The first time we talked, I mentioned paint-and-sip classes. It was honestly a throwaway comment—I was just trying to relate to him since he's a graphic designer. I didn't expect him to remember it." She continued, "But for our second date, he booked a paint-and-sip class. He said he thought it'd be fun to do something creative together, especially since I seemed interested...I loved it so much that it's become our thing. We go all the time now." What's more, she added, "Sometimes I'll even paint after work by myself; it's surprisingly calming."

I turned to the guys, raising an eyebrow. "See? That's the whole point of the Red Car Theory." I was met with blank stares across the table. "She thought she wanted a silver car: outgoing guy who works in finance," I huffed. "Garrett is her red car. He didn't fit her pre-existing checklist. He rewrote it. Now they have shared interests—like painting—which she'd never think to try with a finance bro." Hailey nodded in agreement while Ryan, the banker, looked like he'd just been shot.

Nevertheless, all three of my guy friends were finally engaged. The side conversations had come to a halt and they wanted to know what *their red cars* might look like. (Hey, they asked for it.) "Ethan, your problem is you're not even on the road to notice cars," I teased. For him, the red car wouldn't be Margot Robbie—or another idealized version of a Hollywood dream girl. It would be someone who shared his sense of adventure, and sardonic humor, so commitment wouldn't feel like a jail cell.

Jason, meanwhile, was stuck romanticizing an empty parking spot where his ex, Claire, used to be. "Claire was your starting line, not your benchmark," I offered. His red car might not bring [immediate fireworks](#), but she'd make him feel safe in a way Claire never did. In

fact, he seemed to forget that ‘the spark—that *thing*’ he was looking for, came later. “You want the kind of comfort that comes from trust. It’s not going to happen until you allow yourself to let someone new in.”

As for Ryan, it was about breaking his habit of dating like he’s evaluating a Fortune 500 company. “Your checklist isn’t helping you find the perfect person—it’s making sure you never find anyone at all.” His red car wouldn’t check every box, nor would it come neatly wrapped in a bow. It would, in my unprofessional opinion, show him the exact opposite: That love isn’t about perfection but connection. Just like Hailey, Ryan would need to ditch the Excel formulas for a partner who could give him what he needs. (As opposed to what he thinks he wants).

The long story short is that Red Car Theory isn’t about tossing standards out the window or settling for someone who’s “good enough.” It’s about recognizing that connection lies in the unexpected—and possibly right under your nose. The right person—the one who makes you laugh until 3 a.m., who remembers the little things you forgot you even mentioned—might not look like the dream boat you’ve been picturing. And that’s the point. Red cars aren’t rare; they’re just inconspicuous until you start looking for them.

So, as I told my friends, this theory has a simple message: stop scanning for the car you *think* you want. Instead, imagine what life might look like in a fiery red Ferrari. Because, if we’re being honest, silver Honda Accords are a dime a dozen. Why settle for ordinary when could have something extraordinary?

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