

The streak experiment sheds light on auto woes

I've finally learned why the Japanese are beating out our automotive brains. This tale of woe was related to me the other night by a young physicist who recently spent a stint with America's automotive giant, General Motors.

It seems these two GM middle management types discovered over the coffee machine one morning that they had a common plight — their wiper blades streaked the windshield at eye level.

UPON RETURNING to his department, the one middle management type gathered up the young physicist.

"Find out why the wipers streak the windshield at eye level and see if we can come up with a solution to this problem," he ordered.

With great ardor, our young hero just out of college dove into his assignment.

Like other Americans, he was under the belief that this automotive giant was equipped with the best of research and development equipment.

His inquiries among colleagues were greeted with blank stares and bewilderment.

"Windshield wiper streak? Don't think I can help you on that one."

NOT TO BE DETERRED, he gathered some erstwhile cohorts and took matters into his own hands.

Equipped with a common garden hose and sprinkler, the group mounted their research equipment onto a camera tri-pod. Daily they would sprinkle the window while throwing laundry detergent into the path of the wiper.

They changed the tension point on the wiper. They replaced the rubber wiper with a sponge material. But the ever-present streak remained.



They filmed the wiper in action and examined the photos closely.

"You know, if we left a thicker film of water on the windshield, the streak would disappear. It would be like looking through a fishbowl."

The boss didn't like that one at all. It was back to the drawing board. Winter drew near. But the group persisted, at

times fighting off the snow and cold to carry on their experiment. The streak must be defeated.

FINALLY, COLD and the derision of co-workers forced the research team to find shelter.

"Say, could we use that garage over there for some research we are doing?" the young physicist asked a veteran employee who was responsible for such things.

"Certainly can," came the friendly reply. "By the way, what you researching?"

"Windshield wipers."

"You know something, son. Forty years ago a young man just like you used that garage for the exact same thing. It's the streak, isn't it?"

He couldn't quit. All of his superiors were off to a conference out East. Who knows? Maybe they were learning how to get rid of that streak.



Susan Rosiek

Let reason guide your tax vote

Taxation has been a volatile issue throughout this nation's history. In 1980 taxation, once again, is stirring up the Michigan electorate through such proposals as Tisch, Smith-Bullard and the Coalition plan.

As election day nears the campaigns are shifting into high gear. Sponsors of the three major tax plans are criss-crossing the state in an effort to drum up support.

Close on their heels are the opponents armed with charts, graphs and reams of information trying to point out the sweeping effects of tax cuts or what amounts to, in most cases, tax shifts.

Voters are being supplied with information about the tax plans. If one wants to find out more about the tax plans, it's easy enough to do. Information is available at the state and local levels and in the Observer.

We hope taxpayers will take time to sift through and study the information.

It will be mighty easy to walk into the voting booth, remember the tax bill you pulled out of the mailbox last winter and cast an emotion-charged vote.

AMID ALL the campaign hoopla it will be easy to forget the effects of tax cuts.

One thing voters should remember is that any tax cut — in particular, Tisch (Proposal D) — will ultimately change the shape of services they've come to expect at the local and state levels.

If you believe that Tisch is the panacea for those middle class tax woes — take a closer look.

Schools will suffer. Most areas districts estimate they will have to slice about 20 percent of the budget in the first year. It's nearly impossible to trim that kind of money and not expect to cut back jobs, and that affects programs the subjects which will be taught and the size of classes.

But you say you don't have any children and are not too concerned about schools because they always are bemoaning the lack of money? Maybe you're a senior citizen and want to take it easy, enjoy life without the fear that taxes are going to eat up your modest income.

The Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan and the State Commission on Aging oppose Proposal D — and with good reason.

Tax proposals often cater to seniors because they live on fixed incomes which are devastated in times of rapid inflation. Therefore, tax cuts appeal strongly to them. Seniors also represent a growing block of political support.

But what the tax plans promise in one sentence, reality tempers.

These nutrition and transportation programs have benefitted a number of local seniors. While the lunch program is a social outing for some, for others it's a meal they wouldn't otherwise eat.

The senior citizen transportation service which takes seniors to doctors, the market and other places is supported by tax dollars.

Colleges and universities would be particularly hard hit. Students would face the prospect of limited educational opportunities with tuition rates two or three times higher than current charges.

OTHER AREAS that could be cut back include: police protection (state police and funding for local grants), hospital funding and general health care, mental health care, highway maintenance, state parks and a long list of other public services that most residents take for granted.

Tax cutting or tax shifting doesn't necessarily mean tax reform. Tax proposals often imply more than they deliver. It behooves voters to act responsibly and investigate the long and short-range effects of any plan.

If you don't think they will affect you — take another look.



Tim Richard

A heretical, unpopular view of state

This column will be highly unfashionable. You may have to read it twice to believe it would appear in the media.

I am not "mad as hell" at Michigan government. Quite the contrary: This state has made great progress in many fronts, and there is no reason to inflict massive amputations by voting a wild tax cut.

The other day I unearthed a 1960 photo I took of Vice President and Mrs. Richard Nixon at a Grand Rapids rail station. It reminded me that I've been covering state-local government 20 years, and that a lot has changed.

MUCH GOOD has happened since then:

- The salmon program. Less than two decades ago, the Great Lakes stock of lake trout was practically exterminated by the lamprey eel. Michigan's effort at eradicating the lamprey and stocking coho and chinook salmon must be rated a stupendous achievement.

- The community college movement. In 1960 the state had a handful of junior colleges. Today there are 29 community colleges having an incalculable impact on the lives of students who can't afford to go away to college, women who want to get into the economic mainstream, and just plain folks looking for new work skills or cultural enrichment.

- Public transportation. In the early 1960s, private bus companies in outstate cities and metropolitan suburbs were dying like flies. SEMTA was created in 1967, and many transit authorities were born outstate. While the bulk of the money was federal, the state contributed enabling legislation and match money. Today we have the beginnings of a beautiful bus system, and we're inching closer to rapid transit.

- School funding. Folks thought the 1960 gubernatorial candidate, John Swainson, was crazy when he talked about \$10,000 salaries for teachers. But Govs. Romney and Milliken, legislators and voters had the courage to unhitch school funds from two cents of the sales tax, to pass an income tax and to tie local taxes to economic growth. Teachers deserved to benefit, and did.

- The colleges. Without hurting the empires in Ann Arbor and East Lansing, the state put a lot of money into Wayne State University and the "regional" universities — Eastern, Western, Central and Northern. We can be proud of these schools.

- Tourism. Every year I see improvements in our state parks, campgrounds, recreation areas, freeway rest areas, information booths. We even rate a national political convention.

There are other areas of pride: The rural justice-of-the-peace courts have been replaced by justice district courts, the Detroit River is visibly cleaner (aerial photos of 20 years ago and today show a breathtaking improvement), we have more openness in government, state aid has helped make the Detroit Symphony a world-class orchestra. And so on.

ALL ISN'T perfect, of course. Race relations, despite affirmative-action programs, are so bad that even liberals don't discuss them any more. The state has failed to clamp down adequately on braying snowmobilers and trail bikes that rip up the woods.

Workers compensation reform has been stalled five years.

On balance, however, Michigan is a darn well-run state. If my opinion is unfashionable, so be it.

Hero one day, bum the next

One of the most puzzling things The Stroller has encountered during his long journey along the journalistic trail is the fickleness of sports fans.

One never knows from day to day or from game to game which way their sentiments will swing. Sometimes their switches are almost unbelievable.

This fickleness has come to the fore twice within recent weeks and the switches in the fans' actions are almost too puzzling to try to solve.

For instance, there was the boozing of young Rich Hewlett, the Michigan quarterback, in the Wolverines opening game. Here was a young lad, only 19 years old, playing his second game of a college career and under conditions that were almost impossible, and he wasn't passing the slippery ball.

The fans didn't consider that he was playing under wraps because his coach didn't want to take any chances with another big game coming up. But that didn't faze the fans. They booed lustily. They could have shattered the confidence of the young lad for the rest of the season.

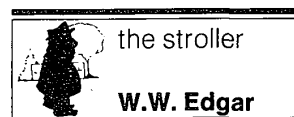
THEN THERE WAS the case of Monte Clark, the Lions coach, who was berated by the fans because of the 2-14 record of 1979. The fans were asking that he be fired.

Then came Billy Sims, the young speedster, along with Gary Danielson, who missed last season because of injury, and now the fans are taunting Monte as coach of the year.

How can you figure anything like that? This fickleness is nothing new.

One of the worst examples The Stroller ever encountered came years ago when he was sports editor of the Detroit Free Press. At the time the Tigers traded popular outfielder Gee Walker and the fans howled.

They flooded the paper with letters of protest.



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

They swore in writing that they never again would enter Tiger Stadium. The Free Press became so alarmed at the protest that it ran a page of protest letters each day for two weeks.

All through the winter the fans kept up the clamor.

Would you believe it? When opening day came along the next season the fans set an opening day attendance record.

How can one decipher anything like that?

ANOTHER OCCASION that comes to mind was a night in Yankee Stadium in New York when The Stroller walked to the ring with Joe Louis. Then in his prime.

As we neared the ring one of the spectators shouted for all the world to hear, "Kill the black s.o.b."

Louis heard it and just glared.

Less than an hour afterward, when Louis came down the same aisle after knocking out his opponent, there was the same chap, only this time he was yelling, "Atta boy, Joe."

Again Louis glared and then smiled and asked, "How come he changed? He wanted me killed when I was going to the ring?"

There was no suitable answer to Joe's question that night. Just as there is no answer to the fickleness of the sports fans of today.