

# Electric toy trend points to diesel truck demise

Being a trendsetter can be the pits — especially when you're 30 years ahead of everyone else.

Take this article in the Wall Street Journal the other day, for instance.

Tyco, a traditional manufacturer of toy trains, has announced it's turning its eye to, of all things, trucks. So, big deal, I thought to myself.

But after reading about Tyco's logic I gave it another thought.

Seems that years ago, at least according to Tyco moguls, the only thing a little boy wanted was an electric train.

"Nowadays, I don't think that would even cross a child's mind," said Tyco president Richard Grey. Today, he said, kids love trucks.

With that philosophy in mind, Tyco is turning to manufacturing all sorts of electronically operated trucks — dump trucks, tractor-trailer rigs, shipping terminals, cranes, gravel hoppers and a plethora of paraphernalia.

These electric jobbies will retail for about \$30. Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Grey, trucks always were top priority on my gift list. Phooey on those dumb electric trains.

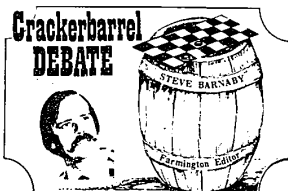
MY OLDER BROTHER was the keeper of the electric train in our house.

Looking back, I figure that as a youth I knew a trend when I saw it — trucks would be the major transportation of the future. Trains were on the way out.

I kept telling my brother how visionary I was but he didn't seem impressed.

Unfortunately, I completely missed the important part of the trend. Toys' popularity is based on two factors — the future and the past. Just look around the toy shelves. On one hand can be seen reams and reams of outer space oriented toys.

On the other is the nostalgia — trains, old-fashioned china face dolls and trucks.



And from the look of things, trucks will someday go the way of the train, a piece of American memorabilia to be remembered with fondness. The other night I had a conversation with a guy who has been in the trucking business for a good

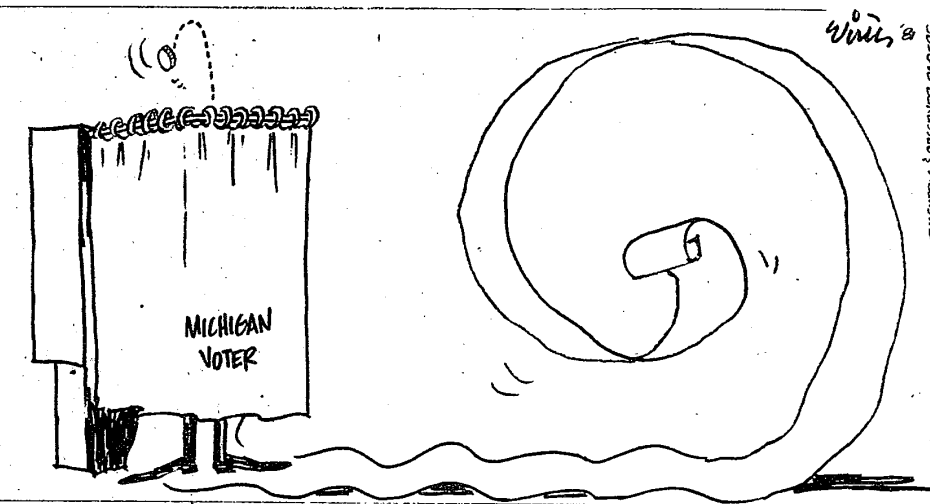
many years. With the increasing cost of diesel fuel it's getting more difficult to keep those big rigs, which consume a gallon every three miles, in business.

In the heyday of trucking, diesel fuel was dirt cheap. Just a few years ago, truckers were paying 35 cents a gallon. Those were the days when gasoline was going for 75 cents.

BUT ALL THAT has changed. Today diesel fuel has reached the same levels as gasoline.

Sure, trucks aren't going to disappear from America's highways tomorrow or even in the next decade. But toy manufacturers have a keen sense for what sells.

Trucks have become a part of American folklore. They represent a time of unimagined wealth which, as we all know, is something else which is becoming just a memory.



Tim Richard

## Our long, long, long ballot

Every four years, Michiganians develop ballot fatigue.

They get tired of waiting in very long lines to vote on a very long list of candidates for a very long list of offices.

The first response of many is not to vote at all. Of the dedicated voters, particularly in Oakland County, many respond by voting by absentee ballot through the simple expedient of telling the local clerk they expect to be out of town on election day. It's a little white lie, but no one checks up on you.

After election day, my colleagues and I write editorials and columns saying the more logical response is to have a shorter ballot. That will mean appointing rather than electing many officials. It will mean less ballot fatigue and more chance for the voter to hold his elected officials accountable.

Finally, we have an ally.

La. Gov. James Buckley is advocating just such a constitutional amendment. He is asking the Michigan Legislature to put on the ballot a plan for gubernatorial appointment of education posts and the two top courts.

If the legislature won't move, then he will start a petition drive to place it on the ballot. He should.

THE AVERAGE Oakland County voter, over an election cycle, votes on at least 99 offices. Figure it out:

Federal government — president, vice president, two U.S. senators, one U.S. representative, for a total of four.

State partisan government — governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, eight members each of the State Board of Education, University of Michigan Board of Regents, Michigan State University Board of Trustees and Wayne State University Board of Governors, for a total of 35.

Legislature — a senator and a representative, a total of two.

Judicial — seven members of the State Supreme Court, six from a district for the State Court of Appeals, 11 for the Oakland Circuit Court, four for the Oakland Probate Court and an average of two for the local District Court for a total of 30.

County government — executive, prosecutor, sheriff, treasurer, clerk-registrar, drain commissioner, and a board of commissioners member for a total of seven.

Education boards — seven trustees of Oakland Community College, seven for the K-12 district board of education, for a total of 14.

Local government — typically seven members of a city council or a township board. In some cities, the mayor and clerk are elected separately. In some townships, a parks board may also be elected, and some township residents are also in villages where a council is elected. The total could be as high as 21, but let's just use seven.

IT ADDS UP to 99, in new math or old. I didn't include the partisan precinct delegate, who is part of the presidential election process.

Can you name them all? I make my living covering government, and at best I might hit 60 or 70 percent.

The job would be even tougher if you were to ask me to explain the judicial philosophy of the Hon. William R. Beasley or the Hon. Robert J. Danhof, who make major decisions on the court of appeals.

It could be worse. You could live in Detroit where you'd have the additional chores of voting on 36 circuit judges, nine probate judges, a wad of recorder judges, common pleas and traffic court judges, three county auditors, a charter commissioner, a nine-member city council, a central school board and a regional (ward-sized) school board.

I vote yes on cutting the number of elected officials.

from our readers

## Legislator raps the Crackerbarrel

Editor:

I found your Jan. 26 editorial, "Bills' veto earns plaudits," concerning Gov. Milliken's vetoes of amendments to the Open Meetings Act, disappointing and a deviation from your usually high standards of editorial comment.

The author of the editorial obviously wasn't familiar with the content of the two bills in question and consequently did not even begin to enlighten the public on the actual issues involved.

What readers were left with was an exceptionally biting, but uninformed and uninformative personal opinion. I would like to clarify some of those issues.

THE FIRST BILL, SB 1296, was little more than a technical modification which did not deserve the governor's veto. The second measure was more controversial with good, conscientious lawmakers on both sides of the issue.

The bill would have allowed a public body to hold a private interview with an applicant to a public position if so requested by the applicant provided that all decisions to employ personnel must be held in open meeting.

While some of my respected colleagues disagree with me on this issue, I and others who supported the bill did not "cave in" to pressure from local officials.

Since the Open Meetings Act took effect some four years ago, incidents continue to occur which pit the public's right to know against an applicant's right to privacy.

In one particular example, a city manager in this state quietly applied for a city manager position in another town. Because his interview for the new position was public, word got back to the city council then employing him that he was seeking other employment. He was promptly fired.

I do not consider this type of situation to be in the best interest of the public nor of the men and women who devote themselves to public service. If the actual hiring and terms of a contract are fully public, then the essential rights of the public are adequately protected.

I felt this bill means to balance the public's right to know against the rights of those public servants to privacy. I have always been and will remain a staunch supporter of the Open Meetings laws. But every law is not perfect as first adopted.

In this particular instance, a majority of lawmakers recognize a weakness which they believe needs correction. They are not out to sabotage the Open Meetings Act.

Many of my colleagues opposed SB 1143 and I respect their stand. The governor's veto, however, is a different matter. While publicly proclaiming his desire to protect openness in government, he withholds information from the Legislature and vetoes bills like House Bill 5405 which I sponsored.

The bill would give lawmakers access to information that departments do not and will not supply. Perhaps we should have the public do our asking for us — the govern-

nor may be more "open" with the people.

I ONLY WISH that your editorial opinion had been based on a more careful understanding and examination of the issue. On a personal note, I would like to comment on the writer's term "notorious liberal" in reference to myself.

"Notorious" can have a negative implication and I am afraid that some readers might assume that being a notorious liberal is bad. The author should have made his intention clear and say so if he has some other philosophy.

At least the person who authorized the editorial should have caught the ambiguity. In my mind, it's not bad to be a liberal, depending on the issue. In this particular instance, however, the issue is not my being a liberal or a conservative. It is simply that I spent many years as a local official and understand the problems these bills were meant to correct.

I hope in the future we can expect the sort of enlightened views usually offered in your editorials. More particularly, I hope to see further examination of the governor's vetoes — including those you find so acceptable like the past vetoes of Sunset legislation and the Michigan Economic Action Council.

Contrary to the governor's claims, the public interest does not always lie at the basis of his veto decisions.

REP. JOE FORBES  
Majority Floor Leader  
67th District

I know how taxed (again, a play on words) our elected state officials must be and how sleepy and exhausted they must also be after a full lunch in their tummies.

Regardless of the hardship on them, I still do not understand why it will take almost three months to act on such an important bill, with, incidentally, no guarantee of passage. While all around us robberies continue at such an alarming pace — with the stealing of precious metals (many of them family heirlooms), the subsequent stolen merchandise melted down within hours and the evidence gone forever.

CONRAD R. PEARL, D.O.  
Southfield

## End gold meltdown.

Editor:

A crime wave is taking place in almost every city in Michigan, with the stealing of nearly \$25 million worth of gold and silver last year during home break-ins across Oakland County and the state.

A legislative bill has been proposed to regulate the sale and disposing of precious metals. The problem is that it will be some time in May before our state legislature acts on the bill.

The bill would require precious metal dealers to:

1. Register with local police.
  2. Require positive identification of the seller.
  3. Record the thumb print of all sellers.
  4. Hold all items for at least seven days before melting them down or otherwise disposing of them.
- Violators of the proposed law would face penalties consisting of fines, jail or both.
- What is the holdup? (A play on words.) Robberies are continuing at a record clip — just ask your local police department. How many bills have more urgency or importance in our Lansing capital? There again, one wonders, how many bills can be acted upon from about 10 a.m. till lunch hour, for the few remaining hours left in the day — after the extended lunch break that our reps must take — in order to keep their blood flowing?