

editorial opinion



"Between the lines"

by Carl Stoddard

Will there be gas pains?

Last Tuesday afternoon Gov. Milliken announced that the partial ban on tandem gasoline trucks in the tri-county area had caused no disruption in gasoline service.

At 10 p.m. that night, I pulled into a gas station on Eleven Mile. "Fill it up, regular," I told the attendant.

"Sorry," he said, "we're out of regular."

Normally, I'm not a suspicious person. And I realize gas stations routinely run out of gasoline. That probably was the case last week.

But just to be sure, I started checking if gas stations in the area to see if the double-bottom ban was causing any shortages. The answer I got was "yes and no."

Some gas station operators told me they had never received a gas delivery in a double-bottom tanker. Other had received all their gas from the tankers.

None reported serious problems as a result of the 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. ban on the tankers. But—and this was a big but—many said they were worried that consumers might get it into their heads that this partial tanker ban would indeed lead to a shortage.

In other words, a gas shortage shouldn't happen, but it could.

IT REMINDS me of movie scenes set in the 1930s when frantic mobs of farmers stormed banks and demanded that they be allowed to withdraw their life savings right then and there.

Well, of course most banks couldn't respond to that kind of demand. Money was out on loan or tied up in other investments. It wasn't all just sitting there in the vault. So when the farmers asked for it, the immediate answer was that the money wasn't there.

The same thing will happen if we all pile into our cars and head for the nearest gas station with our credit cards waving and our hopes set on filling the gas tank, the lawn mower gas tank and every teapot and bucket we own.

The lesson, learned the hard way in the 1930s, is that hoarding doesn't always work. The sudden rush on the banks or on the gas pumps leaves us with the impression that the shortage is critical, the need is dire and the time to panic is now.

Please note that the shortage

involves double-bottom tankers, not gasoline. The gas is still there, it just may require more effort on the part of the gas companies to deliver it to the stations.

I refuse to complain about any inconveniences caused by the partial ban on the double-bottom tankers. The alternative to the ban is, in my opinion, much less healthy. That is more or less the same conclusion that Milliken reached last week.

"It appears that in the first week of enforcement of emergency rules (regarding tandem tankers) there has been minimal impact on consumer cost and supply," Milliken said.

"While it is difficult to draw a direct cause-and-effect relationship, I remain confident that this action will reduce the likelihood of injury and death as a result of accidents involving these vehicles."

So that literally is the bottom line: The ban on the tankers may cause some inconveniences at the gas pumps but it should pay off in a savings of personal property, injuries and needless deaths.

there any way I can make sure that the work done on my car is done by someone who knows what he or she is doing?

A: Each repair facility is required to post on the wall the name of each of its certified mechanics and the areas of repair, for which each is certified. If, for example, you know you will need some brake work on your car, insist that the repair be done by that mechanic certified in brakes. Ask that the mechanic's name be included on your written estimate as further assurance that he will actually do the work.

Q: It sounds great that auto mechanics are being required to pass tests to assure some minimum competence. But isn't the certifying of mechanics going to raise the cost of getting a car repaired?

A: Based on a somewhat similar program of licensing auto mechanics in Ontario, we can expect labor cost to rise somewhat.

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Tinkering Around

At last—trivia answers

My New Year's resolution to quit procrastinating has to be put to use some other time or I'm sure. So, I've decided to quit putting it off and start using those little tasks that were conveniently overlooked in 1977.

If you remember, way back on Dec. 19, when most of us were caught in the throes of the holiday rush, I decided to take the easy way out of writing this column by providing you with a trivia quiz. (You thought perhaps I did it out of the generosity of my heart? Hmm, I didn't know people still believed that.)

After procrastinating for a few weeks on giving you the answers, I've decided to tinker with the idea of turning over to a new, more prompt way of dealing with the world. So, by giving you my trivia answers, I'm starting off my New Year right. (Didn't know you were going to get a chance to reform me when you started reading this column, did you?)

OF COURSE, I'm repeating the questions here, since by now I know most of you have forgotten them.

NAME two movies in which Bing Crosby sang "White Christmas." One point for each movie.

A: Bing sang that song in Holiday Inn and in White Christmas, which was a remake of sorts of the first picture.

TAETBT4(Tinkering Around Extra Trivial Bonus Question—remember?) For five points, give a random one of the non-plot of one of the movies.

A: In White Christmas, which hits the television late night slots every year with the regularity one would expect of a substitute host showing up on the Carson program, Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye play two Broadway types who try to save their old Army general's dying Vermont ski lodge by bringing their "lick" (i.e., show) to the sticks. Along the way, they try to attract the attention of a sister act who conveniently fit right into their show. (I told you it was a non-plot.)

For those of you who remember Holiday Inn, I congratulate you. It usually hits the late night slot with the irre-

gularity of a decent made-for-television movie. In that little extravaganza, Fred Astaire and Bing play a couple of Broadway types who split over a nice young lady.

During the lapse in their partnership, Bing ends up running an inn that only opens during the holidays and stays closed for the rest of the year. (Nice idea but where did he find enough income to live?) His erstwhile friend Astaire uses the year to make a play for the young lady by offering her fame as a dancer, fortune, and himself. Old Fred loses out on this one, of course. White Christmas was sung during the movie and if you've heard the song on the radio this season, the original recording was taken from this movie. (That's a piece of extra trivia, folks.)

FOR FIVE extra points name der Bingle's co-stars in one of the versions.

A: White Christmas: Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney, Vera Ellen (I wonder what her last name was?) Jean Hager and Mary Wickes playing the world's noisiest housekeeper.

Holiday Inn: Fred Astaire, Marjorie Reynolds (who gets to listen to both Fred's and Bing's pitches) and Virginia Dale.

NAME THE first science fiction movie ever made. It's worth 20 points because it's an obscure flick.

A: Now remember, I said it was obscure. In 1902, George Melies directed a French movie entitled L'Homme à la Lune (A Trip to the Moon). It was just about the first sci-fi, space travel movie to be filmed. It was silent, of course.

FOR three points who played Kris Kringle in Miracle on 34th Street?

A: Edmund Gwenn played the man who kept people wondering about the existence of Santa Claus.

FOR an extra five points, sing part of the refrain of Night and Day. Five points for the name of the composer.

A: Cole Porter wrote the words that follow:

Night and Day, you are the one. Only you beneath the moon and under the sun.

Whether you're near to me or far, it's no matter darling where you are I think of you night and day.

Day and night.

AFTER that extravaganza, for five points, name the man who wrote the Night Before Christmas.

A: Charles Clements Moore penned that rhyme. (Probably wasn't when not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.)

LAST but not least, for five points, give Ebenezer Scrooge's explanation for seeing Marley's ghost.

A: Good old dead-to-earth Scrooge blames the apparition on a bad potato in the gruel. (Talk about feeble excuses. He could have blamed it on pollution or maybe another more potent herb in the gruel.)

Now that you have the answers, if you scored 30-41 points on the quiz, you're an expert.

If you scored 31-40, you're an almost-expert. Between 21-40, you're OK at the game and I would expect you to reach the ranks of the experts, someday.

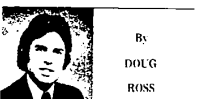
However, those of you who scored 1-20 should lay off trivia and find something more worthy of your talents, like logic or astronomy. It's obvious you aren't a fan of television or the movies but on the other hand, your mind is probably free from the clutter that afflicts a trivia master's mental garage.

Happy New Year. I would have wished it to you sooner, but I've been procrastinating.

LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Citizens can win

Car repair law can work



By
DOUG
ROSS

The second phase of Michigan's Auto Repair Protection Act went into effect Jan. 1. Here are the questions most frequently asked by consumers about the new law and some answers that ought to help you protect yourself against incompetent and dishonest auto repairs.

Q: What does this new phase of the Auto Repair Protection Act do?

A: Beginning Jan. 1 of this year, every auto repair facility in Michigan has to employ at least one mechanic who is certified as competent in each category of repair work done by the facility. In other words, if the deal-

ership or garage does transmission repairs, there must be at least one mechanic on the premises who has passed the state skill test on transmissions. Similarly, if the facility does front end work, it must employ someone who has been certified as competent in that area of repair. And so on.

Does this mean that I can now count on a certified mechanic always repairing my car?

A: Not yet. For the next three years, the law only requires that any major repair work performed by a non-certified mechanic must be inspected and approved by a mechanic who is certified to perform that particular kind of repair. However, beginning in 1981, all mechanics in Michigan, with the exception of trainees, will have to pass skill tests before they can work on your car.

Q: DURING this three-year period before all mechanics are certified, is

Around the Edges

Suburbs beat poverty

I once wrote a column in which I quipped, "The suburbs are great for the children, but no place for grownups to be."

I gripped a lot about gardeners manuring our lawn at \$40 a crack and spending hours ourselves planting shrubs and flowers and pulling weeds.

I complained about the age of automation in our suburban paradise where air conditioners broke down when the temperature was a sizzling 90 degrees, garbage disposals got stuck and the electric eye on our garage door was always closed.

I talked about cement jungles, high density traffic, towering skyscrapers and boring, homogenous association meetings during which members grumbled about ugly rubbish cans and dogs (mine) watering their bushes.

I thought I was being funny and facetious like Irma Bombeck until someone sent me an article in the mail after reading my little gem. The item, mailed to me by a man, was entitled "Lives of More Than a Billion Women are Devoid of What We Take for Granted." It sure rocked my socks.

In Mexico City, I read, a woman wakes at 5 a.m., eats little or nothing, straps her baby on her back and walks a mile to a field. There, for 10 hours, she bends and stoops and plants or hoos.

AT 3 P.M., the article continued,

she scavenges for firewood and carries it and her child back home. There, she pounds grain kernels into meal and prepares other food.

By 6 p.m., she is ready for another walk, three miles roundtrip, to fetch water. At dusk, she kindles a fire, then cooks, serves and eats an inevitably bland and nutritionally inadequate meal—the only kind affordable.

I glanced at my column which kidded, "There's seldom any food in my garbage disposal because I planted the stove with plutonium. There are only 12 bottles of Aspi Spumante and one-calorie pop in my refrigerator." That didn't seem funny anymore.

I continued to read about the woman in Mexico City who could have lived anywhere in Africa, Latin America or Asia. The lives of more than one billion women—the majority of the world's female population—are devoid of what we American gals take for granted.

Among these "common, ordinary" things we expect are clean tap water, refrigeration, electricity, telephones, books, television, travel and leisure. This made me think about the time I've cursed the jangling telephone and the lousy TV programming.

WORDS LIKE poverty, misery and ignorance are tossed around loosely and have little meaning to women who fight for equal job

opportunities and equal pay.

In fact, the article said, in many rural villages and in poorer countries, the birth of a female is often viewed as a disaster and she's considered an underdog. Roughly one out of every three women on earth can't read or write.

In many areas, women must walk miles to get water. Sometimes children tag along, carrying smaller buckets. Once back home, kids pitch in to boil the water to make it safe for drinking.

I glanced back at my column in which I wrote, tongue in cheek, "The suburbs are great for children. They need clean air and a yard. Everybody knows kids need a barbecue pit and the feeling of roots that come from a recreation room with Ping Pong and pool tables, an oak-paneled den and family rooms floored in parquet where wall-to-wall fires are burning."

"A child must flourish in places called Bonnie Brae Glen where civic clubs and the PTA meet weekly. (I recall scouts watch birds in the park, the houses have four walk-in closets and three bathrooms and a stereo in every room.)"

I thought about those billion impoverished women and the children who are underfed and walk miles to get water. I really had egg on my face and, suddenly, I realized the suburbs are great for children and a wonderful place for grownups to be.

JACKIE KLEIN

Guest Columnist

Herman was almost human

ED. NOTE: Joan Russell is a Southfield resident. She reminds us that several winters ago the Southfield Eccentric published a photograph of a snow sculpture in the likeness of her cat, Herman, whom she writes about here.

By JOAN M. RUSSELL

Herman, our cat, was one of those unforgettable characters. Few people are privileged to really know such an unusual personality. Herman was friendly and affectionate, yet aloof and independent. He had a few close friends and many acquaintances. Those who knew him, truly loved him. He passed away recently and will be mourned by anyone who knew him. Herman was not particularly handsome but he had personality. At first glance, he looked like any old alley cat, but Herman had depth. He had personality and charm and, above all, character. True cat lovers might say that he wasn't unusual at all, but for a family who never before had a cat, Herman came to be almost human.

He came to us under not unusual circumstances. The original owners, who had found him during a camping trip, could not find him during their new home and sought an understanding family who would take him in.

Herman got along with Dusty, our dog, and was friendly and personable and so we decided to try to find him a home.

WELL, IT didn't take a week for us to get so attached to Herman that we couldn't give him up. He only lived with us for three years but in that time we grew to love him, mother him and worry about him like we did our children.

He was independent and a rascal at times, catching birds and mice even with a bell around his neck and with his front claws removed. He got into his share of scraps, but was able to intimidate most dogs, even though (and perhaps because) he had been neutered. Like most cats, Herman did what he wanted, where he wanted, when he wanted.

But he made the rounds of the family daily to let us know that he loved us as much as we loved him.

His passing was tragic, because he was hit by an automobile. Auto traffic was apparently the one thing he couldn't cope with.

If there is a heaven for cats, I'm sure that Herman is there. If he is true to form, he will do more than just survive, he will become an involved character in the everyday scheme of things

just as he was here in our lives.

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My Cup of Tea

Why wasn't story in the paper?

This week's mail brought a raft of letters, some nice, some not so nice, informing me that an article requested for publication on a specific date had not been published, and how come?

My answers to this almost always fall into one of two categories: 1) You didn't make the deadline, or 2) I couldn't read it, or understand it and there was no contact telephone number to call and check out your story.

The repetition goes like this: My deadline is Monday for the Thursday publication and Thursday for the Monday publication. And it may be that that is where the trouble lies. There are too many last-minuteers, and if you wait until 5 p.m. Monday, there may be six others before you who waited until the same last minute.

One club publicity chairman writes "We rely heavily on the Observer to inform our members of our meetings."

I do my best, but it's a foolhardy reliance on her part when she has taken on such a job and never bothered to check out how we can best work together for the benefit of all.

I hope she understood, when I called her today, that I welcome her news, but husbands who carry around unmailed letters for two weeks, or program chairmen who don't know from where their next speaker is coming until a day before the meeting, carry no weight with newspaper deadlines.

AS TO THE ILLEGIBLE notes that fall on my desk, these come under several sub-categories.

One is the completely hopeless. The writer is under the impression that newspaper writers have either ESP or mind-reading abilities. He or she is a scribbler. The name and telephone number, if there is one, is likewise scribbled. Very often the last name will be North, or Johnson, or Brown,

something impossible to track down in a phone book.

Another illegible note is one where an acronym is used that is familiar only to the club, or group, that uses it. The acronym, or initials, become so common to the writer, he or she doesn't stop to think that the rest of us have to have them spelled out so we'll all know what we are writing or reading about.

A very common error among my contributors is that they will forget one of the who, why, where or when. It is not unusual for us to receive a very well written notice of an event, except that the writer forgot to tell us where it was taking place, for example.

If there is a phone number on the article and you haven't pushed me right up to my deadline wall, we can generally make it.

LORRANE MCCLISH