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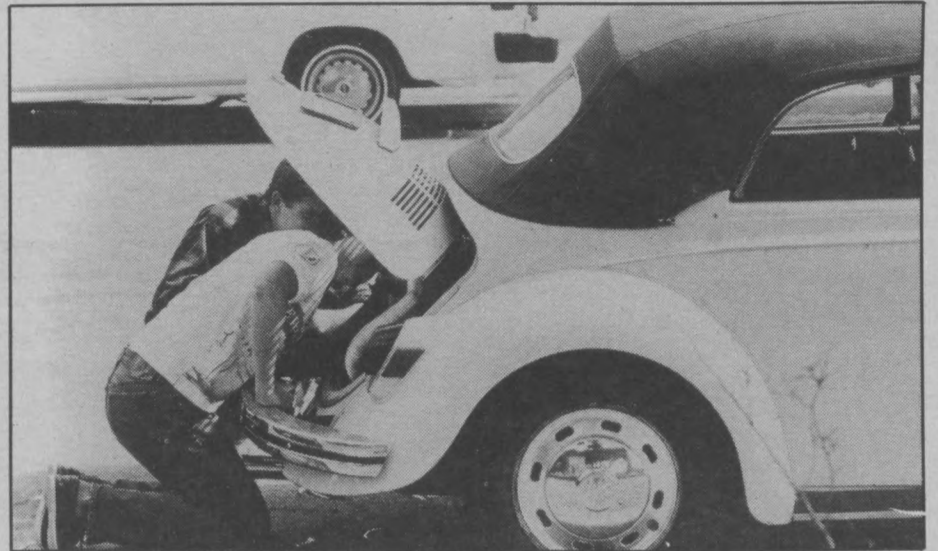


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# Automotive Stories

They're Strange ... But True



Checking under the hood is fine for every day repairs, but keep an eye on that gas tank.

## THE UNRELIABLE NEEDLE

Gas Tanks Are Liars. They'll Fool You and Hurt You.

By Anselmo Watkins

Running out of gas was not something that had ever worried me. I'm pretty good with my maintenance checks, looking at the oil level, refilling the power steering fluid reservoir to make up for its leaks. The only thing I don't bother filling is the wiper fluid, since the tank has a crack and when I do fill it, it just pours out all over the ground. As for the gas tank, well, it and I have an interesting relationship. You see, my truck's gas gauge is a little

funky. When it's on the plus side of half, it moves at a snail's pace downwards. But get it on the negative side of the halfway point, and it plummets down like a bobsledder. You'd think that it guzzled a gallon of gas just to start the damn thing. The gauge also never reads completely full. You can put 20 gallons in that 20 gallon tank and it still won't read full. Accordingly, the needle can go a ways below empty before really, desperately needing to go to the gas station. With that in mind, plus the knowledge of about how many

See GAS, p.6A

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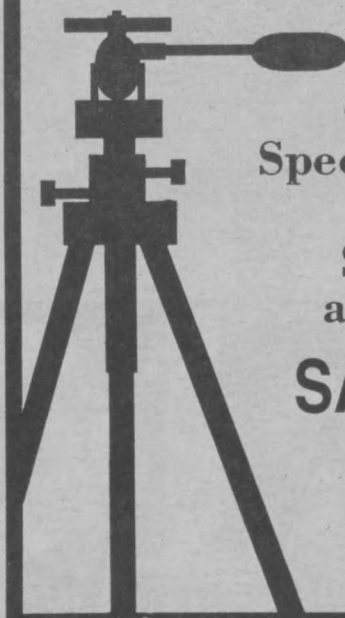
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# Automotive Stories

They're Strange ... But True

## When Bigger...



## Choosing Your Next Car? Think Big, Round and Spacious

## ...Is Better

By Mortimer Trousers

**B**igger is better. Imagine that you're *really* hungry and must decide between a large inexpensive platter of plump pastries-a-plenty and a very expensive, yet elegantly simple, tray of lobster hearts. What to do? Just remember: *Bigger is better.*

Better yet, you wanna be a NFL star? A hulking linebacker or quarterback of a man? Make lots of money and play a mere 16 games a season? Of course you do. But you better be bigger than cyclists.

In the automotive world, this dictum holds particularly true, for a fivefold myriad of reasons. A big car has special advantages when it comes to price, safety, space, style and sex appeal.

At first, Detroit auto inventors were weary of size for the road boats as the heating and upholstery costs alone would surely keep men on bicycles. But once cars became especially popular — and oppressively smaller — assembly line workers found it difficult to clunker around with wrenches and crowbars inside teeny-weeny-car shells. The giant car-makers soon found out what those in Bavaria have always known: Make the car spacious and the workers will have an easier time and a more productive day! So now a 30-foot Ford "mother-ship" costs less than a tiny Porsche Carrera!

Safety alone should drive new and old car buyers to a larger-than-life rig. The survival statistics of drivers in crashed semi-trucks versus those in Volkswagen Bugs alone makes a 10-fold difference that one surely cannot ignore. A beetle might cost less than a Peterbilt, but so does a Schwinn!

When driving across the country with a bunch of people getting on your nerves, safety and the car's cost might not make much of a difference. But this is where space comes in. What could be better than a large station wagon where you can take a needed respite from your cranky next of kin? In a Civic you can't do this; in a Winnebago you can "disappear" for weeks.

Style is one of the biggest considerations in purchasing cars or we'd all be in small and very affordable Gremlins or Yugos. Instead, the freeway is riddled with different colors, tints and models. While there certainly are very many small cars, it is clear that the larger ones have more style.

Why anyone is buying the smaller ones anyhow is not entirely clear at press time. If we look at the cars of the

See BIG, p.7A

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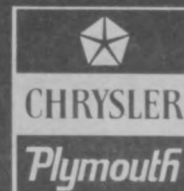
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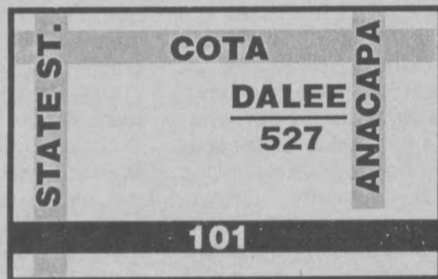
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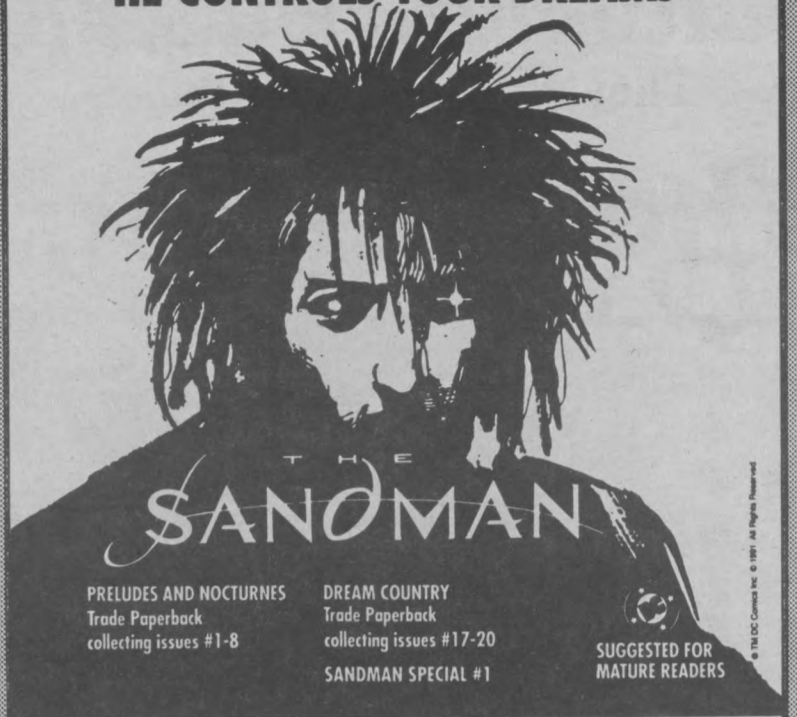
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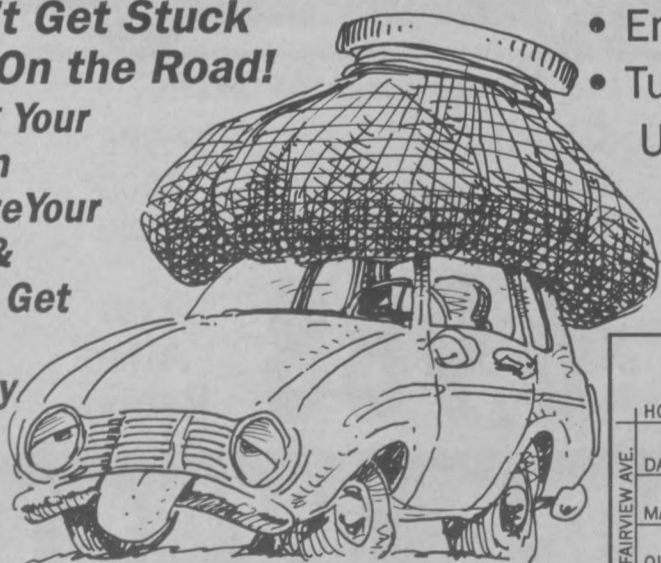
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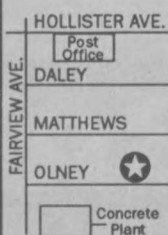
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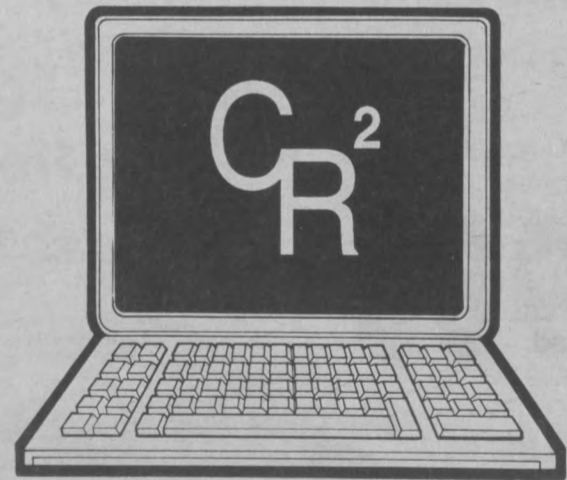
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# Automotive Stories

They're Strange ... But True

## Bad Luck Driver

By Arnulfo Schmid

**B**ad luck doesn't kill cars, stupidity kills cars.

That's the credo I've followed for much of my driving life, whenever some blowhard would complain about dropping his transmission on I-5 because he had the bad luck to buy a car with a clutch installed by some fool in Detroit who was eating his lunch at the time.

These are the same people who say it was just bad luck that a cop pulled them over while going 95 mph on 101. "He appeared at the exact moment I was putting my Peter Gabriel tape on. I don't listen to Peter Gabriel in the car anymore," one friend told me.

Still, I'm having to re-think my credo these days. A string of mind-boggling events has led me to believe that there are people who shouldn't be in automobiles. Not because they have poor driving skills, but simply because they are Automotive Jinxes.

Anthropological note: Automotive Jinxes can be

See WHEELS, p.7A



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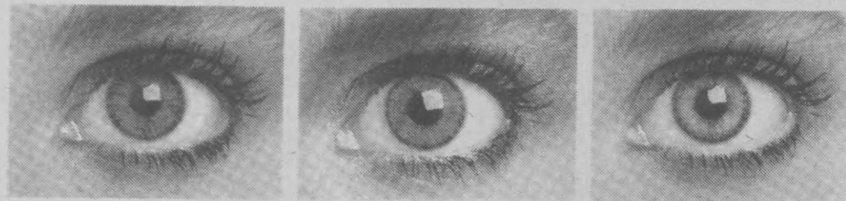
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# Automotive Stories

They're Strange ... But True

## GAS: Always Stock It Up!

Continued from p.2A  
miles I can get on a tank of gas, I feel relatively secure, despite the inaccuracies.

It was with that security that I jumped into my truck for a run down to Carpinteria, knowing full well that the tank read below empty. No problem, I thought. I'll just fill it up when I get down there.

So, when my engine coughed, sputtered and died at 65 mph on the southbound 101 at 3 p.m. on Friday, with cars all around and a Celica trying to climb into my bed, I was more than a little surprised and disturbed. Actually, I was a lot surprised, and pretty mad.

Following the rules of Murphy, I was about as far away from a gas station as I could possibly be. I let my truck bleed off speed, hoping to inch closer to that purveyor of old dinosaurs. I moved over to the shoulder, where someone had put up some of those orange traffic standards.

Rather than swerve to avoid them, I simply let myself fulfill a life-long fantasy and ran over about a half a dozen of them. Still, despite that vicarious thrill, and after all that coasting, I was still more than two miles away from the nearest gas station.

There's a certain feeling

of helplessness when you know that you are stuck without the services of your vehicle. As you sit on the edge of the freeway, you know full well that every other driver is looking at you and thinking, "The guy didn't fill up his tank. What an idiot." It makes you feel pretty small.

I was in a hurry, though, and not wanting to walk along a freeway any more than I had to, I decided to run. This was a rare move for me, as I usually consider anything more than a moderate walk to be completely outside the realm of reasonable exercise. This was an exception.

It also proved to be a smart move, as 200 yards down the road an older gentleman in a Thunderbird pulled over and asked me if I needed a lift. When I decided he didn't look much more harmless than a school bus driver, I got in.

Earl was his name, and he told me that he usually didn't pick people up from the freeway, simply because it's dangerous. But, he added, I looked harmless because I was running.

As Earl and I chatted, I couldn't help but think about what he must be thinking. But just as the words, "Fool didn't fill his gas tank," popped into mind,

he dissolved them by saying, "Boy, I remember when I ran out of gas. You'll never make this mistake again."

I was just about feeling good about myself again when we got to the gas station and I had to suffer the humility of asking to borrow a gas can. "Sure," said the guy with a big smile on his face, obviously thinking, "What an idiot."

Soon after, armed with \$2.43 worth of gas, I got a lift back to my truck, where I then had to begin the delicate operation of pouring gas into my car while truckers, obviously thinking, "What an idiot," blew their air horns and came as close to me as possible without actually turning me into roadkill. It was a hoot.

Still, I survived, and soon was trundling off down the road back towards the service station to get my \$10 deposit back on the can and to put some more gas in the old beast. Soon after, I was on my way, my horrible experience behind me.

And as I drove off into the sunset, Earl's words echoed in my ears. I'll never make that mistake again. And I haven't. I haven't run out of gas since it happened; last Friday.

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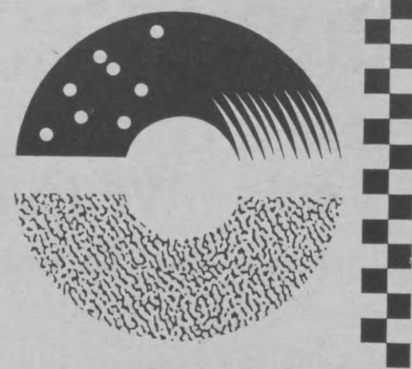
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# Automotive Stories

They're Strange ... But True

## WHEELS: A Running Gag

Continued from p.5A  
easily spotted by their furtive glances at parked cars. They know that they're cursed, and they try to avoid cars as much as possible. Upon entering a car they panic easily and can be heard screaming, "How do you turn on the dome light? I don't know how to turn on the dome light!"

Automotive jinxes generally fall into two categories: car killers or cop attractors. But one story recently related to me by Guinevere, a compatriot of mine from a former life, finally convinced me that there are some people who can be both.

Kharmin, another bon vivant from my party dangerous hometown, was driving north on 101 in the dead of night at the comfortably illegal speed of 75 miles per hour, Guinevere told me.

Chatting along with her

friend Jennifer, Kharmin carefully glanced now and then in the rear view mirror of her pumpkin-orange Datsun 210. And a few miles out of King City (also known as the biggest speedtrap north of Ventura), she noticed a pair of headlights a distance behind her.

Being the astute motorhead that she is, Kharmin correctly identified the headlights as belonging to a 1980s Ford Mustang. Unlike the rest of California, however, she did not immediately associate this particular car with the California Highway Patrol.

Big mistake. The officer who pulled her over was apparently a nice fellow and wrote her up for going only 70, which probably will save her a few bucks. Guinevere said that Jennifer thought the cop was cute, too, for what that's worth.

After the patrolman jetted off, Kharmin discovered that her pumpkin-orange car had, well, turned into a pumpkin. Or at least the battery did.

The pair waited there for the better part of an hour trying to devise a solution to their problem when Mr. Cute Cop returned and offered a jump start.

He pulled his Mustang in front of the Datsun and hooked up the jumper cables. "Give it a little gas," Mr. Cute Cop said to Kharmin as she cranked the engine. So she did. With the car in gear.

After removing the Datsun from the grill of his car, Mr. Cute Cop was no longer as nice, and by all accounts, no longer as cute.

I avoid driving with Kharmin these days. Her bad luck *both* attracts cops and kills cars.

## BIG: Think It, Then Live It!

Continued from p.3A  
'50s — veritable pop icons around the world — we see enormous hunks of well-molded steel. The classic Corvair and the Bellair alone could swallow a sea of imports in style alone. A Desoto with

rumble seats and tail fins suggests the "Yes, I do own the road" attitude we hold in America and celebrate in Texas.

Which brings us finally to sex appeal. It is easy to be noticed in a large gas-guzzling clunker of an

automobile — especially if it's lowered or painted candy apple red. This should appeal well to the opposite sex who will find plenty of room to explore the insides of your auto. This is one of the many — and potentially the best — advantages to a big car.

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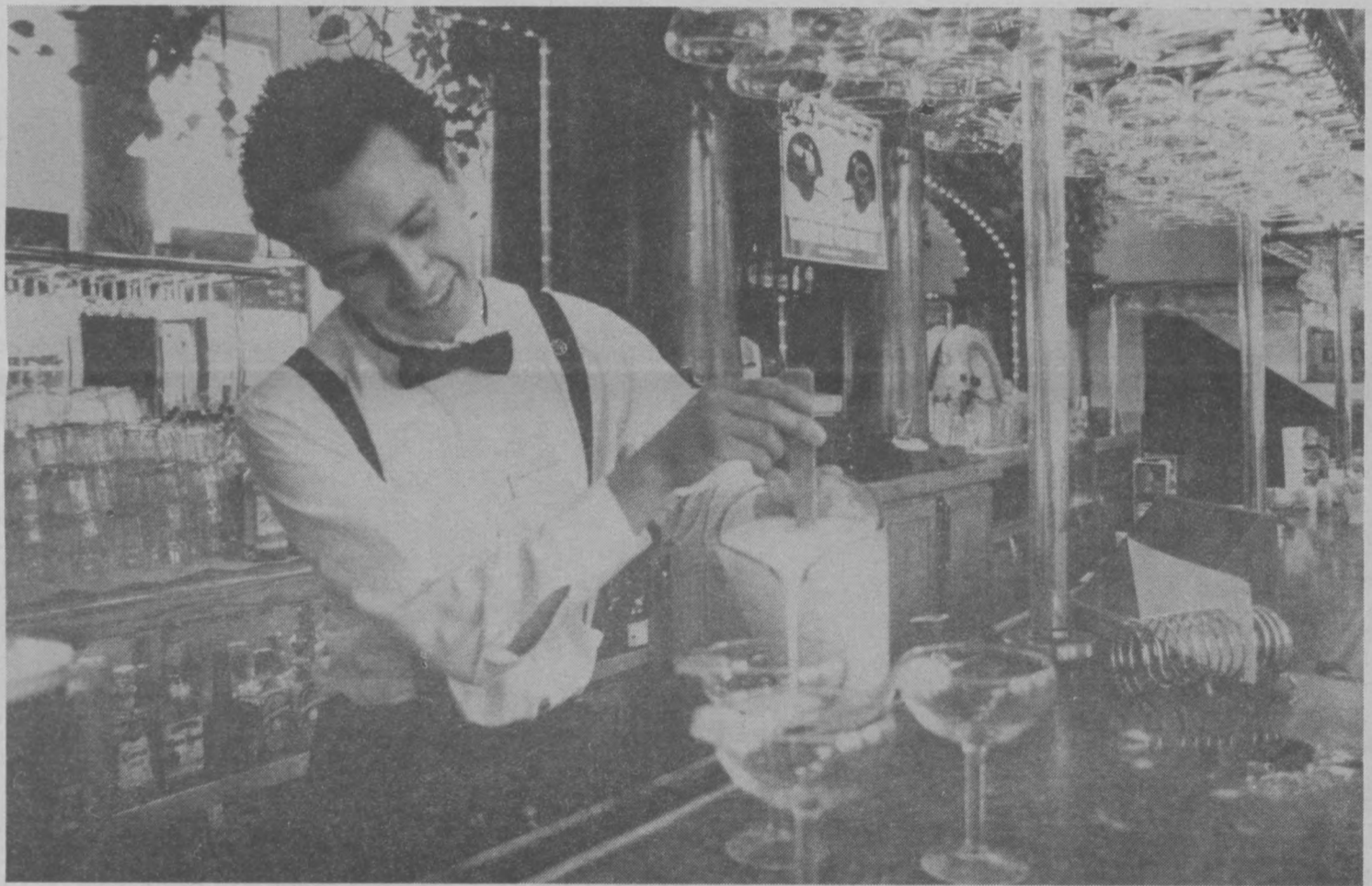
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