

opinion / editorial

Death in the fast lane calls for safe-speed vehicles

Life on the highways is back to being cheap again. Last week, the Department of Transportation reported that traffic deaths topped 50,000 in 1978, the highest kill-rate since the imposition of the 55 miles per hour limit in 1974. Federal officials said that following a brief slowdown, speed-fever again pushed up the death toll.

**colman
mccarthy**

In the West and Southwest, where flooring it to 70, 80 and 90 mph is almost a religious act in worship of the great open spaces, the gore jumped 28 percent between 1975 and 1978. The statistic reveals the blood-red truth of how the laws of the highway mix with the laws of morality: the faster you go, the more likely you will go.

With the country's momentary fling with safety and sanity now over—even then, the 55 mph limit was initially imposed to save fuel, not lives—any further effort to reduce the carnage must move beyond the useless "please drive safely" approach.

Criminal act

The crime wave on the roadways—to violate the 55 mph limit is a criminal act—will never be stopped until the speed limit is imposed on the vehicle, not the operator. If drivers won't slow down, as the nation's police and morticians know better than anyone, then slow down the cars.

At first, the notion of vehicles with engines designed for a top speed of 55 mph seems only a dream that Ralph Nader might have on the best of days. It hasn't been possible even to get automobile companies to install bumpers with more toughness than French pastry.

But with the Department of Transportation now talking about "redesigning the automobile" and creating cars that are "socially responsible," it is the pragmatists, not the dreamers who are coming forward.

Lead-foots

Kevin J. Murphy, the president of Continental Trailways, recently asked the federal government to require 55 mph governors on all interstate commercial vehicles. Although the lead-foots of Murphy's own company groused about the idea, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is currently seeking public comment on the proposed rule.

Governors are useful but they are still little more than check reins on wild horses. The corrals of Detroit were on the mind of William Haddon, M.D., the former federal safety official who is the head of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

At a conference on advanced automotive technology, Haddon said "... it is imperative that we as a nation decide that the built-in top speeds of vehicles about to be planned for the 1985-2000 period be lowered to a speed close to the present national speed limit.

Needless to say, as an engineering matter this has been inexpensively and entirely feasible for at least a decade using approaches that in no way interfere with performance at lower speeds."

Detroit's type

If Haddon's thinking—intelligent and humane—sounds strange, it is because the ears of the public are dinned with the hype

of Detroit's speed message. Television commercials, picturing cars on test tracks in high-speed "performance drills," suggest that all of America is now the Bonneville Flats.

As victims of this speed promotion, safety-conscious citizens lose several ways. They risk being killed by the maniac-criminals going over 55, they are paying for horsepower they don't want, they are forced to pay higher taxes for police departments that must waste their time on speeders rather than other social menaces, they risk losing family members—especially teen-aged drivers—in high-speed crashes.

This isn't the first time that rational thoughts of safe-speed vehicles have surfaced. In 1971, NHTSA proposed design controls. But three out of four of the American car makers opposed them, with the fourth (GM) raising the standard specter of "higher costs." Fiat of Italy, twisting logic like spaghetti, said slow traveling becomes tedious."

That argument, and others of stupefying crassness, carried the day. Since then, about 400,000 Americans have died in traffic, with some 5 million seriously injured. As the most abused machine of the 20th century, the automobile was built-in speed assures more built-in death.
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Past songs and souls ripple life's waters

.....and it comes and it goes
and it rolls and it flows
rolls and flows
through the holes in the pockets
of my clothes

—Bob Dylan

Somewhere along the line we all got drenched to the bone, and have never quite shaken the chill. It flickers inside like the lights in a storm, reminding you that although you're safe and warm, somewhere outside it's raining.

michael zangari

It's the reigning law of transition. No matter how smoothly you think you segue into the inevitable changes, there's always a piece of the things that came before lodged somewhere in your system. If they seem to surface at odd times, it's only because echoes have a habit of doing that. Not because you would have planned it that way.

In wrapping up and packing away the column this week, I feel a real need to touch the various people who have laced these pages in one way or another in the past several years, but nothing comes. I've been sitting here for several hours watch-

ing the people come and go, occasionally exchanging a smile, but mostly engaging in a quiet sort of battle to catch eye contact with somebody. I'm not sure what I'm looking for there, but I know it has to come.

Echoes of the unsaid

Across from me, hunched over a typewriter with an unlit cigarette dangling from her mouth, is a woman who has been on the periphery of my stay here at the paper. We've never been very close, but I've always respected her honesty and her abilities to care and to cope. I've always felt comfortable calling her a friend. That's a word I don't use much, and have probably never said in her presence. She's leaving for an out-of-state job at the end of next week, and suddenly I lack the words to say to her too. It's not because there is nothing to say. The worst types of echoes are of the things never said.

To the dead we've never quite buried, there is a real feeling of grief for those unsaid things.

I guess I've got time for one more story before I close this off, and the only thing that comes to mind isn't even much of a story. It's more of an isolated moment in the flow of things. The woman involved has been dead now for almost two years.

Early and eerie

Underneath Heppner and Love Halls in the Niehardt Residential Center, is an un-

derground tunnel connecting the two. Because of the age of the Center, you get the feeling when walking down there that you have stepped back 50 years in time. This is intensified at three in the morning to the point that the isolation closes in on you, and it is almost timeless.

When the mornings would wear on, I would walk the halls and sort things out as best I could. One morning, I heard something waft from the stairwells that was as beautiful as it was eerie. As I got closer, I could discern that the sound was a blues harp. Not only a blues harp, but the very best blues harp that I had ever heard. It was an unearthly and almost mystic wail that came from very deep inside someone. I stood around the corner and listened for a long time. I was transfixed, and almost afraid to move around the corner because of the very real fear that there would be nothing there. I eventually rounded the corner, moved by a different set of feet, and stood face to face with the only woman I had been dating for over a year.

She dropped the harp into her bag. The music was her own, and as secret and as private as anything you could imagine. It was an unspoken thing. As far as I know, she never played for anyone else for any length of time, and I never brought it up again. I hadn't known she had played. Neither have I ever forgotten the song.

letters to the editor

The NU Board of Regents have already approved a 9,000 seat addition to Memorial Stadium and, although students will not benefit from it, they will almost certainly pay for it. The projected cost of the stadium expansion, which will reach as high as tenth floor Oldfather, is \$5.6 million plus interest expenses and it may go even higher.

The regents propose to pay for this folly, not only with revenue produced by the addition, but with money from a surcharge on other seats as well. Financing construction with money generated from sources external to the addition itself is

deceptive. It makes the addition appear less expensive than it really is and it fails to consider the value of the alternative programs which this extra money could provide for.

If the stadium expansion were to be self-sufficient, that is if it were to pay back the \$5.6 million and interest on its own, it would take several centuries to pay itself off. The 9,000 seats at \$9.25 per seat would generate \$374,625 annually (from three and a half conference games and half the take on two non-conference games each year) while interest costs of 6.5 percent would run \$364,000 annually. Simple

addition proves that the stadium expansion is terribly uneconomical to say the least.

The only way the regents can pay for the new addition is by generating extra revenue. The primary source of this extra money would be a \$1 surcharge on regular seats which would raise an average of at least \$325,000 annually.

Instead of manipulating this money to pay for an expansion that is too costly to pay for itself, it could be used advantageously to replace the proposed \$357,269 of state tax money which will be used to finance next year's women's athletic program.

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