



Good Guys & Bad

by Gary Witzenburg

It's a sad state of affairs when, instead of looking up to our government and trusting it to do the right thing in our behalf, most of us have grown to fear and mistrust it. It seems that all Washington can do in this age of gross over-regulation is take our money and give it away, or use it to screw things up even worse than they already are. Some officials and bureaucrats, of course, are worse than others, but most seem to be more often myopic and misguided than far-sighted and realistic.

Ralph Nader remains one of the all-time bad guys. He was the self-righteous do-gooder who stirred up this whole mess in the first place, and he obviously won't rest until he destroys the auto industry and has us all walking or waiting for a subway that no city can afford to build. Last fall, Ralph said he was opposed to federal help for Chrysler Corporation because if Chrysler goes belly-up, it will be easier for him to break up GM and Ford. "A Chrysler failure sets them (GM and Ford) up for a breakup. Let it go bankrupt," he said. This dangerous character would fit in very well in Iran, and someone should deport him there.

While you may or may not agree with him on some issues, President Carter himself is definitely no friend of the automobile. He is committed, he says, to "getting folks out of cars and onto buses and trains." Like

everyone else who favors that sort of "mass transit," he certainly doesn't consider himself one of the "masses" who will be forced to use it. Mass transit is for everyone else. Get all those cars off the roads so there'll be more room for me. I hope he takes the first train back to Georgia after this fall's election, if not sooner.

Also very high on our enemies list has to be William Haddon of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). This group and the mental giant who heads it are the ones who spend millions of insurance company dollars (which used to be ours) furthering the inane cause of air bags to protect all those dimwits who won't buckle up, and who once re-proved a basic law of physics by crashing little cars head-on into big ones to see who came out the loser. The latest brainstorm of this band of self-serving saviours is to limit cruise controls on cars, trucks and buses to 57 or 58 miles per hour. Haddon should be banished to the deserts of Nevada to spend the rest of his life strapped into a Pinto with its cruise control set at 55 mph.

Stuffed into the back seat of that same Pinto should be the Dragon Lady herself, ex-Naderite and current NHTSA chief, Joan Claybrook. If ever there was a dangerous enemy of the automobile and the

American way of life that depends on it, this granite-head is it. At least Nader can only bitch, and few listen to him anymore anyway, but this lady is trouble! Reporting that a DOT/Calspan research safety vehicle had protected its dummy occupants in a 40-mph head-on crash with a vehicle of the same weight, she cackled: "This demonstration leaves no doubt in my mind that the automotive industry has the means to do a better job safeguarding the motoring public." Right, Joan, and damn the cost.

Interestingly, her statement reported that such a crash was equivalent to a single vehicle taking on a wall at 80 mph, when anyone with the barest knowledge of physics can figure out that two equal cars meeting head-on, each at 40 mph, produces exactly the same effect as one of them hitting a wall at the same speed — a very abrupt deceleration from 40 to 0 mph. Each stops the other cold, just like a wall would, and each absorbs one-half of the total crash energy. Argue this one out at your next club meeting, but don't try it for yourself.

"The four most effective safety features on today's cars, says Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca, "are safety door latches, seat belts, safety glass and the energy-absorbing steering column. The automobile industry developed all four features voluntarily, well before the govern-

(Continued on page 64)

FINAL INJECTION

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(Continued from page 66)

ment made them a requirement." He also blasts the so-called "safety bumper" as having "no safety benefit whatsoever," despite a cost of \$770 million each year and a loss of 600 million gallons of gasoline a year because of their added weight, according to the Detroit-based Automotive Information Council (AIC).


On the sore subject of gasoline, AIC also reports that "one month after being named No. 2 man in the Energy Department, John C. Sawhill indicates he will push for even more stringent miles-per-gallon standards after 1985." This in spite of studies such as the one from Harbridge House, a Boston-based research firm, which estimates the cost of going from a corporate average fuel economy of 19 mpg for 1979 to 20 mpg for 1980 at a staggering \$3

billion.

Chrysler says it is spending \$100 million every month to redesign its cars and plants to meet government standards, and GM claims a cost of \$1 billion for each one-half mile-per-gallon improvement in its fleet average. When will it come into focus for clowns like Sawhill that these billions would be better spent developing ways to increase the domestic supply of fuel (like extracting it from our vast resources of oil, shale and coal) than trying to keep a lid on demand by whittling a few more mpg's out of new cars — which are only a minor part of the problem anyway? And we'd better start developing those fuel-producing industries today to have them operational by the end of this decade!

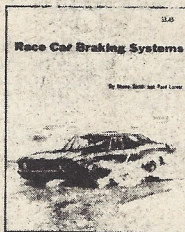
Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, seems to have the right idea. He sagely complains that there are too many laws on the books. "I'd

recommend alternate sessions of Congress," he says, "one to pass laws, the other to repeal them." And Neil Goldschmidt, the man who replaced ambitious air-head Brock Adams as DOT chief, may have the makings of a clear thinker. One of the first things he did after taking over last fall was to meet and talk things over with auto industry executives in Detroit. "I don't think a more fuel-efficient car can be invented in Washington," he said, adding, "we will pay attention for the first time to the real capital consequences of the demands we make."

I'm tempted to shout "Bravo!" but we have yet to see whether he'll put his actions where his mouth is. I might begin to trust him if he follows up by replacing Claybrook with some sensible administrator who can see beyond his or her own political career. Should that happy event occur, "St. Joan" could always find work as an Arab terrorist. 

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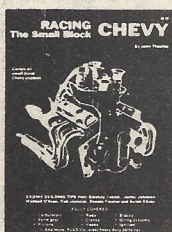
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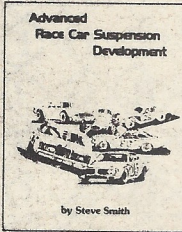


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