

letters to the editor...

55 mph... should it last forever?

Open letters to the editor will be published on a monthly basis and replies that are received by the 3rd Tuesday of the month, will most likely appear in the next issue.

Editor
OPEN EXHAUST

Karl Pel, born 1-13-28, died 11-8-74. Beloved friend of the Gorgon family, member of SCCA.

Karl joined SCCA in 1966 and became active with the Flag and Communications group. In 1969 he joined the Tech crew. Not only did he become an excellent Tech Insp. but he kept us fed and supplied with all those little goodies which make life at the track a pleasure.

Who can forget his two stoves going as he cooked breakfast for 20-30 workers at MIS or Grattan or lunch for half the Region at Waterford.

Karl was awarded the Garfunkle Award, Detroit Region's highest award for service to the Region in 1971. This was the first year that the award was given without regard to a complicated point system, but by a vote of the Board of Directors.

His last function for the club was to paint 1500 arrows for the POR and then work the Sunday pre-tech here in the city.

Many will miss Karl's good humor and devotion to SCCA, I know that I will.

----- Jim Mickle.

Editor
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Is enthusiasm dead in Detroit?

I have been a member of SCCA for less than a year and I am rather disappointed. The region has a driver's school, two races and the POR. What about the non-racer or casual rallist?

Local clubs show more energy.

The Detroit Council has a rally and khana championship yet there is little if any SCCA participation. "But I'm racing that weekend", you say.

"Baloney", I say. With 400 plus members everyone is not racing or even working at the event. I know, because I'm in the tower timing, which many people do not consider working but how would you like to try timing 3 Formula Fords at Waterford because there are no timers to help and the grids seem to get bigger every weekend, while timers get fewer and fewer, but things can't get too much worse.

While I am venting my spleen, I would like to comment on what appears to be an attempt to discourage competition in the Showroom Stock classes by certain well known people in the region.

I would much rather see a half dozen SSS cars than a couple DSR cars or a bunch of 15 year old Porsches and Sprites, but I don't go around badmouthing those classes.

If you don't like what is on the track, don't watch. No one is twisting your arm.

Michael White

by Gary L. Witzenburg

THE SCENE: A rest stop, a Texaco station, an exit on Interstate 80 called Wamsutter in the middle of the desolate Wyoming countryside just west of the Continental Divide.

Cut to the inside of a small house next to the gas station, middle-American furniture, a console stereo, a child's electric train on the floor and a desk in the corner. Behind the desk sits a nice lady collecting money. The lady's name is Mrs. Arlene Carlton, and she's the local Justice of the Peace.

Cut to the wide, flat and modern expanse of I-80, the coast-to-coast link between New York and San Francisco, where a matched set of Highway Patrol radar cars preside over a gaggle of pulled over travelers. The unfortunate motorists have been clocked at something over the nationwide 55 mph speed limit and are about to visit Mrs. Carlton.

Do Mrs. Carlton and the patrolmen believe in the low limit? "No, but we have to enforce it because of pressure from above."

"How far above?"

"The Governor was against it too, but we would have lost \$28 million in Federal highway funds if it hadn't gone into effect by the deadline."

Not surprisingly, few politicians will publicly admit to being against the 55 limit -- that would be a little like putting down the American way: Motherhood, the Flag, Apple Pie and Ham-

55 mph...

burgers. How can you oppose a law which presumably saves both lives and fuel?

Yet what we say and what we do are often two different things. The same guys who swear by "55" at lunch set their cruise controls at 65 for their freeway trips home. Why? "Because 65 is perfectly safe and reasonable on this highway. Besides, I tried to drive it at 55 once and I almost got run off the road."

So the question then becomes not whether or not to exceed the limit, but by how much. This attitude tends to erode even further our respect for The Law. Most drivers feel qualified to handle a modern automobile at 70-75 mph on a modern super highway. "I've been doing it all my life," thinks Mr. Motorist. "I believe in the 55 limit, but there's no need for me to go that slowly here."

Suddenly everyone's driving between 60 and 70 mph, depending on what they feel they won't get ticketed for. And the few good souls who really try to adhere to The Law become moving roadblocks and themselves create a hazard.

Well-meaning editors and commentators call for stepped up enforcement. But, as one enlightened editor put it: "The majority of the people are basically law-abiding citizens and will do the right thing when they believe in it. It's always the unreasonable laws that are tough to enforce."

And enforcement has become "an impossible task", according to at least one who should know. Walter Pudinsky, who is California's Commissioner of Highway Patrol, says his officers have been averaging 3600 tickets daily. That's

about 110,000 a month, nearly three times the pre-crisis level. Mr. Pudinsky adds that California could issue 100,000 citations a day if it had the personnel and the inclination to do it, since radar checks shows that 70% of the drivers are routinely breaking the law.

Certainly lower highway speeds do save some lives but no one really knows to what degree. Safety researchers concede that speed is but one of a complex set of factors influencing highway safety. "Who" is driving, "where" and "when" are considerations that many believe to be far more significant than merely "how fast".

European countries report that their highway tolls have continued to drop even since higher speed limits were reinstated this spring. Apparently the fuel situation has brought about a beneficial change in the very attitude of the European driver. Our officials are also hard-pressed to explain the considerable drop in the death toll on certain of California's secondary highways, for instance, which have always had a 55 mph limit.

One problem we face is our would-be protectors in Washington really don't live in the real world with the rest of us. When was the last time a U.S. Senator or Congressman drove across the country? At 55 mph? Dodging trucks and wondering if Iowa could possibly extend all the way across the world and beyond?

People who are chauffeured to work and fly everywhere else can't help but lose track of the realities involved. Otherwise, wouldn't it occur to them that while 55 mph is appropriate on the narrow, congested highways common to much of the East Coast, the

same speed is simply not adequate or reasonable on the modern, wide-open Interstates of most of the West and Midwest?

Someday they'll have to face the fact that they can't keep us all 100% free from harm. Flying is dangerous, boating is dangerous, driving is dangerous, bicycling is dangerous and walking is dangerous. Just being alive is dangerous. As long as we're living, we'll never escape the possibility of dying. They can "seat-belt buzzer", "interlock", "air bag", and "speed limit" us all to death before they'll ever remove completely the possibility that we might be hurt or killed in our cars.

Once that inescapable fact can be accepted, then we can get down to the important question of where the trade-off between danger and mobility should be. If 55 saves lives, think how many more lives would be saved if the limit were 35 -- or 20, or 10 mph. But this country was built around mobility. The swift and efficient movement of goods and people from one place to another.

The Senate has already approved a permanent nationwide 55 mph limit and the House is getting ready to do the same right now. Please write or call your Congressman and ask him to think twice before voting blindly for something he may believe is right but doesn't fully understand.

Don't you agree that such decisions rightfully belong with local officials who are close to the situation, rather than in the hands of our well-meaning but so often myopic bureaucrats way off in Washington?

Remember when they laid the income tax on us...as a temporary emergency measure?

• Think about it.