

Sucking On the Pump

Mammals at the feet of dinosaurs

In case you haven't noticed, we have entered an age of transition. Looming over us are profound changes that will forever change the way we live on this planet. If we survive we may thrive, but in a culture nothing like the one we grew up in. One of the obvious clues is the rising cost of energy. This situation comes as a nasty surprise to the naive, now stubbornly bankrupting themselves to fill the tank of their shiny new guzzler.

We really can't blame them for sucking on the gas pump, for more than 50 years we have become conditioned to live our life around the car. Cheap gas allowed us to travel excessively, spontaneously and up until recently, without apparent consequence. Today, the comparatively modest cost of fuel is driving a growing panic that threatens our economy and lifestyle. Many will see this as a loss, a retreat from a higher standard of living and the "good old days." They will resist and resent the price they pay to retain their V-8, and imagine insidious conspiracies rather than blame their own indulgence. They have simply not been paying attention. What will they do when gas doubles again in a few more years? More often than not, a large vehicle is a rationalization, rather than a true need. How many vehicles do you see filled to capacity?

The big SUV represents pride, achievement and entitlement to their owners. Their status symbol is quickly tarnishing. What was once a conspicuous display of prestige is now a social liability. MPG is the new HP. Eco is replacing ego.

It is time we realized the so called "arms race" on the street is over. The game has become too expensive and inappropriate to continue. Like the big muscle cars and tailfin monoliths of the last century, the SUV and "full size" trucks and cars are obsolete and irresponsible. We long admired them for their macho attitude and excess capabilities, but "the times, they are a changing" as the song goes. The next generation of vehicles will be efficient not out of choice, but of necessity, but will inevitably include the next generation of hot rods with motors rather than engines.

The sinking value of the guzzlers is hitting dealers and owners alike. Many vehicles on the road or sales lot today will be junked long before they wear out simply because they will have become too expensive to drive. The utilitarian survivors will last forever, however, since they will finally be only "mission driven," used appropriately as tools of the trade rather than as oversize toys.

This changing mix places an increasing responsibility on those still clinging to their large clumsy machines. It never was the small cars that were dangerous — people are small vehicles, too. It is the big heavy "urban assault" vehicles that pose the real threat to everyone, including themselves, causing more kinetic damage in a collision, to the environment and our social conscience. Owning a large machine is fear based, egotistical and selfish. A rationalization that ignores the obvious ethical question of choosing personal safety over the increased danger this imposes upon others. The only penalty for such indulgence is higher liability costs, much higher fuel costs and maintenance: a price subsidized by society.

Today we have too many bad choices of transportation, we need smarter, better choices including cost-effective mass transit, efficient commuters and city cars. A new generation of hybrids, electrics and other smaller but more expensive vehicles are on the horizon that will replace today's automotive endomorphs the way small mammals replaced dinosaurs eons ago. Thousands of thrashing, spinning components and internal combustion will be replaced with solid state electrochemical reactions and electric motors with one moving part.

The end result of this transition will be an urban traffic environment of smaller, lighter vehicles that are much more compatible with pedestrians, bicycles and public transportation. The windfall of free social benefits will include less congestion and more parking, a cleaner environment, with fewer potholes and road damage. The downside of rising energy costs will be offset by the upside of a more human-scaled urban community. Crisis creates incentives for change; our greatest asset is our ability to see the opportunities that lie within.

Mark Murphy of Creswell is an industrial designer and inventor of electric vehicles such as the Gizmo and BugE. See www.blueskydsn.com



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

they seem to be missing the basic premise behind newspaper publishing: It's not cheap.

EW is a wonderful local weekly with many talented people on staff, and it's a wonder they've been able to keep it a free newspaper all this time. So if we, the readers, are not paying for it to be produced, who is? The advertisers fill that role, and I for one cannot blame the management of EW for chasing the money they need to print every week. When we pull that free newspaper out of that red box, we are supporting the writers, editors, graphic designers, photographers, printers and (bicycle!) delivery people for their hard work. But they don't work for free — would you?

And in the digital age, newspaper advertising is fading. To be an advertising account rep at a printed newspaper has got to be the hardest job ever — your colleagues depend on your skills to pay their rent every month. So, if you object to some business you think is immoral advertising in your free weekly newspaper, you've got three options as I see it: Donate the cash to keep the paper alive without advertising, ask businesses you agree with to advertise in EW to drive out the immoral Satan-spawn (if they do already, ask them to make it bigger — that back page is prime real estate!), or suck it up and enjoy your FREE newspaper.

Jonathan Smith
Eugene

FEED THE HOMELESS

Wow! Hard to believe! Our baby has become an adult! Eighteen years ago, Lois Prisinger, Barbara Boyer and I, a new arrival from California, became concerned about Florence's growing numbers of Florence homeless. We approached the Florence City Council for help feeding the hungry. "Heck no!" was their answer. "We'll be attracting every bum in the country!"

Willing to spend our own meager money to buy the food, I asked municipal, county and state officials for a place to serve the food. Again, "no" was the answer.

I was dismayed and discouraged when an old Oregonian said, "Why don't you call the governor?"

Not knowing much about Oregon politics, I thought the old Oregonian was being facetious and cynical, so I said, "Why don't you call Walt Disney?"

"No," said the old Oregonian, "the governor was listed." I called and reached the governor's right-hand man.

"We can help you," he said. "Be by your phone in the morning."

The next morning the phone started ringing with offers. We started at Laurelwood Community Center, 1137 Maple Street, which had a kitchen, dining room and refrigeration.

With hat in hand, we again approached the managers of Florence's three major markets. Only Safeway was positive. Safeway loaded our pickup every week for two years and continues to provide food.

Blessed by three outstanding managers (Lois Prisinger, Delight Fisher and now Carol Lyn), Florence Food Share now provides more than 40,000 pounds of food to more than 525 households per month, or more than 6 percent of Florence's burgeoning population.

Located at 2122 Spruce St. and open 9 to 11 am weekdays, Florence Food Share is now facing a growing threat to its existence due to rising food prices and the economic turndown.

Please, good citizens, help us. Your financial and food donations can be made at Food Share, and food can be left at every Florence market with a Food Share basket at the market exit.

My wife, Mary Ellen, and I donate at least two cans per visit. After all, 89-cent cans of burritos and 69-cent cans of chili can fill a painfully hungry belly. And giving makes you feel good.

Jerry Copeland
Florence

NO SIR, YES SIR

In response to Peter Gregory's letter to the editor July 3 ("Yes, Sir") I have to reply to you, sir, that your rationale is an apology for neo-fascism. Yes, fascism, that form of government where the corporate state dictates what and how the laws of the land are practiced and how justice is levied on the citizenry of that country. Here in America we call it Republicanism, but in effect it is just a small departure from Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or Communist China. So you, sir, are in effect rationalizing the "common sense" of laying down our hard-fought First Amendment rights to gather together and speak freely without the threat of goon squads in riot gear stopping free speech and free association.

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