

Push-Button Age Brought Into House

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AP Science Reporter

Theodore M. Blakeslee brought the push-button age into his home, and now has gone . . . step, beyond.

He devised nearly 200 push buttons to turn on music or heat, in any room, open the garage door, warm up the car, do other tasks by easy remote control in his Los Angeles home.

But installing and expanding the panels of push buttons in many different spots was becoming costly.

So he fixed it so he can merely dial automatic jobs over an intercom telephone system. He can dial almost anything from any of seven rooms, or do them by push buttons.

Dialing 74 opens the garage door, and 72 starts the car engine to warm up a few minutes. Dialing 743 does both operations.

Dialing 29 turns on a radio, and 2939 brings the music over a speaker in the kitchen; 394 plays the music in his den. Dialing 1 changes stations.

Heater in Den

Dialing 44 turns on a heater in the den, and dialing 404 turns it off. Putting an 0 in the middle of anything dialed by two numbers turns it off.

Separate from all this is an automatic awning, raising or lowering according to the sun's heat, an automatic lawn sprinkler, and an ingenious automatic lawn edger to keep the lawn border neat.

For Blakeslee, it is all a hobby. But it's also a glimpse of the kind of automatic controls you may have in your home of tomorrow. You might have push-buttons, or a dial system.

15 Years Ago

Blakeslee, an electrical engineer in the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, began push-buttoning his home about 15 years ago. Many of the 200 buttons are duplicates, controlling a total of 35 operations.

Doing all the work himself, he now has some two miles of wire and 120 relays.

The hobby led to 47 push buttons in the bedroom alone to heat rooms, tune in the radio, selecting any of six different stations, operate three record-players, turn on lights, lock doors. There's a push-button panel in the headboard of the bed.

Indicator Lights

At the front door is a panel of indicator lights showing whether any lamps are burning when you are going out, whether the back door is locked. Buttons on that panel operate the garage door, start the car, control the radio, turn on various lighting and heating circuits.

A thermostat responding to the sun's heat operates the awning over the kitchen window. The awning won't go up if the sun merely ducks behind a cloud for a few minutes.

The lawn sprinkler goes into action at 1 a. m. daily. An automatic switch activates a detector to measure moisture in the ground. If it's dry, the sprinkler goes on for five minutes. The same testing and re-sprinkling, if needed, is repeated hourly until 5 a. m. Brief sprinklings avoid waste from water run-off.

Burns off Roots

At the 1 a. m. testing, before the sprinkler goes on, another switch sends power along a heating wire laid in the groove between the lawn edge and sidewalk. That burns off any shoots of the low-growing clover — dichondra — that try to reach out over the sidewalk. After five minutes of heat, the sprinkler goes on — putting out any fire that might be started in loose paper or leaves.

"The height of scientific laziness," Blakeslee says.

Either push buttons or dial or an alarm clock can warm up the car, turning the starter on and off, regulating the choke, running the engine for a few minutes.

When Blakeslee drives home, he pushes a button on his auto dashboard. That broadcasts inaudible super-sonic waves activating a microphone in the garage door, opening it.

Dog Whistle

If he's driving a company car, he blows a super-sonic dog whistle, emitting sound waves at a frequency of 14,500 cycles per second.

"Budd can't get into trouble with this system," he says. "The squealing brakes of a laundry truck emitted sound waves at this same frequency, and sent the door up. So did the bristles of a street sweeping machine. I fixed that by using a code requiring two whistle blasts, within a three-second interval. Now it works fine."

Saves Steps

Life in a push-button and dial system home is just fine, says Mrs. Blakeslee. "It saves many steps and energy."

Blakeslee's idea of dialing came from a sideline hobby of telephony. He already had an interconnected system of telephones in each room, separate from the telephone used for outside calls.

He says he cannot even estimate the total cost of his automatic system. It would be very expensive to duplicate, starting from scratch and using hired labor.

It includes a method of turning off or on, from a doorway, one or any number of different lamps in a room by a low-voltage control system.

His automatic control system operates from a six-volt storage battery. It — naturally — has an automatic charger.



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