

"MAD PACKER"

"A packer is the most even tempered animal in the world—he's always mad."

Those words of wisdom, uttered years ago by an irate packing-boss, are still true today. Why is he mad? There are millions of direct reasons, as any dyed-in-the-wool packer will promptly tell you, but the underlying reason is just plain nerve-fatigue.

The professional fruit packer, whose numbers are diminishing yearly, leads a hard life. He has no home, seldom living in one locality more than six or eight weeks. He has little or no time for recreation, as fruit is perishable and must be packed as quickly as possible. He lives continuously from one "peak" to another.

He arrives in Medford (Hood River uses mostly local packers) just in time for the rush of the pear harvest. By the time the peak has passed and the fruit starts coming in more slowly it is time for the apples in Washington. They last until Thanksgiving, when he hurries south to pack navel oranges around Lindsey, a California.

Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter? There are no standard seasons for the tramp packer. He lives from crop to crop. It is either apple season in Washington, pear season in Oregon, oranges in either Northern or Southern California, early apples in California, etc. And always hurry, hurry, hurry.

But most of his nerve-fatigue comes from the actual work itself. The average fast packer (and most tramps are fast or they couldn't afford to stay in the game) wraps and packs on an average of from forty to fifty individual fruits a minute. Try moving your arms at that tempo continuously for even an hour!

The packer maintains that speed for ten or twelve hours a day, often working on Sundays. People weren't meant to stand in one place, hour after hour, moving only their hands and arms. Thus the packer is working on his nerves, crowding himself. As a result the least little thing causes a spark and he blows his top.

He's "mad" because he is placed following a cowboy, as a beginner or slow packer is called. Or else he's mad because he follows another fast packer and the guy following the cowboy gets packer following him is a fruit-hog and packs him out of fruit.

He gets mad if the fruit comes too fast and slows him under, and he gets mad if it doesn't come fast enough so that he can keep busy. He gets mad if the fruit runs mostly to the small sizes (but there is still to be a first time for him to get mad because it runs large.) In fact, there is very little he doesn't get mad about.

But unless he becomes angry enough to "pull his needle" which means removing his needle from the paper tray preparatory to quitting, a good packer never lets his temper slow him down. He feels a personal responsibility for the fruit in his tubs or bins and takes pride in keeping them packed down.

It may be that the process of getting "mad" is a means of releasing the pressure which accumulates from driving himself at top speed. He has to keep his muscles relaxed—tenseness would cause him to fumble and thus slow down.

Watching a good packer at work. His movements are fluid. Standing with the right foot advanced and leaning slightly forward so that he appears to be hovering over the box, he makes every move count. The fruit is thrown from the right hand to the left, followed by the hand itself so quickly it seems one movement.

Wrapping is done with such rapidity a layman doesn't notice the tiny twist of the wrist which locks the paper firmly around the fruit. Then, a sthe left hand places the fruit in the box and grabs another wrapper, the right hand reaches for another pear, etc.

IT NEVER FAILS

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN HE NEVER KNEW WHAT HE WAS EATING WHEN HE HAD DINNER WITH YOU!



NOW THAT YOU'RE MARRIED, HE STILL DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE'S EATING—BUT FOR A DIFFERENT REASON!



There is a steady rhythm to the swish of the paper—a great many packers hum or sing while working, maintaining it keeps them relaxed as well as increases their speed. Actually, unless a person possesses both rhythm and perfect coordination between eyes and hands, he should never attempt to become a packer.

In late twenties and early thirties, when work was plentiful, it was difficult for fruitmen to find enough skilled packers. Then the Betz Company was formed. They were purely labor contractors. For a flat fee they would contract to furnish all the packing-house labor: packers, sorters, roustabouts, etc. To hold packers, Betz paid transportation to the northern jobs, kept his packers busy about eleven months of the year, and paid a cent a box more than the going rate. He demanded a premium pack and to be known as a Betz packer was the best recommendation of a packer's skill that could be given.

Then came the depression. With many hundreds of home folks out of work agitation started against hiring outside help to harvest the fruit. In vain did the packers explain that they had spent years perfecting their trade. Packing schools sprung up in most communities, and the rudiments of packing were taught to ambitious housewives.

In the face of such open hostility a large share of the transients gave up travelling and settled down. But home talent will never reach the high stage of proficiency the tramps had—they work such a short time out of the year. By the time they get well broken in the season is over.

However, they have one thing in common with their traveling brothers—they too are "always mad."

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Oregon Women Now Doing Own Sewing

Oregon women, in line with a national trend, are turning to their own needles and thread in increasing numbers to combat the high cost of clothing, states Miss Lucy Lane, O.S.C. extension specialist in clothing and textiles.

This spring in just three Willamette valley counties, for example, approximately 500 cotton dresses were made under the supervision of extension leaders. The cotton dress workshops are designed to teach clothing construction technique. They are under the supervision of project leaders who in turn are trained by county home demonstration agents. In the three counties mentioned, Yamhill, Benton and Linn, 55 of these volunteer leaders were trained to conduct community cotton dress workshops.

In Jackson county 11 women volunteers held tailoring workshops where 64 suits and coats were made. Miss Lane says the trend toward home sewing is sweeping the country. She points out that the National Wool Council has announced that the number of home seamstresses has increased 130 percent during the past five years. Meanwhile, Federal Reserve board figures indicate that the fabric sales have risen 169 percent from 1941 to 1947.

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Parking Meter Cash Should Be Used For Traffic Improvement

OREGON STATE COLLEGE—Motorists who feed coins into parking meters are entitled to something more than merely the privilege of parking, traffic engineers were told at a recent Oregon Traffic Engineering conference at Oregon State college.

Harry Aumack, Spokane traffic engineer, said that meter revenues—now generally used by towns and cities to reduce general taxation—should go into permanent traffic improvements and investments in off-street parking. He answered critics of parking meters by pointing out that meter-regulated spaces provide from three to five times as effective control as unmetered spaces.

One-way streets were also advocated at the conference as one of the least used but most effective ways of creating better use of existing streets. They not only utilize present facilities without great additional cost, but tend to reduce accidents and save motorists time. The public gets used to them in less than 30 days and merchants find within a few weeks that they actually gain sales volume because their shopping areas are more accessible, it was pointed out.

Officials of the Institute of Traffic Engineers praised western highway and traffic engineers for the lead

they have taken in promoting traffic safety. The western section of the institute, they said, is the largest and most active in the country. The engineers commended Oregon State college for its part in sponsoring this first northwest regional conference and voted to make a similar meeting a yearly affair.



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