

Needed: UNIFORM ROAD SIGNS

An American couple drove 3,700 miles across Europe—and came home sold on the international "picture language" traffic signs in use there **By WILL OURSLER**



OPENING BRIDGE



ROAD CLOSED



TELEPHONE



UNEVEN ROAD



NO ENTRY



FILLING STATION

■ **LAST SUMMER** my wife and I fought traffic, trucks, and Sunday drivers on a 3,700-mile junket through eight European countries.

Often we could not speak or understand the local language or dialect. Sometimes, as in Southern Yugoslavia, we could not even decipher the alphabet.

Yet we were able to drive across France, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Liechtenstein, Germany, and Austria—and through the traffic jams of 50 teeming European cities—without the least confusion regarding traffic signs, speed limits, or warnings of assorted dangers ahead.

Behind this ease in driving stand the international road signs—a uniform "picture language" of the highways that is used by 30 nations in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas—but not the United States.

"The signs are saving thousands of lives," an official of one French automotive club told me. "Wherever they are—and no matter what language you speak—you can read them like the morning paper in your home town."

Many of the pictorial signs were designed originally to provide symbols which could be easily understood even by illiterate drivers, but the need for an international system was recognized as more and more people began traveling by car through other countries. Simplicity and clarity are the keys in the new international highway lingo. Signs come in three easy-to-recognize shapes. Information signs are rectangular; warning signs are triangular; regulatory signs giving specific instructions are circular.

My wife and I arrived in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, at twilight in a downpour. Policemen were on every corner, and I had no desire to make a mistake and wind up in a Communist traffic court.

The global sign system saved us. Every few yards along the main streets there were circular signs with diagonals running downward from left to right. Translated into the jargon of the

American highways, the signs said: no stopping, standing, or (by inference) parking. But on a side street I spotted a rectangular blue sign with a white "P" in the center. Although neither my wife nor I understood Yugoslavian, we knew that meant we could park.

Language barriers are never involved because all symbols and pictures are simple and easy to remember. The silhouette of a car with skid marks tells its message sharply: caution—the road ahead is or may be slippery.

The silhouette of a cow on a triangular sign indicates that this is a cattle crossing, and a leaping deer on a triangle warns of a deer crossing.

A circular sign with the figure 45 in the center sets the speed limit for the stretch of road ahead, and a similar sign with a diagonal bar running across the 45 means that is the end of the speed limit.

There are now 68 of these signs recognized internationally. As new needs develop, new signs are designed. Most become quickly familiar. A blue rectangle with a red cross or red crescent in the center means a first-aid station; a sign with a monkey wrench in the middle indicates that mechanical help is ahead, and a sign with a gasoline pump signifies that a gas station is just up the road.

A few attempts have been made to introduce the signs in some American communities, but generally the United States has shunned the international road signs. Difficulties in getting state and local governments to give up their own marking systems is one of the chief reasons.

But with foreign motorists becoming more and more common on both sides of the Atlantic, the importance of an international code increases daily. Because these signs are so quickly recognized and understood, they help cut down sudden stops, uncertainty, backing up, and dangerous mistakes in the midst of speeding traffic. Thus they make driving easier and safer, even for a complete stranger to the local roads and the native language.



DANGEROUS CURVE



NO LEFT TURN



MECHANICAL HELP



BEWARE OF ANIMALS



CLOSED TO MOTORCYCLES



HOSPITAL

COVER:

Judy Garland's star has risen again. Her up-again, down-again career—from child star to belting songstress—now includes two new motion pictures. Turn to page 14 for her story, "Big Talent, Big Problems."

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