

NOTES ON THE TRAFFIC PROBLEM

A MYSTERIOUS affair occurred at Orewa, just north of Auckland, the other week. I quote from the newspaper report:

Last week men in traffic uniforms painted some conspicuous white 30 m.p.h. markings on the highway. The same men returned later and tarred over the markings.

Yesterday the Waitemata County Council knew nothing of the happenings. The Ministry of Works said the signs had been painted without the permission of the controlling authority, the National Roads Board.

The Commissioner of Works said his information was that the Transport Department was responsible for the move and removal. But the Transport Department knew nothing about the matter. That sort of thing, a spokesman said, was not their job.

Residents are said to have expressed puzzlement at these strange events. Who can blame them? While the Big Five are working on the case, with the whole machinery of law-enforcement waiting to go into action at the drop of a brick, civilians cannot help gathering together in little groups and forming their own conjectures. One school of thought holds that fairies were responsible. This seems unlikely. Fairies have not been reported in the district for some years. It is thought that traffic noise and petrol fumes have disturbed them in the nesting period and driven them into the hill country. Another theory is that escapees from Victoria University College are lurking in the district, and have been up to their pranks again. Yet a third view is that the Transport Department (Traffic Sub-section) was merely carrying out a secret exercise as part of an instruction course for its 18-year-old trainees.

I am impressed with the administrative possibilities suggested by this incident. Here we have no fewer than four public authorities denying knowledge of something that concerns all of them. Yet the job was done. It was not only done, but undone. If all the public bodies in the country were declared to

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be not responsible for doing any jobs at all, then perhaps all the jobs would get done. The only difficulty might be to prevent them from being subsequently undone — although in many instances that might be a good thing.

THIS incident, by concentrating public attention once again on the traffic question, has provided me with an opportunity to discuss some of its more important aspects. First let me touch on the root problem of pedestrianism. Here the situation seems to be similar in certain respects to that in fox-hunting England, where a clash of interests has produced a deadlock. On the one side are the farmers, who would like foxes to be legally recognised as vermin, and as far as possible wiped out. The fox-hunters, on the other hand, wish the species to be preserved for sporting purposes, in order to keep up the morale of the British Commonwealth.

The question is, what should be done with pedestrians? Should we seek to exterminate them? If so, can a more efficient weapon be found than the motor-car? This seems doubtful. The H-bomb, the only serious competitor, is too uncertain a weapon for general use. If extermination becomes our national policy, it will be necessary to give motorists more encouragement than they receive at present. A bounty should



be paid by the Government on every pair of pedestrians' ears.

On the other hand, if pedestrians as a species are not to be exterminated, what measure of legal protection should they be given, in order to preserve them for game purposes? Here it must be said that there is little point in preserving them if full advantage is not taken of the sport offering. More tourists might be enticed to visit New Zealand if publicity could be given to the fact that we enjoy an all-the-year-round open season in this country. The owner of a fast and powerful car could always be assured of a limit bag. At the same time we should guard against unforeseen legal obstacles. Somewhere on the Statute book there is, I believe, a fusty piece of legislation preventing people from bringing lethal weapons on to

what is still quaintly called the Queen's highway. This should be removed, in case some unscrupulous pedestrian should unexpectedly appeal to it.

[F pedestrians are to be tolerated at all in future—for sport or for any other reason—we should remove the injustices that arise at present as a result of their being allowed access to the roads. Every time a pedestrian crosses a road he helps to wear out its surface, and at the same time puts the bonnets of motor-cars in jeopardy. The conscience of the nation should be aroused against the failure of the Government to make the pedestrian pay his fair share of the upkeep of our roads. To have pedestrians trespassing on roads that are paid for by the motoring public, and then complaining because they are knocked down, would be comical if it were not so uneconomical.

At the very least they should pay a registration fee (light or heavy traffic, according to dead-weight and size of boots) and wear two licence-plates, one on the bonnet and the other at the rear. Furthermore, no pedestrian should be allowed on a roadway unless he is thoroughly padded, so that the paint-work of motor-cars will not be damaged.

LET us turn our attention to the most important aspect of the whole matter—the protection of the lives of motorists. Some time ago I put forward a suggestion that was completely ignored by the authorities. I am used to this sort of discourtesy—not to give it an uglier name. I bring forward this proposal again in the hope that its merits may receive some belated recognition. Briefly, it is this—that a law should be introduced compelling all motor-cars and trucks to be built on the principle of the "dodgem," that gay little vehicle one sees in use at amusement parks. Car-drivers could then dispense with those last little traces of inhibition that restrain them at present. Lady motorists, in particular, could then go shopping without fear of damaging either their husbands' cars or their own persons. The busiest thoroughfares of our cities would be perfectly safe for everybody except pedestrians. Over the dinner-table we should no longer have to listen to such gloomy remarks as, "Darling, I'm afraid I collected a teeny dint in the front mudguard today," or "George, I was so annoyed this afternoon—some brute tore off the rear bumper while I was having my hair-do." Rather should we hear such light-hearted things as, "Who do you think I ran into as I was bouncing down Queen Street this morning?" Anxiety and boredom would both be banished, and motoring would once again be a romp.

Yes, dodgemes are the answer. Make the motorist's life one long fun-fair, and at the same time settle the pedestrian's hash.

I have one last suggestion to make about preventing damage to motorists and their cars. There is theory that most accidents are the result of slow driving. This is so generally accepted by now that its logic should be applied in practice. Thirty miles an hour in built-up areas and fifty elsewhere should be made the *minimum*, not the maximum speeds.

(Solution to No. 696)

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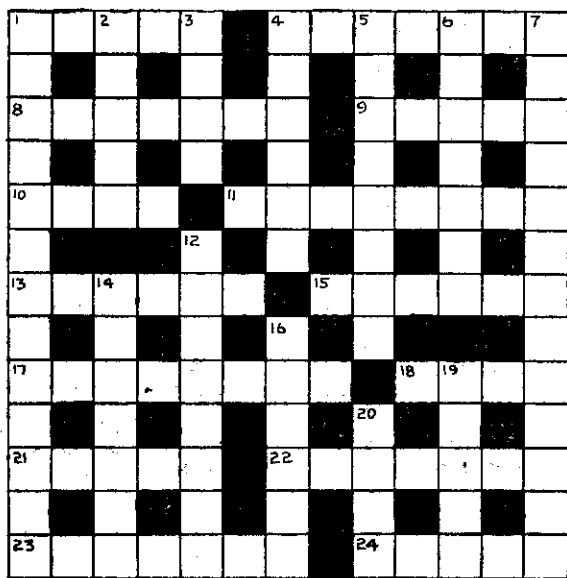
Clues Across

- Would drinking too much of this make one this?
- One name for a flower.
- For the sheriff's officer I follow the security for the prisoner's appearance, and finish very loudly.
- Perhaps an 8 across would do this to the 11 across if he failed to pay his rent?
- If you are too 1 across you may have difficulty in bending down to touch yours.
- Tenant.
- Go with aunt for a sweet.

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- Part of this part of the eye may be found on one of your 10 across.
- Enlargement ending in comfort.
- To put one's head in its mouth is to court danger, both literally and figuratively.
- Two sixths.
- Each ear (anag.).
- Abandons.
- He met his death at the hands of Charlotte Corday.
- Found in church inscriptions.
- Stares into flowers.
- Command to a worthless dog to enter?
- "A primrose by the river's — A yellow primrose was to him" (Wordsworth).

No. 697 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



Clues Down

- But dates stain (anag.).
- Diagonal rib of vault.
- Neat.
- The beginning of affection.
- Person appointed to carry out the terms of a will.
- View.
- Rat in tenement provides amusement.
- Even lard is sweet smelling if arranged properly.