

BANG ON!

[F the reader sees Elfin torches, Fairy Lites, Butterfly Twinklers, snakes, witches or Golden Flitter's as a matter of daily experience, he need read no further; in terms of ordinary experience he is grossly over-privileged. But is over-privileged the correct term? Most of us meet these manifestations on Guy Fawkes' Day, and reactions range from the uninhibited ecstasy of the young to the cautious back-to-the-wall distrust of the insufficiently agile. It is one thing to read the commercial poetry of pyrotechnic manufacturers, but quite another to avoid the attentions of a malevolent jumping jack.

For the names included in the approximately 80 tons of fireworks imported into New Zealand every year, read like a delirious parody of William Blake—at least the Blake who, according to Aldous Huxley, averaged three thunder claps and a scream to every page (or was it three screams and a thunderclap?). In the names, the planets are well represented, and though there are no flying saucers there is a Martian Ray. There are silver, red, and green dazzles and dazzlers (but no bobby-dazzler), mystic jugglers, radium plumes, *mwels*, Chinese drops, rain, sprays, showers, fountains, cascades; and besides a quite ordinary Black Devil, a very important and fascinating Devil Among the Tailors.

Not all the varieties of fireworks that come into the country go on the market; since 1930 when an Amendment was made to the relevant Regulations, to provide for the testing of fireworks, many dangerous types of fireworks have been barred, and every year new varieties are tested.

In the Sunday Evening Talk from YA and YZ stations at 8.45 on November 4, listeners will hear how all these fireworks are tested, and why, in a record of an interview by Jim Henderson with C. G. Lauchlan, of the Explosives Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. The testing of fireworks, though only a fraction of the Explosives Branch's work, is done fairly sporadically, however, throughout the year, with a particularly intensive period between July and November.

Products related to fireworks are also tested, such as toy pistol caps, bonbon snaps, and starting cartridges for Diesel engines. Some fireworks have a practical

application, one such is a bird scaring rope that should be popular with Chinese market gardeners. This consists of a slow burning impregnated rope that has crackers spaced every two or three inches down its length; hung up on a tree the crackers will explode at about half-hourly intervals, thus keeping what birds are around in a constant state of nervousness. These ropes were experimented with in Canterbury, but were not very successful — Canterbury rooks apparently being of too stern a fibre.

Testing is done for unsafe chemical combinations in fireworks, mixtures that can explode on impact, for example, or eject stars that still burn after reaching the ground. The labels and cases of fireworks are also checked, and the method and manner of ignition. (Who hasn't been frightened by a short fuse?)

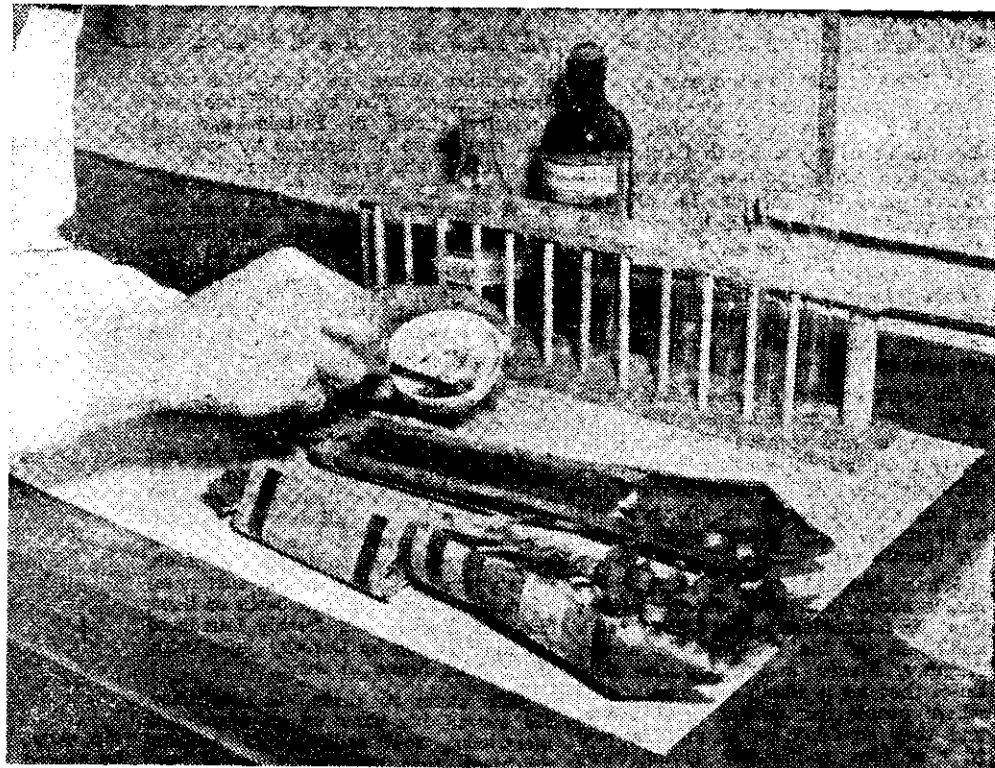
Altogether, every safety aspect is covered before fireworks are cleared for sale, and the safety of children is assured. There have been instances of dangerous fireworks making illegal entry into the country in the past, but the vigilance of the Explosives Branch has quickly made them too hot to handle. It is a very sad comment on the irresponsibility of some parents, however, that accidents still happen with home-made fireworks made more or less under their noses.

The NZBS talk on fireworks to be broadcast on Guy Fawkes' Eve was recorded at the Explosives Branch's Testing Laboratory at Shelly Bay, and Peter Hitchcock, the NZBS technician concerned, told *The Listener* that he found the job rather "different," to say the least.

"Some years ago," he said, "I took part in a long-distance recording of fireworks at an Auckland Birthday Carnival. At a distance one can watch and enjoy; close up one is too busy ducking to watch at all. I found it very interesting trying to record it all, one arm over my face, the other holding the microphone out to gather noises and sparks simultaneously, while crackers, jumping-jacks, cannon and rockets went bang and whoosh in every direction.

"One thing was called 'Calling-all-Cars,' and the sound of that was followed and recorded till it was fifty feet in the air. It shows how sensitive these small battery-operated recorders are." A few crackers, he said, fell inside the recorder, but it kept on working regardless, and no damage was done.

Later, when the tapes were being edited at the studios, passers-by were seen to look up askance at the building, obviously wondering where the war was; while in the next room, calm and undisturbed, 2YD went on broadcasting Perry Como and *Dad and Dave*.



C. G. LAUCLAN, of the Explosives Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, examining fireworks. TOP OF PAGE: Taking samples of propellant from a rocket for analysis



N.P.S. photograph

PETER HITCHCOCK