

A PICTURE IS WORTH 10,000 WORDS

THERE are some viewers who contend that the newspaper editorial page has lost its punch, that too often it is a sounding board for the special interests or politics of publishers, that it's as preachy as a clergyman who finds his pews empty on Sunday and doesn't seem to realize people don't always want to be preached at, or that it smacks of Afghanistanism (discussion of issues far remote from the decay in your own backyard). Whatever the merits of such comment, some critics would abolish editorial pages per se and run an honest-to-goodness editorial on the front page when there's really something worthwhile saying.

Yet there is one aspect of many editorial pages that commands attention, respect and space in increasing measure. We refer to staff or editorial page cartoonists where liberal publishers have gone out and secured good artists with a gift for putting across potent ideas with a few bold strokes of a pen. They are as different from the old stodgy editorial cartoonist, staff or syndicated, as today's automobile is from a Model A.

Automobiles did we say? Yes, and it's a cartoon about automobiles that won first prize in the July competition of the National Foundation for Highway Safety for Staff Cartoonist Bill McClanahan of the Dallas (Texas) Morning News. Titled "Do-It-Yourself A-Bomb", it shows two hands pouring test tubes labelled "Busthead Booze" and "Gasoline" into a foaming beaker with a skull and crossbones at its bottom and the tattered figures of a man, a woman, a spinning tire and a broken steering wheel soaring into space.

Timely, it appeared when highway fatalities, more than 50% liquor-connected, were heading towards a new record. McClanahan will receive the \$100 monthly award of the Connecticut-domiciled non-profit Foundation.

CLOSE behind but based on an erroneous premise, Foundation judges felt, was Stephen Hammer's well researched article titled "Drunk Driving Dilemma--Lenient Juries, Tough Law". It appeared in The Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat-Chronicle and expounds the thought that "a person arrested for drunken driving in Rochester has an almost 4 to 1 chance of getting by on a reduced charge".

In New York State it is mandatory to suspend a drunken driver's license. Since 1952, however, with less public transportation and increasing need for a man to drive, juries have been acquitting drunken drivers regardless of the weight of evidence. To secure convictions, District Attorneys have been prosecuting cases under the lesser charge of reckless driving which gives the court some leeway about suspension of licenses.

THE result, Hammer's story shows, is a move toward changing the law so that juries may try drunken driver cases "on their merits". This, the National Foundation believes, is a wrong conclusion. The number of cars, drunken drivers and highway fatalities is rising. To retain any sense of proportion laws much be made tougher to beat and enforcement stiffer--not more flexible for juries swayed by clever lawyers and penitent prisoners who bear little resemblance to the wild drunk who turned the highway into a nightmare.

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AS noted by Wendell H. Coltin of the Boston Herald, who again earned a Special Mention, in the Town of Cohasset, Mass., Police Chief Hector Pelletier has photographs taken of drunken drivers he locks up. When the prisoner sees his picture the next day he realizes the futility of insisting he was sober. This might be an idea in States which refuse to legalize Alcometer tests.

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Florida this year passed a mandatory jail sentence law for drunken drivers, imposing 10 days to six months for second offense. Driving after a license is suspended calls for a mandatory 10-day jail sentence.

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From The NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY, Inc.
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Free; use unrestricted. V20170652.

TO EDITORS AND COMMENTATORS:

Here's a safety story that can be used as is or developed further, perhaps with pictures:

If you are driving within 30 miles of Chicago's Loop late some afternoon, with your radio tuned to WGN, you may hear a voice boom:

"There once was a guy named Dutch
Who depended on liquor too much
As he stepped on the throttle
He sipped from a bottle
Now Dutch works his clutch with a crutch."

No, it's not the Jingle Hour. The voice is that of Chicago's flying traffic officer, Leonard Baldy, who Monday through Friday from 4 to 6 p.m., guides traffic from a helicopter high over the city. He reads bulletins on traffic jams, heavily traveled routes and suggestions for alternate routes, along with messages on driving safety from the National Foundation for Highway Safety and other groups---and, yes, jingles, rhymes or crisp advice such as:

"Don't lose your head to save a minute; You need your head; your brains are in it."

Leonard Baldy has been talking to Chicago motorists from the air since last November 24. It is an outstanding instance of cooperative efforts. The Phillips Petroleum Company provides the helicopter and sponsors the program. The traffic bulletins are beamed through Station WGN at least every 15 minutes, more frequently if conditions warrant. Supplementary information comes from the Chicago Park district police; Chicago Police traffic division, Citizens' Traffic Safety Board, Chicago Motor Club and the National Safety Council.

Major routes covered by the moving helicopter include the Outer Drive, Michigan Avenue, Congress Street and other arteries moving traffic from city to suburban points. Officer Baldy intersperses safety tips---and jingles---between the bulletins on traffic conditions.

To drivers with a wandering eye he may broadcast: "A nut at the wheel, a peach at his right, a dangerous curve, fruit salad tonight".

Knowing the growing propensity of the Tired Business Man for having a tall cool one before heading for home, the Copter Cop may say: "One for the road? Coffee, tea, Coke or water, should help reduce our highway slaughter."

Barely a week after starting his broadcasts last November, the Flying Policeman achieved unexpected fame. When fire devastated Our Lady of the Angels parochial school, taking over 90 lives, the first on-the-scene bulletins over WGN were broadcast by Baldy from the helicopter. He urged motorists to stay out of the area so as not to impede firemen and ambulances. He reported congested streets in the area and recommended alternate routes. He continued reports every few minutes through the early evening.

Like all cops, he well knows the menace of the drinking driver. He puts it this way: "If you drink like a fish, try diving, not driving."

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If you haven't published---or planned---a thorough-going article on highway safety (if it emphasizes drinking driving so much the better)---may we urge you NOW, at a time when traffic fatalities are heading toward the new highs we forecast last year, to do so without delay. Courts, police, enforcement officials mostly all agree newspapers can do more to curb, correct or change things than any other medium---and if what you print may help save a single life will you say it was worthwhile?