

13. Driving Him Mad

One sunny autumn week that should have been full of bike miles, Al could only fit in a few. Had to get an inspection sticker for his late model pickup. Such an expensive, aggravating, 2-day process, he really wondered whether mo-ves are worth the trouble. Accounting for all expenses, each mile costs over a half dollar. Reminded him of Thoreau's argument: Takes less time to walk to Boston than riding train, because it takes more hours of paid labor to earn the price of a ticket. Every few months each mo-ve costs what an expensive new road bike does to buy outright. Everyone has a hand out: fees, insurance, maintenance, tariffs. Fuel is comprised of 50% taxes and 10% to 15% alcohol, called either gasohol or E85, which provide lower mileage than real gasoline. Warranties require checkups every few thousand miles. Do dealers so lack confidence they must inspect each new mo-ve constantly? More like holding it for ransom upon a vague threat of engine or transmission failure, for which they'll swap it with a used engine, after which you have to replace entire vehicle anyway. Warranties are not guarantees. When engine failed in his Forq after only 15,000 miles, they plopped in a so-called "remanufactured" unit. Only 30,000 miles later, another blown head gasket occurred, this time, after warranty period was closed, it cost him \$1,500. Making vehicles that never fail doesn't suit their purpose of repeatedly extorting you.

Scallop Oil's CEO went on TV to explain away annual Spring hike in gasoline prices, claiming it's because they do their necessary maintenance of refineries every Winter, which temporarily reduces capacity. Do we need a new law that forces them to do this during Fall instead? After Big Oil burnt two refineries for insurance claims, they put themselves into a more profitable position. Why build anew? Better ROI with lower supply. Seems plausible that if Congress decided to build competing facilities, it would drive down costs for consumers, but that's not likely given their election campaigns are funded by Big Oil. Profit motives must end.

About the same time, he bought a set of supposedly good tires. One of them went soft about 25 times in its first 25,000 miles. Brought it in twice to complain, only to have them tell him he was crazy, no discernible leak. Of course, on Christmas Day had to put mini-spare on so daughter could go to work. Nobody cares if your holiday is spoiled. Went unhappily again into tire store a few days later. This time they did find a leak, an irreparable nail hole on

edge of sidewall. Road hazard protection supposedly fixes such damage for free. Of course, replacement is prorated for amount of time you've had tire—despite repeated complaints over years and light use—and you must have all the original paperwork ready to make a claim, which would have amounted to a tiny discount on a new tire. This didn't justify a road hazard fee. Why spend an extra 15% for conditional protection? You'd have to slash tires yourself at an optimal time to get any benefit. They gamble you'll not want to go to jail for fraud. After many cross words and threats, negotiated his own small discount and free mounting and balance.

A few weeks earlier, fixed a flat on his bike for \$5, price of a tube; only 2 tires to worry about, and no special machine needed, just some inexpensive levers and a pump, which can be used anywhere. Got back on track with nobody else's help or say so, no wrangling deals, no heartache or heated words. Often, people who buy on price fill your landfills with junk autos, appliances, furniture and other goods from China rather than treasure fine, long lasting antiques made locally to be handed down through generations. They only notice current status, neither leading causes nor long term effects. Bicycles defy this description, because what little material they use is totally recyclable. With a modicum of care a well-made bike can last a lifetime, then become reusable scrap.

While waiting for garage to do 10 minutes of work that got done after 90, he went on a bike ride. Couldn't recall how many days, weeks or months he spent waiting for cars. Why own one? To save time? Illich cited an estimate that, "The model American male devotes more than 1,600 hours a year to his car... to get 7,500 miles: less than five miles per hour." Even if you don't own a car, your taxes pay for roads, subways, trains and transportation planning you might never use. If you even own a mo-ve, it better be moved under its own power at least once a week, or parts, seals, tires deteriorate and fail. Motorized transport is a cash, energy and time black hole. This by itself is enough to give you a first class case of road rage. A bicycle liberates you, and is especially useful for escaping service waiting rooms or returning to pick up vehicle at your convenience. Bicycling is more than adequate individual conveyance for an average trip, 3.5 miles, which statistics say is comparable for both bikes and cars. Fiona Apple sang, "If there was a better way to go then it would find me/I can't help if the road just rolls out behind me/Be kind to me or treat me mean/I'll make the most of it, I'm an extraordinary machine." That's right, you are the machine; a bike or car is but a tool you choose.

Dissatisfied, he was getting ready to give up driving altogether. Only need a mo-ve for carting around bikes for repair, passengers, and supplies, occasional long trips, or those impossibly snowy days when a mo-ve is really appreciated. All could be handled by bus, carpooling, rental, panniers, taxi, train. When attending club events, he could simply ride to a ride. Could reduce cost/mile by driving more than 5,000 miles/year, but then he'd have to replace mo-ves more often, a hardship—broken promises, buyer remorse, sales pressure, stupid choices—he'd rather avoid. He was victimized by repair shops who charged for work they didn't even do. One day he left his car just before it began raining; when he returned, he was given a bill for repairs that could only be done on a lift. As he backed out, he noticed ground beneath car was still dry. Red handed, service manager refunded his money without apology or explanation. Such cheating is common. They say they check fluids; soon after fluids fail. You must check all fluids yourself afterwards: bright pink ATF, clear oil, vivid green coolant. Expose them and they find a way around it, hire a kid to move cars on rainy days, rather than actually do work. Why bother hiring and paying real mechanics who actually know what they're doing? Whether or not you went to dealer, a temporary help dunce with just a hammer and vice-grips did your last brake job amidst dust and smell of burnt brake pads and OSHA violations. Service centers only serve themselves from your pocketbook. There's nothing inimical to health in repairing bicycles. Sanity demanded he ride one.

Bicycling wasn't foolproof. Small things trip you up. Got caught on road one morning, another flat. Knurled nut on rear tube stem was seemingly welded on. Tried cutting off tube and poking stem through; but stem flange wouldn't fit. Recalled a controversy over those thumbnuts. Why became painfully clear. May have dripped wax from diligent chain lubing, heat then cold fusing threads. Nut wouldn't budge, even when he tried to use split oak as a lever; wrapped around, squeezed and turned to no avail. McGuyver he wasn't. What was required was a good pair of pliers, the only tool he'd forgotten to bring. What to do? Luckily had his cell phone. Called 911 to get an idea; not enough of an emergency. Cripple-A was no help; they must think his car sends them membership fee, not him. Cripple-A wouldn't exist if cars were reliable. They thrive on unjustified complexity which increases breakdowns. Called for phone number of a local taxi, which arrived as a station wagon, no less. Ideal! But driver informed him that it was their policy not to transport bicycles. Had to strip entire bike of everything but frame and tuck it behind a guardrail, ride to the only

service station for miles, pay gladly to get nut removed, pay taxi for wait and ride back, which was flat rated, not metered, find choice Italian frame hadn't been ripped off, repair flat, and, finally reassemble bike. Arrived at work very late, luckily on a day when nobody was around to notice. When you ride instead of drive you must be prepared for anything, including third class treatment by every organization from employers and independent hacks who don't support your choice of conveyance, to motoring clubs who withhold roadside assistance, to town officers not upholding your rights. Planned to poll local taxi companies to find out their bike policies, but put it off from bad memories of having once been involved on the other side and how dense, inhumane and unapproachable dispatchers could be. And who would benefit from a formal poll? Only local cyclists who didn't give a damn about him.

A community environmentalist recommended a treatise to him about the future of mo-ves. It may not be about selling them at all, but in providing the service of building, maintaining and remanufacturing them for *leasing*, a process which periodically swings in and out of consumer favor. Currently, at lease's end, a move is sold, soon turns to scrap, and there's enormous waste. Multiply this by hundreds of millions of units and weigh the ecological effect. Understand, each mo-ve is a collection of parts, some short- and others long-lived. If, instead, each could be remanufactured after, say, 80,000 miles, less energy could be expended to restore it to like-new condition. Large serviceable portions could be recycled and reused instead of continuously repairing, finally stripping, sorting, shredding, bailing, melting, shipping to China as a cheap resource for them to build guns and use against you in an economic war, and starting again from raw materials.

Airlines already do this with jetliners, swapping in remanufactured engines and so forth. It's the norm in countries without new manufacturing industry, like Mexico, where 50-year-old models abound and are kept like new. Doing so would not only create new opportunities and preserve environment but it would undercut chop shops, third party privateers, and unregulated garages who bilk motorists an estimated minimum of \$100 billion a year in unnecessary parts and repairs, even fraying cables and loosening nuts to get you back in sooner or break down more often. Such piracy, rather than contributing to a gross national product, increases cost and reduces standard of living, much like gaming or insurance, a net loss, a villainous monster sponge that sucks up local resources like a tampon soaks up blood.

Most dealerships are geared toward selling a mo-ve for little, then profiting from their service bays through state ordered inspections and warranty mandated 5,000 mile checks. Any decent local bike shop will bring your entire bike back from dead for the cost of an obligatory car warranty checkup.

The main barrier to leasing is *pride of ownership*. The *status symbol* angle has been used to sell mo-ves for as long as he could remember. It's ingrained in consumer psyches. Reconsider. Certainly some cars are made better than others and consequently cost more. But today there are basically three levels: junk, run of the mill iron, and supposed luxury, all practically indistinguishable from each other. Any step down from status to trash is a small one, just lesser paint, no leather trim, not as peppy an engine. Business regulations and market factors make it so. Besides, he agonized, how can you stay proud of your wheels when there are so many hit-and-run nitwits and parking lot door scrapers? He had to replace four taillights, three windshields and a side view mirror, over \$1,000 of nondeductible, non-reimbursed, expenses caused by phantom miscreants. This didn't begin to add up to the many nicks, dents and scrapes that he constantly had to touch up. You can't keep a new mo-ve in showroom condition unless you coat it in cosmoline and garage it on jackstands. It would be his misfortune that garage would burn or collapse. What can go wrong will. Heaven help anyone who relies on mechanisms when Mercury's orbit runs retrograde and moon is full.

With profit as a goal, you think manufacturers would make stuff really well in hopes of pleasing customers. But when there are many choices, how things are manufactured depends on marketplace sophistication. Competitors that build too well can't curb costs; too poorly, fall below a quality threshold. In either case, they fail. As long as it runs and isn't an eyesore, an owner will hold onto a car to drive down per year costs, the current trend. Only those makers who get close to mediocre succeed. Mediocre means only a small percentage of their clients die, practically none are totally satisfied, and remainder never know any better. Any notion that quality should be expected or guaranteed is naïvely quixotic if not positively ridiculous.

Prices quadruple not so much for quality but for rareness, anything to bolster embattled egos. Handmade imports that cost six figures are finicky, hard to keep tuned, and impossible to get parts for—no measure of quality to his mind. For performance or protection you might prefer certain equipment, features, tires.

But few could afford a mo-ve made to their personal specifications. So people feel special when they buy a slightly different mass produced mo-ve, no matter how much trouble that really causes.

Disconnect your battery or let it die, and you can't restart car, need a special electronic tool to reprogram its computer. A "Check Engine" light (MIL) indicates malfunctions and lures you in for problems from "hardly matters" to "threatens life", no way to tell which. Most of a dealership's profit is made in service bays. Should any one of a dozen suspiciously unnecessary sensors fail, as they frequently do, your vehicle won't run properly, even result in a dangerous traffic situations or major component damage, all because they want to charge you not only for a costly component but also a diagnosis, when they already know full well they'll have to replace a \$25 sensor for which their markup is 1000%. They make charging for diagnoses seem fair, "Isn't our time worth money," but for \$100 all they do is plug in analyzer and read a code, which tells them exactly what to replace, five minutes of work. They must buy or lease an analyzer, to be sure, but that also separates them from lesser competitors. What doesn't sound fair is a series of separate diagnoses, one for exhaust system, another for lights, another for tires. A diagnosis should be from bumper to bumper. But if you ask why, manufacturer's policy is their ready excuse. One dealer was so bold as to demand \$50 to tell him his front tires were worn. Naturally, he refused to pay it. Luckily, cops weren't called this time.

When your car needs repair, you find there are many different parts not common to other cars even of the same brand. Automakers do this on purpose. Regulations say they must produce enough aftermarket components to last 5 years, in other words, to support that model's useful life. By making several models and changing them often, normal wear components, like brake parts and mufflers, have to be stocked by distributors, who are forced to take on consignment a few each of countless parts that might never be sold. Multiply this by number of distributors and you uncover a "hidden" market to exploit. Distributors who balk miss opportunities to sell parts that needy owners will pay double or triple their worth because of unavailability. Estimates for what it would cost to build a car yourself from retail parts exceed 20 times its original purchase price. At some point, owners must simply junk their otherwise serviceable cars because they can't find a catalytic converter that permits it to pass a safety inspection. So automakers force you to buy a new car at intervals convenient to them and this vicious cycle repeats. To buy into this succession of mundane models costs ~\$5,000 per year plus finance charges, insurances,

maintenance, and taxes, or -\$7,500, just so you can commute to your average \$15,000 per year job.

Some cagey mechanics know that engine mounts or pulleys or valves from one model fit another make or model, with or without minor modification, but such mechanics are rare and they specialize in restoring classic or exotic collector's cars whose owners never need to ask, "How much?" You'd think interchangeability of parts would better serve consumers, not to forget national defense or survival in a crisis. Wouldn't this limit your choices? Sounds a lot less stressful, until someone uses it to foist substandard products on you, govern your livelihood, limit your horizons, subjugate needy masses. You can limit choices for yourself without their help. So much of economy is car-based and so much time is lost to manufacturing/selling/servicing them, progress into more important areas remains unrealized. You can't make progress with a millstone around your neck. He was definitely for experimental science, but not technologies looking for solutions.

There is no automotive solution. Without deductibles, nobody could afford insurance premiums. Bigger parking spaces mean bigger lots, more deforestation, probably climate devastation, sterile deserts. "Hyperbole," you scoff? The latest theory was that Sahara Desert, largest on earth, was started from cattle overgrazing and trampling vegetation, leading to erosion, finally affecting climate Worldwide. Why should Americans care? Where do you think all hurricanes start? It's from low pressure, high temperature effects of Sahara, which sweep across Atlantic, where they absorb moisture and then turn cyclonic. Keep making wider highways and lots, and see what other coast gets decimated. It's one big irrevocable experiment in terraforming with seven billion human lives in jeopardy.

If factories were set up instead to remanufacture, you'd simply lease exactly what you wanted for a set period, then move could be sent back, restored to mint factory condition, and leased again by someone else, sort of like reusing milk bottles. Reversing incentives, moves would be designed with body panels of rustproof stainless steel, lifetime components, and quick-change interiors. Instead of foisting junk at the least cost with warranties not worth the paper they're written on, emphasis would be on whatever works well and longest. There would be no issue with used car cleanliness or reliability. Wear parts would be recyclable. Subsequent retrofits could update vehicles to new and better technologies: gas (methane), hybrid, then hydrogen fuel cells. Experimentation would rise

above mulish, stubborn similarity, a by-product of market competition. No more getting stuck with clocked odometers, lemons, or other scams by those who use “new and different” as weapons against you.

Couldn't say he was ever proud of any of his dozens of mo-ves over an entire driving career. Liked them at first, used them, cussed them later, and moved onto next. It's never monogamy. Would pay to let someone else worry about maintaining and recycling. A Bavarian motor maker already covers everything, except fuel and tire wear, for three years at no cost to owner. Were lease fees based on utility not status, that would interest many motorists. All cost, hardship, inconvenience, and stress are foisted onto consumers for the unfair deal of being able to ride 3 miles per trip and sit in stalled traffic or take an occasional busman's vacation if drivers have any time left over from demands of having to pay for this privilege. Ironic.

In this improved plan, since you don't own mo-ve, you never get emotionally involved. Dealers don't demand to see you every month, actually prefer that you stay away. No more wasting time trying to recoup resale value. The reduced cost could be returned to consumers as low lease fees. What's left are negotiations between automakers and consumer groups over what these fees should be. Leases could be fixed for the actual mileage, not time of use. This would reward thrift rather than punishing, as now, in which you pay whether you motor or not—inspections at intervals based on calendar date not miles, along with insurances, property taxes and registration fees.

This system may already be on its way. No?! Since consumers can't support so many individual carmakers, they're absorbing each other like a Borg sci-fi atrocity. Ford owns Jaguar, Land Rover, Lincoln, Mazda, and Volvo brands among others; GM owns Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Saturn and has major interests in Fiat, Isuzu, and Subaru. Daimler owns Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Mercedes Benz and major interest in Mitsubishi. You may as well assume other European or Pacific Rim (Daewoo, Honda, Toyota) brands—will eventually do the same, if not, in turn, absorb the Big Three and market themselves as national brands wherever they sell. In the end there will be only two or three companies, who'll agree on a way that makes each as profitable as possible. This won't be a rat race of competitive manufacturing offering endless innovation and variety, but in providing some such standardized service, which, you must know, will cost consumers dearly for lack of competition.

Insurers, lobbyists, motorists, and revenueurs may howl. They all demand choice and can't see beyond privately owned transportation. It's ready when you are, goes wherever you want, at least locally. Public transportation may mean sharing with undesirable strangers, not always being kept tidy, spreading disease. Routes avoid your destinations, cause complying with schedules, force you to adapt accordingly. You become a target out there, struggling unnecessarily, waiting in the cold. When mass transport strikes loom, NYC's streets are thick with bicyclists, up from 150,000 daily commuters to 600,000. If car or fuel prices inch any higher, or more motorists clog already dangerously burdened roads, that's what more and more Americans will do, what's already the norm in most countries.

People need economies that preserve their choices, even expand them, and this leasing plan may be a part. Society needs to adopt better policies, delouse this automotive paradigm, and get rid of parasites who make it unworkable, highly paid do-nothings at the top. When you base an economy on automotive, you risk everything collapsing along with it. Since alternatives and incentives are few, continuous improvement falters, market stagnates, new approaches don't emerge, product quality and longevity are sacrificed, and well paid professions disappear. This would be sad, since it was from automotive plants that middle class emerged.

Trying to preserve a status quo, United States gradually lost its edge. Innovative technologies are being developed elsewhere, notably Japan. As a principal defense contractor, automotive may suffer losses that might even jeopardize national security. They say the same people from whom America buys crude from may have subsidized 9/11 attack. Or some internal conspirators who then covered it up, since much evidence was unmistakably fabricated. Whether true or not, all this proves is that it's time mankind moved away from petroleum-based energy to something cleaner and less likely to drive people mad for profit. USA was one of the few signing holdouts of the Kyoto Protocol approved by 160 nations to clean air and fight global warming. Would mean lazy Americans would have to burn less oil, a politically impossible position. Do you think any of these other nations plan to scrupulously apply protocol? Nations without mo-ves or industry don't care, have more to gain than lose. It's almost as if they signed merely to pressure America to act responsibly, since it's by far the worst offender. America should take a leadership role. USA obviously isn't ready to back its own discoveries and unprecedented activism with the least restriction on free trade and industry no

matter how dirty or wrong. Betrays its own constituency: America unilaterally dismisses decisions of the entire international community. Who, then, is the rogue nation?

Besides gridlock, resource depletion, toxic fumes, and unhealthy lifestyles, Americans pay an even bigger price for automotive convenience. In their isolation, they don't know how to talk to one another anymore. Conversation is brief, exhausting, tentative. Mo-ves have come to represent what Thomas Edison denounced a century ago, "There is no expedient to which a man will not go to avoid the labor of thinking." Arts reflect a nation's dyspeptic attitudes. Billboard Awards show people buy CDs by inarticulate rappers who dress alike in ill fitting clothes and fling bling as if to make one wonder what they have to fume about. Fans who can't communicate identify with them. The less talent the better. Angry, unintelligible posturing is something bickering birds, even insects, are capable of, which places it pretty low on the scale of intelligent life. Might as well be sound loops of grating noise, not that that couldn't be interesting given finer intentions.

People don't want to think, do everything by rote, prefer a mindless routine, repeat daily grinds. If minds are so numb, all might benefit from once again conversing, from interacting civilly. In days of yore monarchs burnt down coffee houses because, fueled on caffeine, vassals might talk among themselves and discover self rule. People today are just talking, not communicating, something upon which cell phone providers profit. The first inclement day, his phone never stops ringing, in-laws suddenly deprived of sunshine eager to exchange banalities, indulge themselves once again in coos and dulcet babble of obligated loved ones, something they get too little of among cruel society at large.

There's no wonder they talk of a preceding generation of great thinkers, people who defeated tyranny, ended the Great Depression, and put fantastic economies into motion. They weren't used to modern conveniences, people who planned each day and carried though to apparently good effect. Good manners meant much. Political correctness was unheard of. He'd been brought up on a military model to attentively wait, never interrupt, request people's permission to address them but speak when spoken to. Raw recruits sometimes never progress into confident spokesmen, remain in subservient roles, which suits society just fine, although they don't realize that this makes for disenfranchised loners likely to turn violent. Today's convenience has made for a bizarre, out-of-touch society. Communication has become an illusion, a goeey residue floating on a sea of past achievement despised by citizens

and foreigners alike. All conversations today seem to end with, "...and you owe \$\$\$\$. Will that be cash or charge?" And with good professions disappearing, increasingly that's preceded by "...and do you want fries with that?" No wonder have-nots are angry, hateful, jealous. You can't introduce unalienable privileges, promote vocations suited to a wide latitude of attitudes, then pull rug out. This isn't a way to foster self determination. All this does is confuse, frighten and increase assaults. Authorities without ethics driven by greed are your children's role models.

Kids now have miniature motorized versions of motorcycle choppers, pocket size, they've begun to ride on bikeways, because there's nowhere else to ride such dangerous vehicles, too fast and short for parking lots, roadways or sidewalks. Of course, they're a threat to bicyclists and strollers, who pick paths exactly to avoid such entanglements. Maddening. "Oh, leave kids alone. Boys will be boys." Boys are dying in Iraq, too, for the trappings not realities of freedom. Retailers are free to sell these junk machines made from junked mo-ves. They're technically toys, so they need not meet automotive safety standards. Perceived privileges cut across territories, lead to rudeness, violate rights of others. Some actually choose to ride bikes in streets because bikeways don't seem safe anymore. Any sense of safety was an illusion, although rail trails do stick to flat terrain, which is inherently safer.

Individuals may not be able to do much. But until it all implodes, here's something: Leave your mo-ve parked while you ride. Every bicycle commute saves on average a gallon or \$3 in fuel. Bike wear is also less than for a mo-ve. If everyone made one motorless commute a week, imagine the effect, as much as \$170 million/week, nearly \$9 billion/year, shifted directly back to participants to spend on some durable goods, entertainment, services or value items. Energy and resources to build one medium-sized car from scratch would produce 100 bicycles. It's not about boycotting the beloved mo-ve, it's about creating diverse industry, finding equilibrium, living responsibly, reducing energy dependence. Of course, oil companies will profit just as much, because they'll just raise prices to make up shortfall. To be in business is to make profit by whatever means. It's alleged that oil companies subvert rules of PAC money by having employees "voluntarily" contribute directly to candidates. Meanwhile, how do you think workers at Mercedes-Benz's huge factory in Sindelfingen, Germany get around? Color-coded bicycles for each department, like the public White and Yellow Bicycle movements. Policies always favor the powerful. Individuals can never win in these games designed by lawyers for

corporate dominance, but they can chip away tiny fragments for themselves through self-sufficiency.

Bicycling is such an amazing alternative, once you start you become dissatisfied with the dangerous, filthy, lazy, motored mode. Should probably refuse to motor until they make it foolproof, perfect it. Gasoline used driving to ride starts with buddies was always a big expense, and often carpooled. If one compares gasoline's inherent energy to the renewable resource of food calories used biking, as did Dr. Rice in "Technology Review" 40 years ago, that is, one cyclist converting 1800 calories to go 72 miles versus an average 40 (20 x 2) mpg to transport one driver and a passenger, you can get between 1,000 and 3,000 miles/gallon. This range depends upon several factors: bike depreciation, efficiency, tandems, terrain, tire costs. Anyway, turns breakfast syrup into gasoline, a wheel happy lyric he'd once heard. Went through quite a few top-flight tires at \$50 apiece. Bicycling is 5 times more efficient than walking and up to 150 times more efficient than motoring.

Despite all this, clever propaganda diminished bicycle's popularity a century ago. Movies portrayed villains on bikes, like that Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. While bicycling is slower and safer, for those with families who worry unnecessarily they offer term life policies. It certainly stimulates communication, as he evidently discovered. Arrive on a bike, and it's an instant ice breaker. In a world of increasing alienation, bicycling makes ever more sense. By himself, he conceded, he only needed conveyance for one. Solitary action requires no committee approvals, no inherent mediocrity. Not teams but individuals write novels, imperfect though they are as a mode of communication.

In light of all related misinformation, surprisingly insurance companies didn't cancel life policies for anyone who bikes. So easy to apply for death benefits, go out and get run over by a bus. The law is very specific. Since bikes are not required to stay in breakdown lanes, he came close many times. Wouldn't take much, just forget to look in rearview mirror, neglect to swerve aside. Heirs would acquire a nice nest egg and be rid of him forever. Great way to bypass a lifetime of grief and struggling. The system has more to fear from disaffected individuals than individuals do of system. It's a loophole, an simple escape clause, a technicality that anyone can mine. This won't last. Underwriters aren't all half-wits. They already know there's little risk and too much to gain by keeping you behind the wheel, from which they sop the most revenue, as well as spreading fears instead of facts. Canceling your policy would be

doing you a favor, since, if you don't drive at all, you don't need them either.

Sensing logic and suitably putting it into practice are two separate things altogether. There are constraints to overcome as well as a willingness to make yourself a target of hatred. Bicyclists are discriminated against by motoring bigots, even employers, who make no special accommodations for bike commuters, as they do motorists. Especially bad was working where they cater to automotive industry. Coworkers view you as a traitor for not wantonly consuming car products and therefore contributing to corporate survival. Couldn't imagine how he got away with it for 4 whole years, but it caught up with him. If you don't run in step with herd, you get trampled. Iconoclasts don't harmonize with a chorus, so are asked to shut up. Those who don't sing get no supper. Many like-minded folk shared this same dirge, out of work during an administration bent on oil consumerism and unbridled spending into a \$9 trillion deficit. That's America's vulnerable underbelly.

Prejudice is made manifest in many ways, overt and subtle. Took his family on a biking holiday on Cape Cod. Did some of the short paths and drove in between, sort of like cafe racing without booze. It was ride, rack 3 bikes, drive, visit shops, drive, unrack, bike again, repeat. So, on MA-28 in East Falmouth, while girls were bargaining at Christmas Store, he reckoned he'd better go around corner for gasoline. Pulled up to last pump, as one does to leave room for cars behind, at a Scallop Station, which seemed pretty quiet compared to other stations nearby. Wanted to get back quick before girls were done. But that's not what happened.

When he went to operate pump, it wouldn't give. Toggled handle and pushed buttons, but nothing. The 400 pound attendant saw him then looked away. Then attendant engaged in a conversation with someone for several minutes, just ignoring him. He kept trying and waving, hoping he'd sent a sign. Finally, as he walked over, Fattie looked up, making a gesture pointing to his chubby hand, "Pay me first." So few stations require this, thought it odd. Money, admission ticket for everything, must redeem you here 1st and foremost. Where else do you pay before making your selection? Wouldn't be prudent.

So he went in and was greeted with an insincere, "How are we doing today?" If ice breakers don't care to know, why do they ask?

"Not good," handing over a \$20. "Don't know how much I'll use. Be back for change," he said, went out, and filled up.

When he returned, Mr. Beach Ball had his change ready, grinning smugly. Didn't even have to say it, "Stupid tourist!"

So he countered, "You should have a sign up if you want to be paid beforehand," you podunk yokel, he might have added if not the master of his emotions and quite sure nobody ever wins confrontations with locals who squawk all day on police bands.

"No, that's not it. You have bicycles on your car. I don't set pump when I, ah, can't read your plate. What do you think I was talking about to that other guy?"

Now, how this station is set up, you can hardly see anyone's plate at any pump position. Lardo oozed resentment over the fact his family was out doing what a corpulent sluggard disdains. Just another instance of bicyclists being treated below contempt. The horrible realization is Fatso probably harbors the same anger while driving inches from you on narrow Cape Cod roads.

"Well, then," he calmly suggested, "You ought to have a sign that says, 'Pay inside if your plate can't be read.'"

The girlish, sarcastic reply, "Yeah. We'll get right on that."

Tone in Blimpy's voice got to him a bit, but just walked away. Scallop's Board of Directors wouldn't be pleased to hear how they're being represented in Falmouth. About 1 in 3 people bicycle as well as drive. Even at a lower price, motorists didn't seem to want to fill up there. Henceforth, everywhere he'd roam, given a choice between Scallop and several others, you know which he'll pick. It won't be Texacto. When his daughter asked to use lady's rest room in Buzzard's Bay, attendant said, "Sorry, no, we just cleaned it," as if this was a legitimate excuse. Another Texacto they stopped at had no public facilities. Scallop and Texacto might survive, but competition strengthens with each poor transaction which people speak of among themselves. Greedy oil company BODs and CEOs don't care about your complaints, only ever more profits. Withholding patronage is your only option. Besides, nobody ever goes back and pays more to complete filling a tank should they underestimate total cost. Prepay stations lose profit on 2 to 3 gallons per transaction or foster credit card use and pay those penalties. Inexpensive security cameras can catch plate numbers of fuel thieves to report to authorities; after all, what can an attendant do anyway besides stand in the way and surely be harmed over someone else's profits.

Perhaps other station owners uphold brands better than this. Yet bean counters are hard at work finding ways to trim costs. Apparently, their latest victims are toilets. Coffee shops and restaurants, places offering diuretic drinks, ought by law to maintain clean restrooms. Filling stations, too, since you drive there on trips,

possibly the only other place where you surely stop on any itinerary. Is there any wonder why you see travelers pulled over behind trees? Range constricted bicyclists are always farther between infrequent public restrooms and more often behind bushes, dumpsters or fence sections. You'd think bikeway planning would at least include port-a-johns.

A boycott by America's fifty-seven million bicyclists could collapse stock value of any major corporation. Today Epsom is one of the most widely traded stocks on big board, not Royal Much, parent of Scallop Oil. Epsom had a vague reputation for philanthropy, tainted by their irresponsible handling of Valdizzy Oil Spill, which damaged sensitive fisheries and rookeries, and trying to weasel out of cleanup. One drunken ship captain and a tragedy haunts you forever. Hard to put faith in a process so fraught with ecological catastrophe and a track record of conspicuous failure. Epsom managed to post the biggest quarterly profit, \$75 billion, of any company in World history for Q4, 2005. As if actually earned, their CEO in 2006 took a half billion dollar bonus out of shareholder dividends. Corporations doing well don't serve stakeholders any better than those doing marginally. Yet they receive more public funding and tax exemptions than poor individuals collectively. Government cheese giveaways were suspended long ago.

No better than Epsom, Scallop and Texacto had skeletons in their closets, too, but perhaps better spins doctors who took advantage of Valdizzy spill to wrest away marketshare. For protesting Royal-Scallop's despoilment of tribal lands in West Africa, nonviolent activist Ken Sero-Wiwa was executed by hanging by Nigeria's military, what happens if you interfere with "progress". In America, progress confined tribes to reservations and killed buffaloes. Wiwa's martyrdom mobilized MOSOP, which has succeeded to date keeping out destructive oil production despite much pressure. Ditto ALCOA in Iceland's highlands, plans for Mexican salt mines in whale breeding coves along shores of Baja, pressure to open ANWAR to oil production, and other assaults against the few remaining environmental enclaves and sensitive habitats. Presidential energy advisor Don Doublezero's wheedling about how a tiny speck of industry won't destroy vast ANWAR made him puke. Never forget how a few football fields long tanker spilt its load, ruined leagues of shoreline, and still kills seals and shore life decades later. Meanwhile a few heroes are arguing back. It's Zurban versus turban, Bob trying to promote alternative multifuel solutions to expand market choices and stem nation's outflow of petrodollars to middle eastern totalitarian rulers who fund terrorism.

Who wanted to protect his own right to complain, publish and persist? The real costs of oil are far greater and more horrifying than consumers imagine. Activists have to endlessly thwart short term gain from permanent devastation. It would be far easier if people collectively abandoned senseless consumerism.

After all, science is no savior. As Einstein remarked, to paraphrase, "Don't make Science your God; surely it has powerful muscles but no mercy." Science must serve mankind, never be followed without question, yet never allow itself to be willfully bashed by dunces who are too quick to deny hypothetical consensus. This mess exists because society actively pursues or passively condones it, in either case, agrees without considering all of its effects. Sagan noticed how exquisitely dependent people have become on technology, yet they didn't understand it in the least. Such scenarios lead to catastrophes. Truly, machine power can't indefinitely replace manpower. You have 3 choices: Give it up, master it through full disclosure and tight regulation, or rely on someone else to keep you safe.

Too many cars: Where do they all go? Wheels of commerce are yet well greased. But take away artifice or gasoline and what have you? Cessation and chaos, no food, your way of life lost? Technology does have a way of flying out of bounds, existing because it can, regressing into harmful forms resulting in mistakes and setbacks you'd never realized. Hard to measure how much labor it does or doesn't save, and whether that makes any sense anyway.

Words were the final frontier, suited to legal battlefields of finger pointing, mass lynching, and public sentiment. Attention spans are short, however, and months and years fly by, followed by new generations. In a blur, link after link, connections are lost, reputations are wrongfully regained, then all that remain are chains and shackles to be refilled on pillories and treadmills.

