

IMAGES OF DRIVER EDUCATION IN THE '60's

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The subject of my remarks—images of driver education in the 1960's—gives me an opportunity to cover a wide variety of matters, some of which have great promise in the years ahead:

Everything's so advanced. Take medicine, for instance. Did you know that by 1970 Americans will be spending more than 18 billion dollars on medical care? And it's really doing the job too far by then it's expected that every doctor will have gotten well.

In looking into the coming decade, I hope I have discretion as well as the discernment to take a sufficiently broad look into the crystal ball. There was, I admit, a temptation as a member of the automobile industry to talk about all the exciting changes in cars that are coming. Instead, I have attempted to keep the automobile in proper perspective along with the driver, the highway and the changing face of America.

It is also necessary to admit that this business of getting properly oriented with future trends is a tricky undertaking, and one that is full of pitfalls; so I don't for a moment imply that my brief and limited comments here this morning do more than touch upon some of the more important developments and innovations which may take place during the next ten years or so.

In examining the first image of what could be, let me attempt a wide-angle view of the situation. It would be a poor crystal ball indeed which did not show the viewer a panorama of a bubbling and boiling America that from shore to shore was busy journeying out more cars, building more highways, and producing more drivers to use them than ever before. By 1980 it is estimated that three quarters of our people will live in urban centers with more than 100 million of them in the 200 major metropolitan areas and half of the anticipated 245 million population will live in suburbia.

In terms of cars I see an increase of nearly 25 million by 1970, from some 74 million to nearly 100 million.

In terms of drivers, an increase of about 16 million, from 87 million to over 100 million is anticipated.

The total of miles driven is rising at a rate that will bring it to one trillion miles per year by 1970.

And tragically, the total number of fatalities is destined to increase to more than 40,000 a year.

All this at a cost of some 8.5 billion dollars per year, up from the 6.5 we now must pay annually for our automobile accidents and related costs.

Now, let us rub the ball again and take a somewhat more detailed glance at the situation as it applies to driver education specifically. One of the most prominent things to be noted is that in 1970 there will be 4 million young people reaching the driving age each year as opposed to 2½ million now achieving this status. This is 11,000 a day; a significant figure for all of us who are concerned with the problems of improving driver education.

As I see it, some noteworthy changes will have occurred in the public school systems in the direction of increased ability to give more students better training. For example, the number of high schools offering complete courses—classroom and practice driving will increase 12 to 15 per cent, and the number of students receiving complete instruction will rise sharply from the present figure of 39 per cent to around 60 per cent by 1970.

Another important increase will be a doubling in the number of states providing financial aid to schools (from 18 to about 35); and a significant figure will be the rise from 5 to 15 in the number of states requiring driver education before licensing young drivers.

Looking ahead ten years convinces me that the number of driver education teachers will continue to grow. More important, there will be a marked improvement in the background, training and experience of a great many of them so that the quality of

instruction they give will be of a considerably higher order than it is today.

On the other hand, I see a number of teachers who are teaching driving today who will fall by the way. There will be a multitude of reasons for this fallout. Among these are: the decision by more and more smart administrators to strengthen their driving program by eliminating the unenthusiastic, incompetent teacher (as far as DE is concerned, that is) who was just looking for an extra job weekends or summers; the realization by more school officials that driver education would be supported by the community over the long hauls only if the results in terms of well-trained students justifies it; the effect the various associations and conventions—such as this one—will have in raising the standards of acceptable competency; and by the increasingly close scrutiny which will be given to the driving course by special community civic groups whose leadership has recognized the need for improving the quality of the driving courses.

What I have just said can be applied to the professional driving school teacher or operator just as well as the high school teacher. In fact, it is my contention that over the coming years these two groups will exert a beneficial influence over each other as a result of their competitive efforts. Leadership on both sides of the picture are coming to realize the dangers of the sniping situation that in the past has too often existed. Both groups must work more harmoniously together while they are also striving to improve their individual level of operations.

Without question more of us in this business are going to awaken to the fact that driver education extends far beyond the high school. We are going to learn to adopt the approach that driver education must be made available and desirable to the 85 million drivers already on our highways. And who in the community is the natural and logical leader in such a movement? Right! The driver education teacher. The one, that is, who has sufficient vision to project his concept of his job beyond the narrow confines of the high school where he now teaches.

Like the average duffer on the golf course or the 20-year bowler who still has

a 150 average, all but about 3 per cent of the licensed drivers on the road have a great deal to learn about the field of advanced driving techniques. It is just not the kind of thing most people learn by experience. For example, how to space properly, or correct use of the rear view mirror is still a mystery to most people. We must find effective means of communicating the necessary additional skills and attitudes to the millions of motorists. The smart driving teachers are going to find new opportunities that are personally productive for them as far as their pocket book is concerned, and beneficial for the community through improved traffic safety.

And now, what about the situation in our colleges and universities? Teacher training institutions offering sound basic and advanced courses for driver education teachers are expected during the next ten years to increase in number, to be better situated geographically, to possess considerably more equipment than is standard today, to have staffs whose quality is markedly higher, with curriculum standards which will be broader, stronger, and better integrated, and with more students attending them each year than is now the case.

I believe these things because of the figures and indications which point to the need for them are inescapable, as I have tried to point out in my introduction—11,000 students a day of driving age by 1970, etc. I believe these things because I have read a little about the history of the American people, and I know that they have usually, somehow, seemed to recognize certain basic situations and have managed to preserve the worthwhile things in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. And, too, I have talked personally with many people in many states, and they have convinced me of their acceptance of sound driver education as a vital and continuing part of our secondary school system. I believe that colleges and universities will have these advances in their courses because of continually growing pressure to do so. It is my opinion that they will rise to this challenge.

Another factor which can be added to the foregoing ones to account for the significant expansion in driver education during the 1960's is the growing public pressure for some kind of mass preparation of