



• Hollywood (AP)—Marlon Brando today announced that he had purchased an island in the South Pacific which would be used as a site to conduct experiments in developing alternative fuels for use in automobiles. Brando stated: "I heard about this man in England who invented a system to use chicken waste instead of gasoline in his car. I got interested in that and felt we ought to try out a lot of things."

Well, good luck, Brando. It would be fascinating to see Brando and his henchmen knee-deep in chicken dung, trying to get a Pinto to start. He and Frank Perdue ("it takes a tough man to raise a tender chicken") can get together to turn a neat profit. For years people have been looking for some way to put this plentiful product to a constructive use . . . of course, the Army uses a lot of it but I doubt they turn much of a profit by just handing it out.

Not three days after the Brando item appeared, some guy working out of a place called Flower Mound, Texas (wouldn't you know it?) named Richard Clem claimed that he had a new invention that would not only eliminate gasoline but that you wouldn't have to change your oil under 150,000 miles. Brando, Clem . . . and my Old Man. That's just the kind of scheme he was always talking about. One of my earliest memories is a scene played out between my Old Man and my Uncle Carl in our kitchen. The Old Man and Uncle Carl had just popped the tops on two fresh bottles of Foxhead Deluxe.

OLD MAN: That damn Olds is going to break me yet! Today it not only died three times in one block but I'm gettin' about four miles to a quart. Son of a bitch!

CARL (after taking a big swallow, followed immediately by aggressive stomach rumblings): You mean four miles to the gallon.

OLD MAN: I said quart. And I mean quart.

CARL: Hell, that ain't bad, figuring four quarts to the gallon . . .

OLD MAN: I'm talking about oil! I can't even

measure the gas the bastard eats. I can see the needle on the gauge actually moving. Detroit. They got a real deal going with those sons of bitches that run the oil companies and those gasoline guys.

(Author's note: This, by the way, is a cherished myth of the Archie Bunker world: that every place, everywhere, there is a "deal." This universal "deal" explains everything from heavy rain storms following moon shots to NFL pro football defeats. These "deals" are consummated by a mysterious omnipotent group called They or Them, depending on the victim's grasp of English. The believers in this canard, and they are legion, invariably also believe that they—due to their innate superior intelligence—are wise to this "deal" but they are powerless to fight it, due to yet more deals which multiply endlessly. This has become known in some psychological circles as the Consumer Advocate or Nader Complex.)

OLD MAN (opening another beer): What the hell, this beer is green. Well, lemme tell you, Carl, they really got us by the short. And I can prove it. This guy I met in the Red Rooster one night after bowling, named Howard Detweiler . . . I mighta told you about him once . . . and he told me that his cousin in Logansport, Indiana lived next door to a guy who (his voice becomes low and quivering with dramatic tension) . . . worked ten years in his basement inventing

Howard's cousin knew a guy that invented a pill to put in your gas tank to get 250 mpg . . . and you know what happened to him? He's locked up in some prison in South America

a secret pill that you could buy and . . .

CARL: You mean Howard?

OLD MAN: Why the hell don't you listen? The guy that invented the pill's name is Clarence. Howard's cousin never caught his last name. Anyhow, he invented a pill that you put right in your gas tank which mixes the gas with some enzymes (sic) or something and y'get over 250 miles to the gallon!

CARL: Holy Cowl!

OLD MAN (leaning back, savoring the moment): Yep. And not only that but y'never have to change oil. Because the engine runs so cool. Y'don't even need a carburetor. This guy figures that by using the pill your average car would last maybe 70 or 80 years before it was through.

CARL: Boy! I sure would like to get about a dozen of them pills to throw in the back end of that damn Buick. Sometimes I can't even see what's behind me for all the smoke pourin' out, and . . .

OLD MAN: Are you kidding? You don't think

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them bastards would let that one out, do you? Not on your life.

CARL: Why not?

OLD MAN: Boy, how dumb can you get? Lemme tell you, first of all they got a deal with them big oil guys. That pill will put every oil company out of business overnight. So, the politicians make a deal with the oil guys . . . how do you think they get elected? And Detroit makes a deal with the politicians, and naturally, guess who gets it in the ass again, just like always?

(Carl sits nodding his head in stunned wonderment while industriously working the bottle opener.)

CARL: How come this guy Clarence doesn't put 'em on the market?

OLD MAN: Geez. You sure don't know which end is up. They bought him out.

CARL: Bought him out? What for?

OLD MAN: So's they could keep the pill off the market, Stupid. Howard's cousin says they got it locked up in a safe right now, in Detroit. And then you know what happened to the guy that invented it? You know what happened to him? (The Old Man pauses dramatically.) I'll tell you what happened to him. He disappeared. Howard's cousin figures they got him locked up in some prison in South America.

CARL (in a questioning voice): It seems to me that if some man invented a pill like that—why he'd be a billionaire overnight. And it would be hard for anyone to buy him out when that happened.

OLD MAN (in a voice dripping with scorn): Look, you don't understand these things.

CARL: By the way, what the hell ever happened to the White Sox pitching staff? How come they traded Rube, when . . .

OLD MAN: Are you kidding? Listen, that manager has got a deal going with the Yankees, and if he traded Rube to 'em, they'd give that nitwit a job when he got fired from the Sox. Everybody knows that.

We mercifully conclude the scene at this point. But I am fully aware that this little drama is being played even now in countless bars and kitchens. It has all the classic mythic qualities: unnamed evil, doomed virtue and innocent victims. It's *Billy Budd* all over again. Richard Clem, who runs his car on vegetable oil and guarantees 150,000 miles between oil changes and the English farmer who operates his Anglia on chicken dung join an historic procession of dreamers who spent lives and fortunes trying to crack the problem of Perpetual Motion. The lure and the undeniable attraction of anything that promises to solve all problems is universal. Likewise, the belief that parallels it, that there are evil forces who, for their own sinister reasons, block the realization of utopia at every turn is also universal. No doubt, C/D will be deluged with letters, all denouncing me for my naïveté while implying they not only personally knew Howard's cousin, but once met the man who invented the pill, in person. Good luck, Marlon, with your chicken shit.