



• *Highway Evangelist*, or *H.E.* as its readers call it, is published in Waterdown, Ontario, Canada, and Wyoming, Michigan. It is a monthly newspaper that very few people outside of long-haul truckers have ever seen. It is filled with stories of truck drivers who began life drinking and raising hell and then one day "... by divine Providence met Bonnie my beautiful wife, who was working as a waitress in Boar Bristle, Tennessee," saw the Light of the Lord, and have been driving down God's Highway ever since. This stuff is straight out of any one of five Dave Dudley albums about truck drivin' men. There is a country song called "A Tombstone Every Mile" about a highway up in Maine that kills truckers off like flies. If you read *H.E.*, you will damn well see that this is no joke. It is filled with horror stories that would make anyone get religion damn quick, if he survived. For example, "Floyd was prompted to accept Christ after a few near-misses on the 401 last winter in driving ice storms. 'There was a pile-up outside of Oakville, about a dozen vehicles, but I got her stopped crosswise and could reach out and touch the tractor-trailer that was jackknifed and burning alongside of me.'" After that, he began going to church regular. Floyd is shown scowling into the camera with his giant rig behind him. Elvin Hess, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, goes into more detail with his narrow escape, which happened on hilly Route 144.

"I was climbing this mountain at about 10 mph, grossing 70,000 lbs., with a lot of cars behind me. I was about halfway up, when all of a sudden my air buzzer came on. It was a complete surprise. A shot of fear zipped through me. My air pressure gauge was coming down very fast. I immediately called on my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Everything was happening fast, and there was no place to go. No shoulder, a mountain full of trees on my left. Going down, straight in back of me, a whole row of cars and a town full of people at the bottom of the mountain.

I prayed. As I prayed this prayer, I looked at the air gauge. The gauge immediately stopped falling. My prayer was answered." Elvin is shown standing proudly in front of his miraculous GMC 4400. His wife is wearing white wedgies.

All is not peril and miraculous salvation in *H.E.*, however. For example, there is the story of Mrs. Beth Nordby of Blackstone, Massachusetts, who holds Chauffeur License #3 for tractor-trailers and semis. She is a silver-haired grandmother and a dedicated heavy truck operator. "I have driven Triplexes, 10-speed Roadrangers, two-axle, 10-speed Hi-Los, and the new 5-speed Macks." Now there's a woman for you. There aren't many of you, I'll bet, who even know what the hell a 10-speed Hi-Lo is, much less know how to drive the bastard. That's one thing reading *H.E.* gives you: the sobering feeling that you don't know a hell of a lot about all that stuff that's roaring over the highways. At least not as much as you thought you knew. It is very educational. For example, in a boxed feature (with photo), Ed Jaworski and Jerry Klauck of Waukish, Wisconsin, are shown with their new "1973 110-inch Kenworth, with the 350 Cummins NTC motor." The Kenworth strikes the same chord in the soul of a trucker as a Lotus Elan does to sports car fanatics. Not long ago I pulled up next to one at a light. I was driving my Morgan drophead, and the driver grinned down at me from his cab, which looked about eight stories high.

"Nice piece you got there, buddy," he

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can now be found
on the newsstands
right next to
Reader's Digest . . .
not so with
Highway Evangelist

shouted over the menacing growl of the idling diesel.

"You, too," I yelled back. "Kenworth?"

"Seventy-one. The best on the road, 10-speed. Pull a freight train."

The light changed, the diesel thundered, and the driver grinned as he boomed out toward the Florida Turnpike. Being a long-haul trucker is sort of a religion in itself, something like being a deep-water sailor. Both are lonely, dangerous jobs that take a man away from home for months on end. There's a Country & Western song called "Long Haul Widow," sung by a girl, where she says, "Please, darlin', get a shorter haul." No doubt because her husband, the trucker, has been slippin' around with Betty the Waitress, who is the heroine of another song. "Listen, Betty, I'm singin' your song," is sung by a trucker to Betty, the waitress at

the truck stop, who's been played fast and loose by another trucker who just sweet talks all the waitresses across the country and then roars out across the night, leaving them lonely next to the jukebox. Truckers and waitresses just naturally go together. And it ain't an easy life for either of them. There's one song about a guy who's got a wife at each end of his long distance haul. Just like Casey Jones the trainman who died at the throttle of Old 98. And by the way, Casey has his counterpart in C&W trucker mythology. There is the story of Joe, who roams the highways in "The Phantom 409," a ghost rig. Joe died in a flaming wreck avoiding a stalled school bus—which somehow doesn't have quite the flavor of Casey Jones highballing Old 98 down that long grade into oblivion. But nevertheless, The Phantom 409 rides the highways.

In some ways the trucker has taken over the place of the railroad man in C&W music. Jimmy Rodgers, the late Singing Brakeman, has been supplanted by Dave Dudley and his truckers' ballads, and the songs range from the ridiculous to the sublime, ranging from "I'm a Truck" which is actually *sung* by a truck which complains that it is "passed by a Volkswagen bus full of hippies" because the driver missed a gear, "and of course blames it on me." It then later gripes because its stupid trucker has Buck Owens tapes in the deck instead of Merle Haggard—which conclusively proves that the truck knows a hell of a lot more about C&W than its driver. Then there is "White Line Fever," written and sung by Haggard himself. This is already a classic:

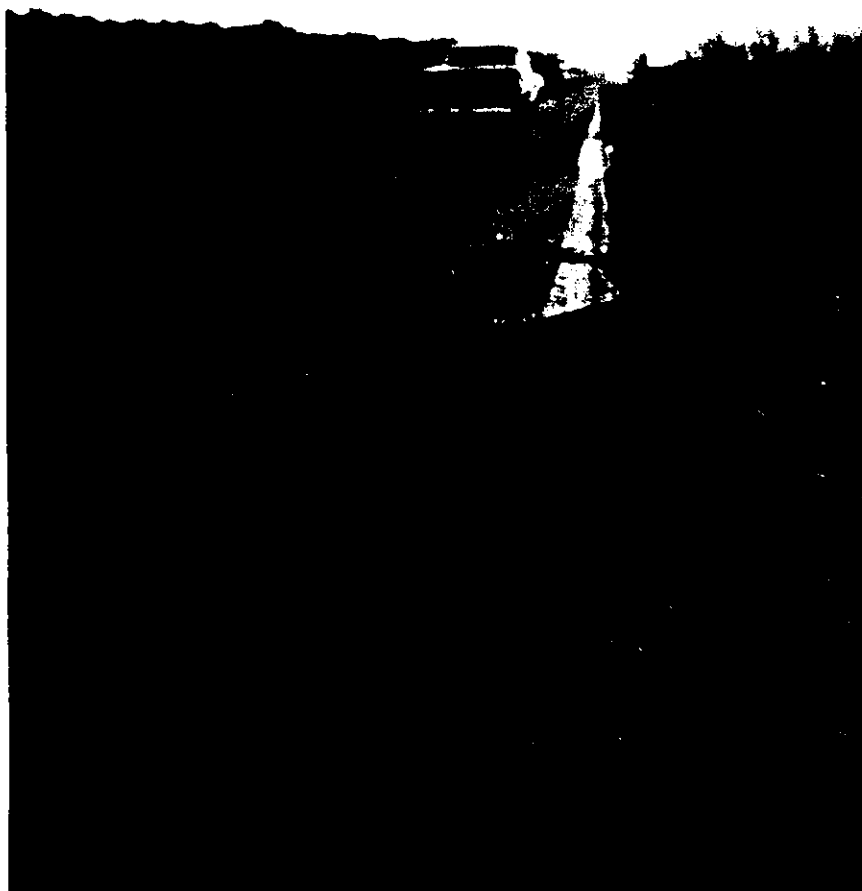
"The years go flyin' by like the highline poles.

Guess I'll die with this fever in my soul."

I'm sitting there in a truck stop in Wheeling, West Virginia, home of WWVA with Country Jamboree—the biggest C&W station on the East Coast—having my second cup of coffee and listening to the roar of the rigs as they pull out into the night drowning out the radio. I'm reading my new copy of *Highway Evangelist* as I strain to hear the music. On page 12, "Gear Box Groanings" has a list of truckers suffering the miseries. For example, Joe Biro, driver, Roadway Express, Akron, Ohio, has back trouble and Travis Trive, driver, Bulk Carriers Ltd., Toronto, has a pinched nerve in his leg. Page 13 has a story about "Dr. N. Stowell, a leading nuclear scientist in the U.S.A., who said in a radio broadcast, 'With a delicate instrument we can measure the wavelength of the brain. Recently we checked the emanations from the brain of a woman near death. She was praying. The meter reached 500 positive. This was 55 times the power registered by a 55-kilowatt broadcast station sending messages around the world. In the same hospital we trained the meter on the brain of a man cursing God. The meter pegged 500 minus.'"

It's stuff like this that makes you think. The piece was entitled "Science Measures

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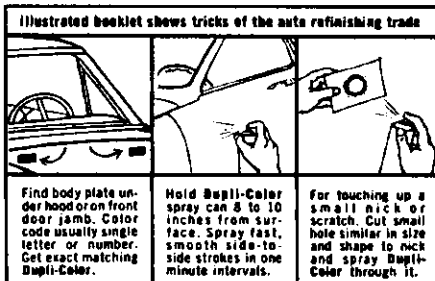
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Prayer." There is a chatty little story about "Bill Stone, 27-year veteran of hard slugging on the road, who has hauled everything from live beef to hanging beef and thousands of items in between." His better half, Violet, "after a quarter of a century standing at the window waiting for her man to come home, decided to get into the saddle with her husband and be his helpmate on the road. She's having a ball, traveling and working together with her husband for Red Ball Transit for the past two years. They drive a 1970 Dodge twin-screw."

And then there's Eddie, Cindy, George, Rosie and California Slim, who guard the SSP Truck Equipment yards against battery rustlers. They are geese, and before they went to work for SSP, the company was losing ten batteries a month. It is now down to zero. "These geese are mean and will go after anything that moves, especially California Slim. He's all neck, legs and heart. He thinks he can fight anything. He don't know he only weighs 7 lbs." It's this kind of writing that makes *Highway Evangelist* an underground classic. There are some great lines in *H.E.* that get right down and say it. For example, "I need the screws tightened in my head so I can think and do right." That's just the kind of line that would never occur to Norman Mailer. It would look great engraved on a plaque and hung in an analyst's office. I was sitting there snickering over that one when a squat driver eased onto the stool next to me. He glanced over and spotted my *Highway Evangelist*.

"You ever read this?" I asked.

"Yeah, I see it around once in a while. I don't go much for that religion stuff."

"Did you read about the guy who lost his air pressure on a grade and . . . ?"

"Yeah," he interrupted me as he waved at the waitress for some coffee. "I don't know whether prayin' does you much good when you got a busted air hose, but it might help if you just got a slow leak." He laughed noisily. "Let me tell you this, I lost my air one time on a grade outside of Altoona, goin' downhill in the rain in a big White COE. Tried everything but draggin' my foot out the door. Prayed for maybe two miles."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well, went through a Bull Durham sign, two barns and a haystack. Finally come to rest in a creek in 4 feet of water."

"Do you think the praying helped?"

"The insurance guy didn't think so. Said we shoulda checked them air hoses. Then we wouldn't of had to do no prayin'."

"Well, keep her rollin'," I said as I paid my bill and started for the door.

"See you around, buddy." I headed down the turnpike imagining I was at the wheel of a 13-speed Roadranger hauling 70,000 lbs. bound for Cheyenne. I had to make it by dawn. I had only 2360 miles to go, but I knew my Roadranger could do it. With God's help.