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One shortcut from a lunchroom to the inn in Santa Fe cost 165 bucks for a stopover to look in a travel store's window. Odds at the moment of blowing that much dough for the world's lightest suitcase, or that much dough for a suitcase factory manufacturing the lightest suitcase in the world, equaled the possibility a U.S. Congressman might vote against a pay raise after accepting a vacation bonus.

In France, they call window-shopping "licking the glass." Out at Mertzon, we keep all the merchandise out of the sun, or hold indoor garage sales, so no catchy language develops in that small town to jeer at human weakness.

The travel store had no business unless you counted an ol' gent walking about with his hands deep in his pants pockets as business. Seventy-two hours previous set the stage, when my pal and I lugged our old grips up a stair-flight at the Guadalupe Inn.

The roll-on wheels hit every third step for short respites from the overload. Each suitcase's wheels ran free against tempered concrete steps. Jettison would have been my choice, but pride kept spurring the final ascent. Many cannon balls fired at Gettysburg weighed less than our combined loads.

Thus primed, we rolled the new bags around the aisles, mesmerized by the soft whish the new rubber wheels made against the Spanish tiles. Santa Fe merchants hold a built-in advantage. Thin mountain air makes lowlanders feel good — rich and immortal.

Nowhere on the continent does the right hip pocket in men's pants grow so warm from the credit cards eager to imprint. Women swear purse zippers not only open smoother in Santa Fe, but also the purse gaps open wider for quick-draw access.

My pal began to ask questions, like who stood behind the bag, the store or the manufacturer? Back from a spin over by the walking stick and ice piton section through beach towels and parkas department, it sounded so foolish to waste time owning this black, shiny marvel on a warranty question.

Ol' Quick Wit, the clerk, told her the manufacturer offered the best place to make a claim. See what I mean by mountain air? Before we realized that he was one of those slick guys who win at Bingo before the numbers are drawn, we'd slid the plastic over the counter to complete the deal at \$165 apiece.

The two new bags rode side by side empty in the car's trunk back to Texas. Once at the ranch, it became

noticeable that mine lacked the zip on stone sidewalks and shag carpet that it had on tile and concrete.

To compare, I unpacked the old bag and placed the contents in the new one. For the two-week trip, the selections for clothes and gear covered all climate and altitude variations known to Northern New Mexico winter and summer, including any freak changes caused by the atomic tests at White Sands. Rearranged in the deeper, wider new bag, space opened to add my walking shoes on each end, a large print *Webster's Dictionary* in the middle, and a portion of my arrowhead collection in a pocket.

Quick passes over the bathroom scales showed the old bag outweighed the featherweight by a whopping 3.3 pounds. Three point three may be hard to visualize until you recall that two slices of granny's fruitcake weighed between three and three and a half pounds before the brandy evaporated.

Further examination showed the axle length on the old model to be 13 inches and the wheelbase to be two inches compared to a 17-inch axle width and a one and three-quarter inch base for the new one. Big difference was the 12 inch wide cast iron handle for the old bag and the 17 inch wide aluminum handle on the new one. Accustomed to steering the narrow handle, I knew it was going to be a big change to the wider bar.

The real test came on the first trip through security by air to Phoenix. At the San Angelo departure, the indifferent agent must have been a nature boy who wandered in from ol' man Mark Nasworthy's pasture across the road from the airport the day before, for all he offered or said about the new bags.

Spoiled by the courteous attention from previous agents, it wouldn't have been a surprise if my first new bag in 20 years ended up in the Northwest Territory instead of Northwest Arizona under the direction of that guy. His looks made you think he was going to stamp your hand to get back in the door at a honky-tonk instead of issuing boarding passes.

But to move on, "The World's Lightest Bag" steered too wide to make Starbuck's at Phoenix the first try. "The World's Lightest Bag" high-centered on the ramp to Alamo car rental.

And in the end, "The World's Lightest Bag" rode on the back seat of Alamo's most economical rental car because it was too large to fit in the trunk.