

SEPTEMBER 15, 1977

For diversion, a few of us gather at the gas station on the south end of Mertzon. Along late in the afternoon, as many as four or five hombres can be found sitting around on boxes and tires, drinking a few beers and visiting to end the day.

One 12 inch oscillating fan cools the tin building. In the winter months, a small butane heater knocks the stuffiness of a 16X16 room by often raising the temperature five degrees above the outside reading. In spite of the heat or the cold, it is a most agreeable place to bemoan the trials of our business and the disappointments of the game.

The owner and the building are of the same mold. He is a car doctor by choice. He has a degree from an agriculture college. I've never thought to ask why he didn't choose, say, the comforts and glories of a civil service job over the arduous work of hammering cross-threaded bolts off torn-up ranch pickups. The truth is that I'd probably do as well asking the old garage itself why it didn't remain a fancy car dealership from the old days instead of turning into an indifferent shade and unsatisfactory windbreak for a mechanic who is so independent of thought and nature that he'd make the farmers of the Constitution think they were the great compromisers of all time.

To further state the truth, questions concerning his private or public business are out of order. To carry the truth into infinity (and this is getting impossible), I stay too mad at him for failing to treat my mechanical failures in the same light of the fate of the entire agriculture industry that I don't care whether he skins his knuckles so bad that his confounded college cancels his degree and brands him a misfit in academic or unpapered society.

Astounding records have been set at his garage. The fastest overhaul job ever done in Texas was completed there. I'm unsure of the exact date. It was the season the Dallas Cowboys were doing so good is all I remember.

Anyway, he completely rebuilt his wife's automobile in 18 days and six hours. You may not think that's fast. Allow me, please, to explain. Eighteen days were used in promising her he'd fix her car the next morning. Fifteen minutes of the six hours were spent dispatching his helpers for parts to calm the furry of his redheaded wife that had stationed herself in a point of command in the front office. The remaining time was a blurred flurry of flying wrenches and screaming grinders that surpassed the fastest repair job ever completed in the pits in the critical minutes of the Indianapolis races.

Longest shutdown time was also recorded on his premises, involving a German car owned by his neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Goat Whiskers the Younger. Invoices of a San Angelo wrecker show the lot the 14th day of November, 1971. By Christmas of 1972, total activity on the case, excluding checking the anti-freeze, was a report to the sheriff's office that the fashionable hood ornament had been stolen. Sometime late last year, a newer model wrecker reclaimed the car for a destination to delicate for me to pursue.

I could continue on and on in the saga of my clubroom. Important men storm in, demanding service. They slink out glad to be on the appointment book. I loaf there completely in awe of this last outpost of free enterprise. The very President of the United States has a brother who is a gasoline grinder. Mertzon is on the maps. I might be sitting in the right place in spite of my wife's objections.