

EDITORIAL: THE ROAD TEST

FIRST POPULARIZED by the British auto magazines of the Thirties, the road test has become a staple item in today's automotive press. These specific product reports range from the brief "I drove" squibs in daily newspapers to the complete technical analysis and comprehensive performance evaluation in such magazines as *Car Life*. Their value ranges from the ridiculous to the documental but there is little doubt that that part of the public which is enthusiastic about the cars it buys utilizes the road test report as some sort of purchasing guideline.

The problem is, as with political reporting, in finding someone to believe. For any given car, a reader can find a number of printed opinions. Unfortunately, these comments often are only as good as the commentator. If he is forthright, knowledgeable and unbiased, the report is valid. If he isn't, then the road test report is worthless. But, how is the reader to tell?

The key perhaps lies in his reading and comparing of several reports on any one car. Then the reader must assess the validity of these in terms of his own observations and knowledge. If he finds one source particularly accurate and valid, he builds up a trust in that source's views—he knows he can accept what he reads.

It then is the duty of the publication to make its reports as meaningful and truthful as possible. It owes accuracy and validity to that reader. It must nurture his trust with honesty and reason.

There are many techniques for accomplishing the road test; our newspaper friends do it on weekend drives of varying lengths and to varied destinations. Some of our magazine confreres prefer the "quickie" evaluation of prototype models on the manufacturer's proving grounds so that they can be "first" with the test. Others have been known to take a car and drive it for a month or more, then reprint the press releases. However, there are some of our more knowledgeable friends who do a remarkably good job of putting a car into its proper perspective, and these we envy and strive to surpass.

Aware of its vast responsibility to our enthusiast/consumer/readers, *Car Life*, from the time of its acquisition by Bond Publishing Co., has established standards of testing which we hope will guarantee the confidence and acceptance of our readers. We keep upgrading these standards in the continuing effort to make the test reports more meaningful. Note in the two tests in this issue a new, and far more comprehensive, data panel. It's part of our philosophy of telling the

reader as much as possible about the cars we examine.

CL also does not attempt to do tests on the basis of proving grounds data. We will present a brief report and perhaps driving impressions or a short table of acceleration figures, on a 1-hour proving grounds ride, but never a full-blown road test. Proving grounds cars are generally prototypes and seldom are truly representative of the finished, in-the-showroom, product. When we get a car for testing, it must be a production-line model. We keep it a minimum of one week, but more often two weeks as we have found you have to "live" with a car to really uncover its virtues and vices. One of our future tests will involve driving out the warranty, i.e., 24,000 miles, on a touted new 6-cyl. car.

Acceleration (and braking) performance for CL is measured on dragstrips of certified length. Speedometer corrections are calculated against measured miles. Handling and driving evaluations are made over a set of roads which encompass virtually all surface conditions—except snow and ice. We would try those, too, were they available. CL tests involve utilizing the same people, to provide one more constant in the quest for accuracy.

The road test, then, is as accurate as its reporters. It can be, if it is honest and well-founded, too, either an endorsement or a condemnation of a particular car. And, there are still cars being manufactured which can earn either appellation.

Car Life does not profess to "like" any particular make, model or nationality of automobile unless the combined evaluation of the entire staff says "here is an interesting car; here is a car that does what we think it's supposed to do." Nor do we take potshots or make criticisms without justification. Again, such points are subjected to group evaluation, rather than risk the possibility of bias by an individual. *Car Life* road tests are unsigned—i.e., they carry no author's byline—simply because they represent the collective view of the magazine rather than that of an individual.

We are particularly fortunate in having no external pressures applied to our road test reporting. Neither manufacturers nor their advertising agencies threaten or bribe us in an attempt to influence our reports. Those who buy pages of *Car Life* to carry advertising messages do so with the knowledge that the purchase does not entitle them to editorial influence.

Car Life's editors and staff would have it no other way. We feel we can best serve our readers by being responsible to them. Accuracy, honesty and thoroughness shall continue to be our policy. —The Editors