

Women Drivers---

I Don't Understand 'Em

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By HOMER CROY

Author of
"WEST OF THE WATER-TOWER"

WHEN I was young and had a pair of neat military hairbrushes on my dresser, I understood women. But now that I am getting along, and see the brushes only of a spring when my wife decides to straighten things around, I realize how little I knew in those days.

The reason I thought I understood women was because when I was in college I specialized in psychology. It was my hobby, and there was nothing I liked better than to unscrew a brain and see what made it work. Psychology, at that time, was called just plain psychology; then it became psychoanalysis, and I trailed along behind it. Now that the same old thing is called behaviorism, I still follow it. I was getting along pretty well at my job of understanding women—in a few years I expected to be in the second reader—and then along came the automobile and upset everything. Any woman is hard enough to understand, but put a steering wheel in her hand and nobody can understand her. Freud himself would flunk.

And the queer things women do when you put a steering wheel into their hands! It simply knocks the socks off psychology. A man may have been married to a woman for years and think he knows all about her (a common delusion), and he gets her a car and the wife starts to drive. Then the poor husband wakes up to find that he is still cutting out flowers and fairies and playing in the sandbox. It will be months before he can go to the blackboard.

When a woman gets into a car she leaves reason at home. And the key isn't under the doormat. I don't know where it is; nobody knows where it is. A man drives a car by knowledge, but a woman drives it by faith. She doesn't stop to reason out that this gear connects with that camshaft, which in turn operates the gadget. No. She was told by the man who gave her the driving lessons that if she stepped on this pedal the car will go ahead. That is all she thinks necessary to know about the car. Push pedal, and car will go ahead. How or why it goes ahead is of no more interest to her than peanut raising in Peru. If she pushes and the rear axle breaks, or the gears are stripped, why the car simply is no good.

A woman will climb confidently into a car and start gaily off, knowing

no more about the car than a Chinaman does of a Vitaphone, and go blithely sailing through traffic that would give her husband a congestive chill. It would be like a landlubber, who had never been in anything more complicated than a rowboat, suddenly being given command of the Leviathan. The Lord's duties must have doubled since women took up driving.

The car turns off the main road, say, and runs into a mud hole and gets stuck.

"That isn't much of a mud hole," she says, "—only about knee deep."

The things that women drivers do and get away with—is amazing. It simply knocks Logic in the head. For instance, in my neighborhood is a mean Judge. The man is never so happy, so radiantly elated as when he is hanging a fine on somebody. Nero playing when Rome burned would look as gloomy as Buster Keaton in comparison to the Judge when he is handing out a speed fine. Excuses don't go; if the officer who has given the summons says that the person was going thirty miles an hour, Clarence Darrow himself couldn't be of the slightest help to that person. A fine is coming as certain as Christmas. And it makes no difference who the person is.

One day a woman friend of mine who drives a speedy car and who occasionally likes to see how far the figures will go, went clipping through that town.

The faithful motorcycle policeman drew up alongside her and led her to the Judge. Fifty-two miles an hour. That was all the Judge wanted to know. Automatically he picked up the pen to assess the fine. And then the good lady spoke:

"She simply knocks the socks off Psychology. The Lord's duties must have doubled."

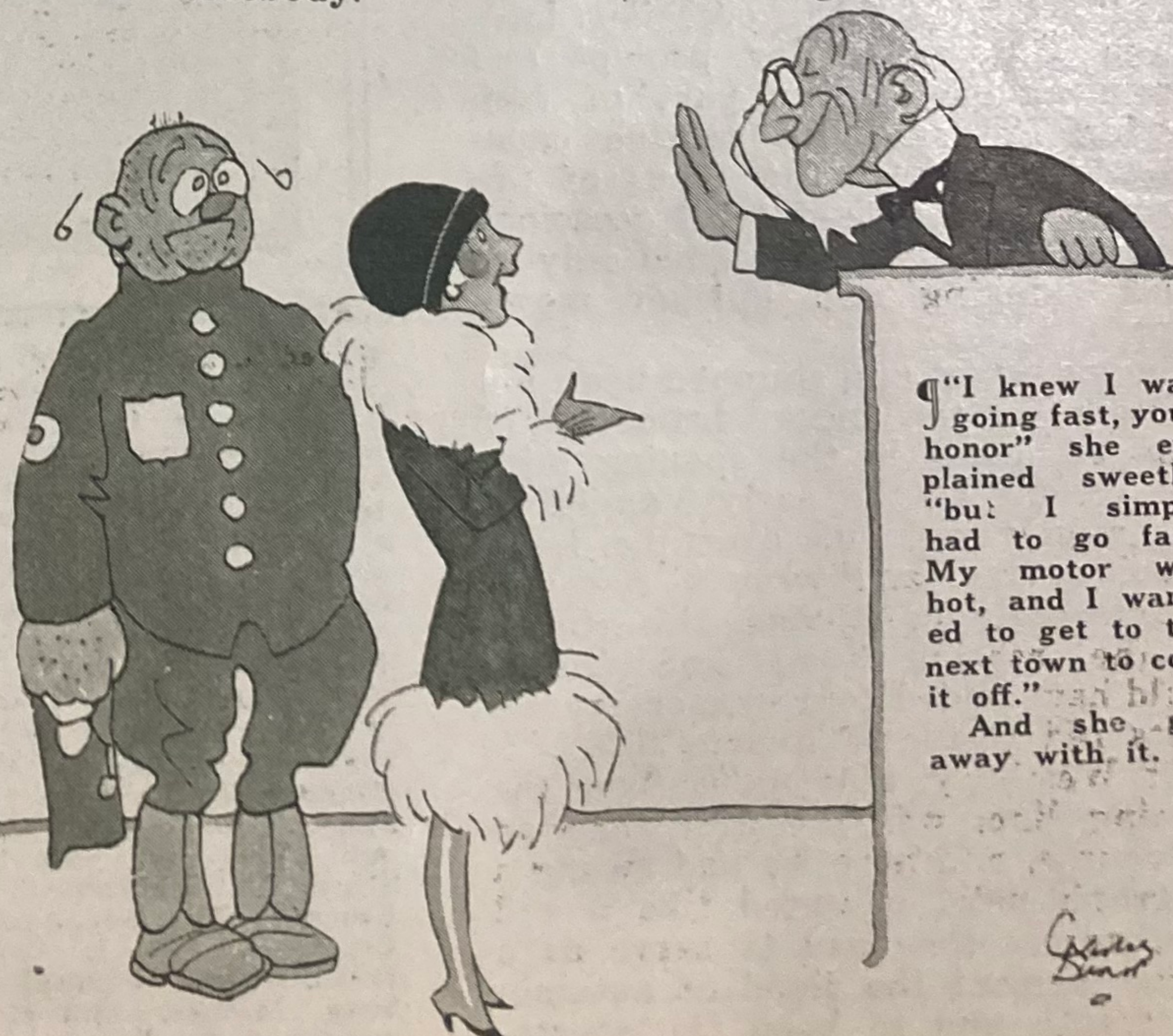
"I knew I was going fast, Your Honor," she explained in her sweetest voice, "but I simply had to go fast. My motor was hot and I wanted

to get to the next town to cool it off."

And she smiled upon the great and noble man—and got away with it! She didn't have to pay a cent. No, I don't understand 'em. If a man had put up that excuse, the Judge would simply have called the violent ward and told them to rush three of their strongest keepers.

I used to think that I understood women before the automobile came along. I thought that women were afraid to go out at night, especially girls, and I supposed they would always be that way. Why, it was a terrible calamity if the daughter of a household was not back by ten o'clock. The poor, distraught mother

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WOMEN DRIVERS

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walked up and down the floor wringing her hands, while the father was on the telephone giving the police department the devil for not getting out the whole force. Nowadays, if a daughter gets in before midnight, the mother climbs out of bed, turns on the light, and calls the doctor. Then she asks where it happened.

Why, I knew so little about women that I thought they would never take to machinery. But now, when you go out, whom do you see behind the wheel? It used to be that the person had a cigar, but that day has passed. The lipstick has put the cigar out of business as a motor accessory. After a while a lipstick manufacturer will have to advertise, "This lipstick guaranteed for 10,000 miles." Some day a smart manufacturer will come along and invent a lipstick on the end of a weight so that the lady can pull it out, fix up Cupid's bow as she drives along, let loose of the lipstick and it will pop back into the upholstery.

Another thing about women drivers that I don't understand is the way they take chances. At home, and in personal affairs, they never take a chance. They will work for hours getting just the exact line to a dress—such marvelous patience. It would be a calamity if this button was the sixteenth of an inch too far over. Chance is a word that is not in her dictionary. But when she climbs into a car and starts out in traffic she has a faith that would make St. Francis of Assissi a question mark. So far as she is personally concerned, there is not another car on the road. She is sailing peacefully and quietly across the Gobi Desert. It never seems to occur to her that another car might dart out from a side road and mess things up. She comes to a right turn. A man will hug his side of the road, but does the lady hug? I mean, of course,—shame on you, shame on you! No, the lady turns clear over to the left side of the road to make the right turn, absolutely convinced that no car will suddenly dart out and make a scene.

A policeman steps out, let us say. What does the man driving the car say? Nothing. He sits and takes it while the officer gets out his choicest adjectives and sprays them all over him.

How does the woman act? She has taken chances that the man wouldn't take for the gate receipts at a world series, because she has her own way of handling the traffic officer when the time comes. She gives the officer a look that you could spread on a pancake, a look which says, "Oh, you big fine man, would you make trouble for a poor, innocent, helpless creature? I am sure such a hand-