

Hi-Fi on the Road: II

Onward and Upward For Nothing-Heads

by Joan Shepherd

Since we realize what a great feeling it is to be part of Man's climb ever upward and onward, we thought you might be interested in a few notes regarding certain unimportant developments during the progress of The Climb. Most of us are just tagging along on the trip, but that has been true throughout history. The route of The Climb has been dotted with billions of anonymous free-becs such as you and me who have limped along with the crowd, glomming onto what we could and hoping for the best but mostly

suspecting the worst. We're not exactly soreheads, since we really haven't much to be sore about, and could probably best be described as "nothing-heads," meaning neither wildly ecstatic about the state of Man nor notably alarmed about it, but, as I said, sort of just going along for the ride. Of course, "nothing-heads" could mean several things other than that, but that would be unkind and I wouldn't want to be unkind. Especially to me.

No Choice

Nothing-heads rarely cause things to come about but are the sort to whom things happen. It is not a matter of choice but of acceptance. Most nothing-heads accept, but always with reservations and usually some preliminary skirmishing, and perhaps even a small amount of cautious "naughting." But never too much. We tire quickly. Not only that, but we have a tendency to bore easily, owing to shortcomings within ourselves which we refuse to recognize, preferring to put the blame on circumstances or, most often, on "Them." "They" are the nebulous beings who cause things to happen and are blamed for everything. Excepting, of course, anything that turns out well for us, in which case we credit our good taste for finally bringing out something decent. It is to all my fellow nothing-heads that this brief note is directed.

Within a very few years, nothing-heads, soreheads, and everyone else will find that a new note has crept into the mobile en-



tertainment business. As a result of this development, new rackets will have sprung up around us and others will have quietly withered on the vine or will be so changed as to not resemble their former selves. Today, next to Burma-Shave sign-reading, the most common form of on-the-road entertainment is simply the old fashioned record-plugging disc jockey, who speaks endlessly of teen-age-type hit tunes and Once-in-a-Lifetime Offers. If the plans of a mammoth industrial concern jell as per schedule, this will not be so for much longer. In fact, a lot of things will not be so for much longer, and it has many people in the radio industry tossing in bed at night. Briefly, here is the scheme:

Every new car within a few years will be equipped at the factory with recently designed tape-playing hi-fi rigs that will be fitted into the dashboard or its equivalent. These machines will play self-threading, cartridge-packaged tapes that will simply be dropped into a slot in the dash without requiring the driver to shift his attention from the road. The tape will then play automat-

The Village Voice
August 1, 1956

ically for three hours without reloading or bother of any kind. Since it is tape, there will be no problems of needle vibration, owing to road bumps, nor will there be needle scratch, and the tapes can be played endlessly without wear. They will be small, not over 5 inches in diameter, so that many hours of program will be stored without taking up much space in the car. But here is the real kicker: a large catalogue of tapes will be available at all service stations throughout the country, and the stations will handle the tapes on either an outright sale basis or a lending system whereby the driver turns in a tape he has used for one he wants. This will be a nationwide network of distributors using standard tape throughout, and rates that will not vary.

No Commercials

The programs themselves will eventually include almost anything that can be reproduced on tape ranging from all types of music to complete plays and operas, all done by top casts and without commercial breaks. Thus it will be possible to drive along a lonely turnpike and be entertained by Olivier doing "Henry V" or Joanne James doing aesthetic mayhem, entirely by personal choice and for peanuts at that. This leaves only the news, weather, and sports open to radio, and automotive radio eventually will probably be on a subscription basis whereby the radio of a paid-up subscriber will be able to unscramble a jumbled signal while the deadhead gets only noise on his. All of this sounds highly theoretical and somewhat implausible, but remember where you read it first.

So ends the first of a series of battle reports to my fellow nothing-heads on the progress of Our Climb Onward and Upward Toward a Successful Infinity. Stay tuned for the next, and keep your rations dry.

This is the second of two articles. The first article appeared in The Voice for June 20. Mr. Shepherd, who conducts a nightly radio show for WOR, will become a bi-weekly contributor to this newspaper at the end of August. For more on his activities, see The Village Square, page 2.