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The Magazine of Michigan's Metropolis

March 31, 1974

Detroit Free Press

Our Worst Fears Realized! The Big Tire Has Rolled Free!



Detroit's Monster Tire Moves!

(Sort of a true story that'll break your heart)

By A. F. DAY
For Detroit Magazine

It was a dark and stormy night.

The following morning, Uni, the giant Uni-royal tire, decided it had had enough.

"Blimp, blimp, blimp!" Uni thought to itself as it rested, as usual, on its concrete pedestal alongside the Edsel Ford Freeway in Allen Park. "I'm sick and tired of hearing about that blasted Goodyear Blimp! That stupid helium bag gets all the attention! It's as famous as Howard Cosell!"

Uni, an attractive white-wall, had once been an internationally-known celebrity too, a fact that made the upstart blimp's fairly recent rise to fame an especially bitter pill for the big tire to swallow.

The U.S. Rubber Company had constructed Uni as a tire-shaped ferris wheel for the 1964 World's Fair at Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York. For two glorious summers, the 80-foot-diameter rubber marvel had spun happily on its axis, carrying wide-eyed humans up, around, down and up again as they sat in special baskets attached to Uni's outer tread.

"Heya, heya, heya! Ride the world's largest tire!" Uni's ticket seller had barked over and over, like some candy butcher hawking Cinnamon Devils or Orange Crush. And millions of people, both foreign and domestic, who shared a fine sense of the bizarre, did just as the ticket seller suggested — after ponying up a buck apiece, of course.

Families had snapshots of themselves taken as they stood next to the monster wheel (\$2.25 extra, including a handsome plasticine frame.) A photographer from National Geographic shot the New York skyline from atop Uni. Time magazine used the tire on the cover of its World's Fair issue, and the rubber engineer who designed Uni won \$150 on "What's My Line?"

One day, the entire clerical staff of the Russian Embassy, having received a group rate, took a ride together. Round and round spun the communist clerical workers, wolfing down hot dogs, swilling Pepsi Cola, denouncing "this gross and overstated monument to automotivistic capitalism," and giggling wildly.

Uni was the most famous advertisement in the history of the free world, or at least in the history of Madison Avenue — with the possible exception of the smoke-ring-blowing Camel cigaret sign in Times Square, which has fallen victim to a coalition of Surgeon General's Report literalists and clean air freaks.

For a small-town tire vulcanized in Akron,

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Cover and illustrations
by Nolan Ross

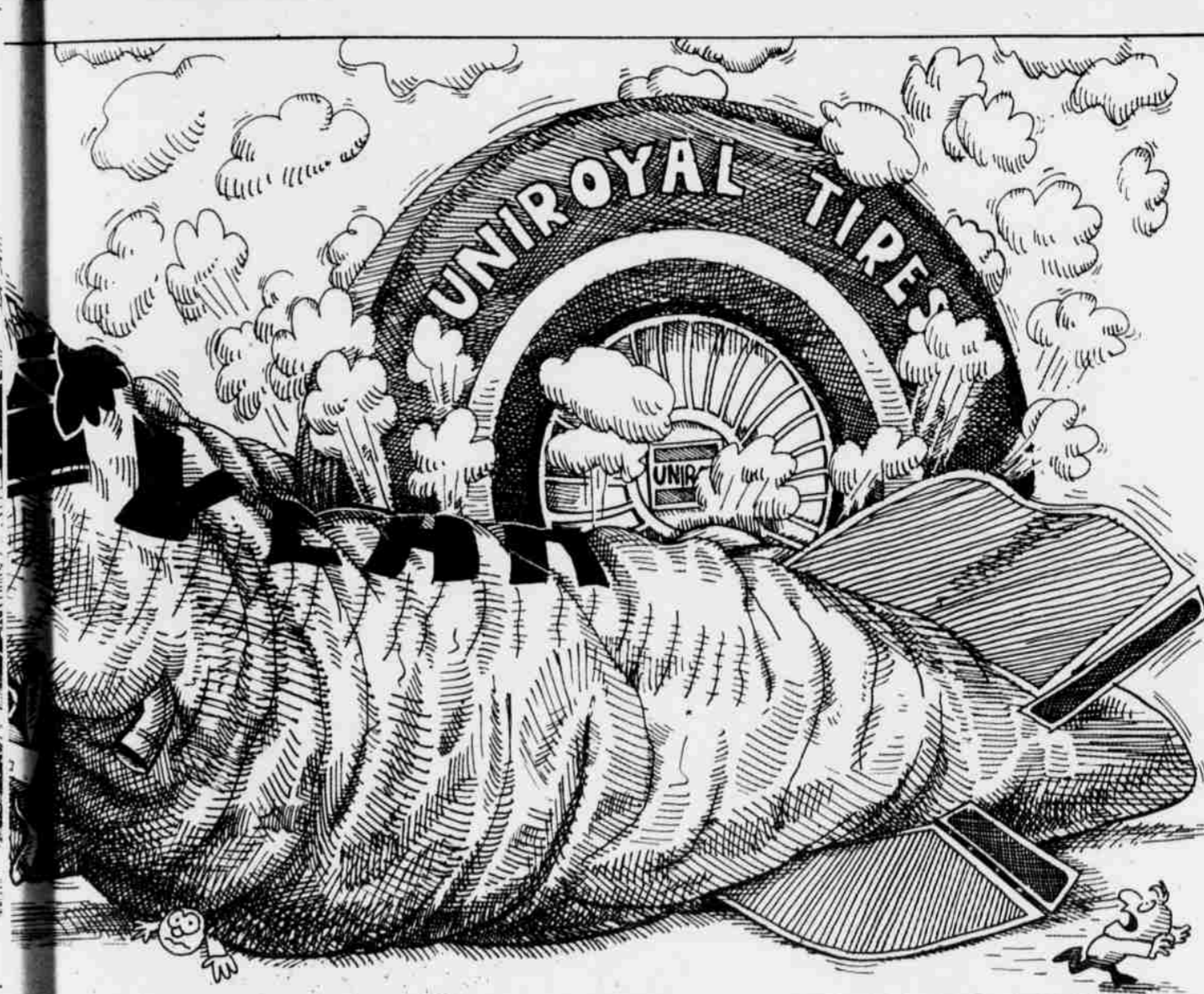
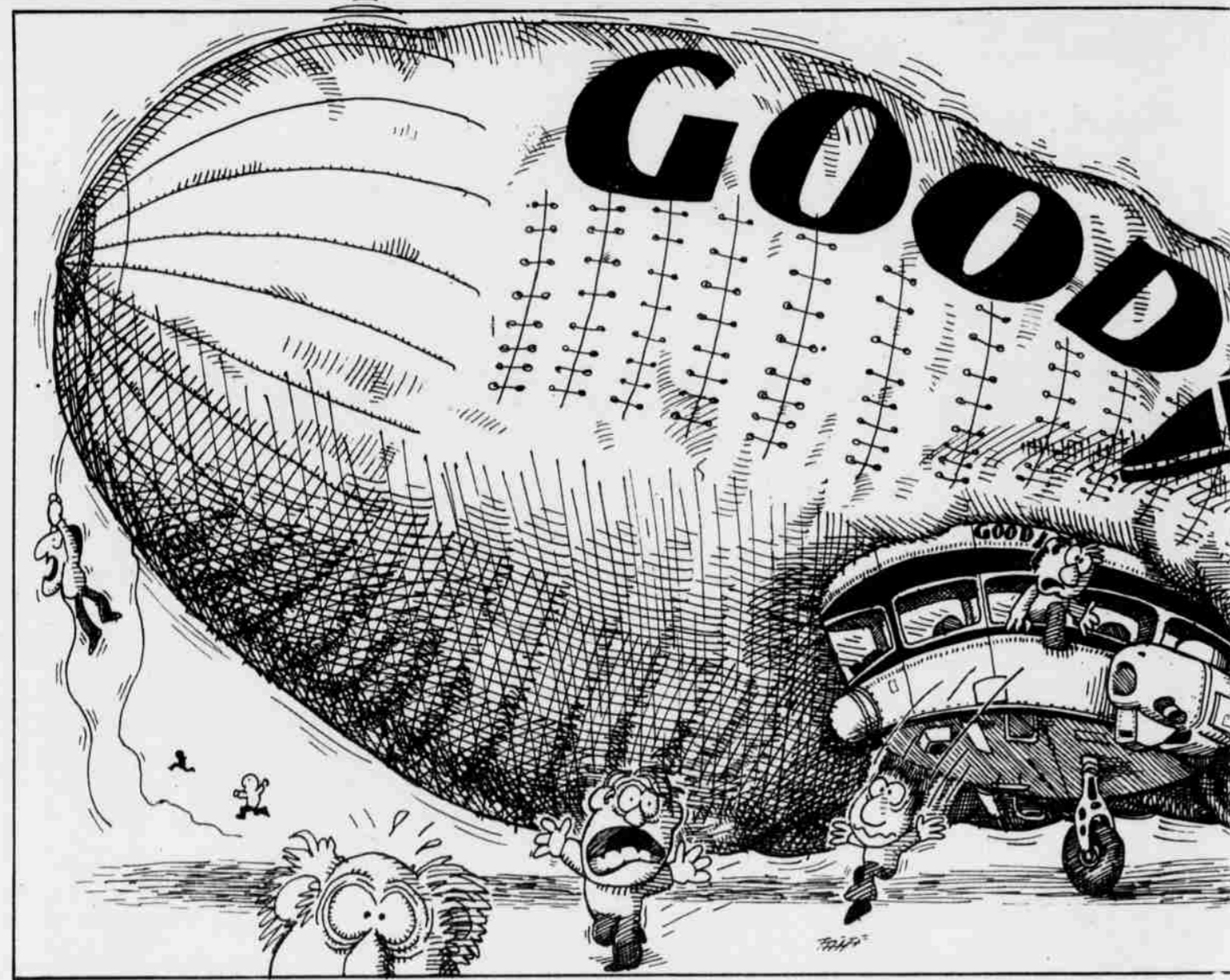


Uni Discovers The Blimp's Secret

such acclaim was heady stuff. Then the inevitable happened. The fair ended. Although Uni had sensed that the gala fete could not last *ad infinitum*, it still came as a rude shock when fair impresario Robert Moses pulled the plug.

Would Uni sit that Flushing Meadows field until its rubber cracked, and it toppled over sideways, filling up with rain water as a huge breeding ground for mosquitoes? Would some Brobdinagian juvenile delinquent with a 40-foot tire iron steal Uni's hubcap? Would an ambitious Seventh Avenue entrepreneur salvage the big wheel and slice up its treads to make the soles for a zillion pairs of hippie sandals? The future looked dark as a blackwall.

The U.S. Rubber Company bigwigs, however, had no intention of allowing such an expensive and eye-catching advertising gimmick go flat in some Queens bog. They spent \$250,000 to have Uni taken apart, trucked to Allen Park, and reassembled next to I-94, where everyone driving east into the Motor City — what better place for the gargantuan tire, after all? — would be certain to spot the thing and thus be forced, for a few seconds at least, to think Uniroyal.



Once again, Uni was a celebrity, if only locally.

The only nail in Uni's otherwise clear road to contentment and self-satisfaction was the blimp. If your lot in life is to be an advertisement for a tire company, you had darn well better be the best advertisement for a tire company in the world. Everyone knew that.

In recent years, however, the Goodyear Blimp's fame had outstripped Uni's. The key to the blimp's success, Uni knew, was in its mobility.

"How in the name of Vulcan can I compete with that idiotic gas-filled cigar when I'm stuck here in Allen Park, and it can float as it pleases all over creation!" thought Uni grumpily. "Half the motorists that pass me by think they're hallucinating anyway, and a goodly number of the rest are too worried about surviving their visit to Detroit to pay me much heed."

"But that blimp can drift to any public gathering it chooses — football games, supermarket openings, bar mitzvahs and bank robberies, you name it. Mobility — that's the key."

Uni, although no steel-belted radial, was still clever enough to know for absolute certain it had to perform one spectacular grandstand play to grab the nation's, if not the world's, fancy away from the blimp.

Uni pondered the problem for several years (tires are not especially quick thinkers, you understand.) Then, one day last December, a

Continued on Page 24

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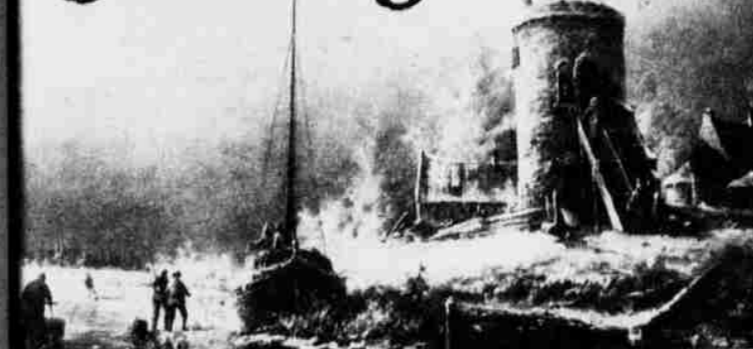
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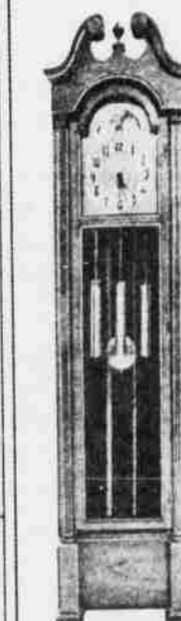
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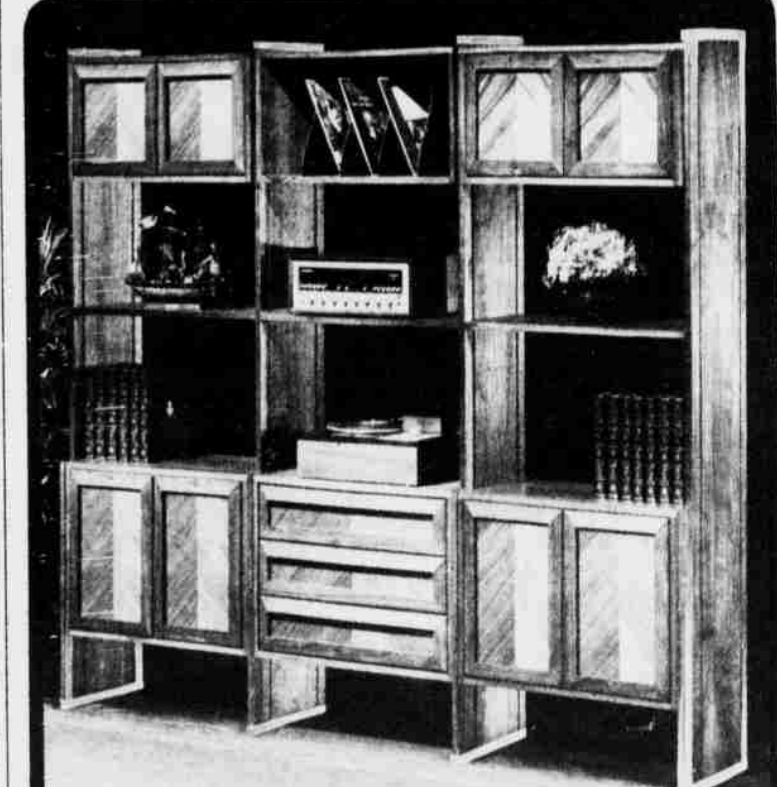
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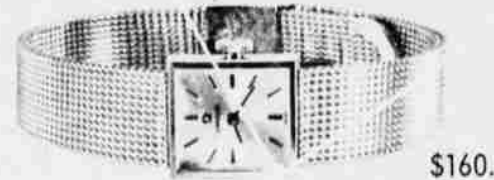
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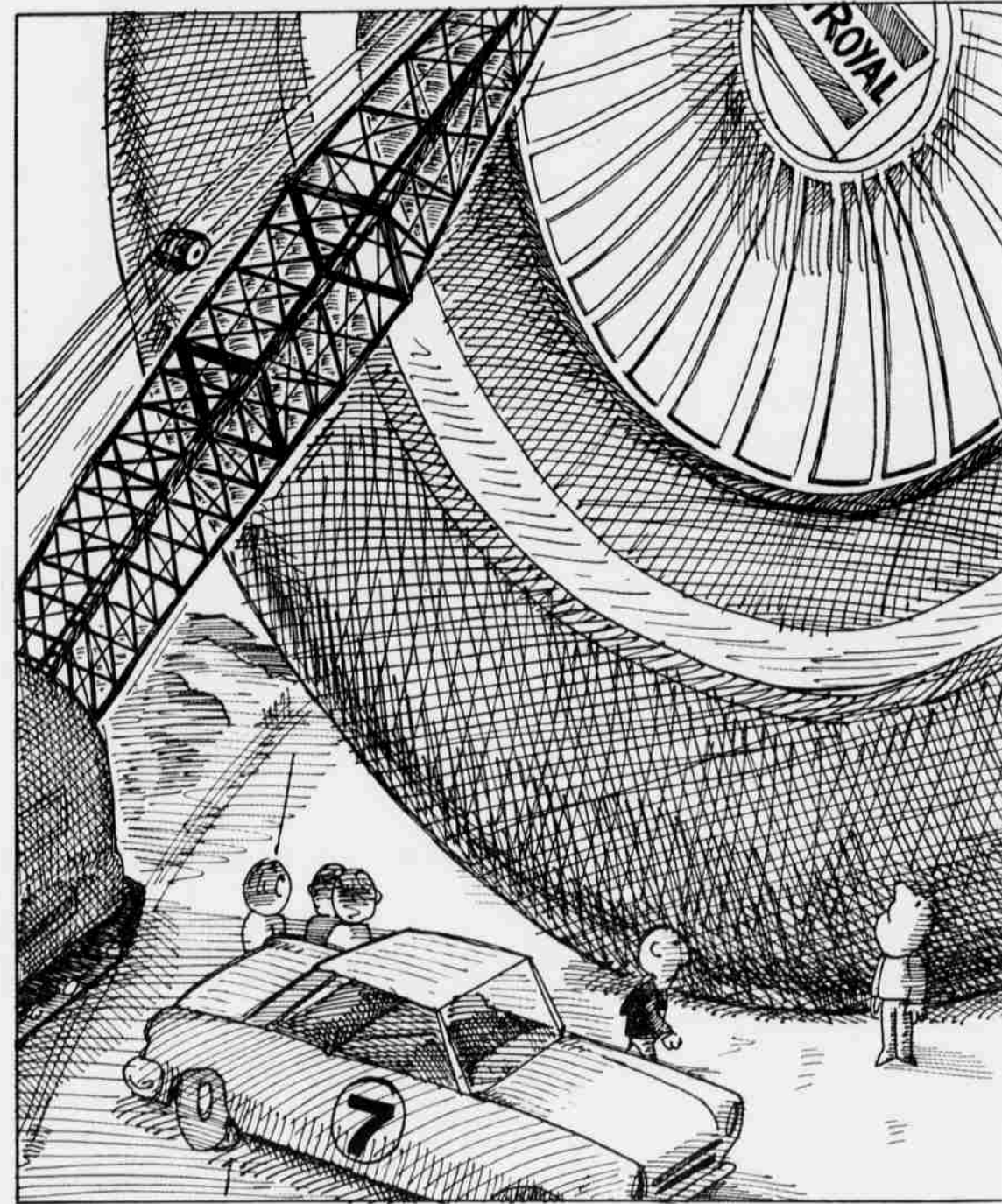
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There's Even a Moral To This Tale



discarded copy of the Detroit Free Press blew up against Uni's pedestal, open to the sports section. Joe Falls' column that day was all about the upcoming Super Bowl in Houston.

"That's it!" Uni shouted to itself in a moment of triumphant epiphany. "That wretched blimp plays the Super Bowl every year, and is seen by millions of football fans on coast to coast TV.

"I'll roll to Rice Stadium and take on the blimp! Mano a mano on the 50-yard line! What a half-time show! I'll crush the wind out of that silly balloon and reign supreme as the king of the tire ads!"

On the way to Houston, Uni fantasized, it could do the things it had been wanting to do all these years. Cruise Woodward Avenue, laying a big patch as it screeched away from a stop light, leaving some poor teen-ager in his '57 Chevy choking on a cloud of rubber smoke. Visit the Rouge state and Greenfield Village. Meet the big state fair stove. See if Toledo is really as bad as they say. Bump up against the White House and give President

Nixon a bad fright (Uni had heard reports of Watergate on the radios of passing cars.) Float down the Colorado River. See "The Exorcist" (at a drive-in theater, of course.) Take a spin around the Indianapolis 500 Speedway. Sit beside the Grand Coulee Dam to see who's taller. The possibilities were endless.

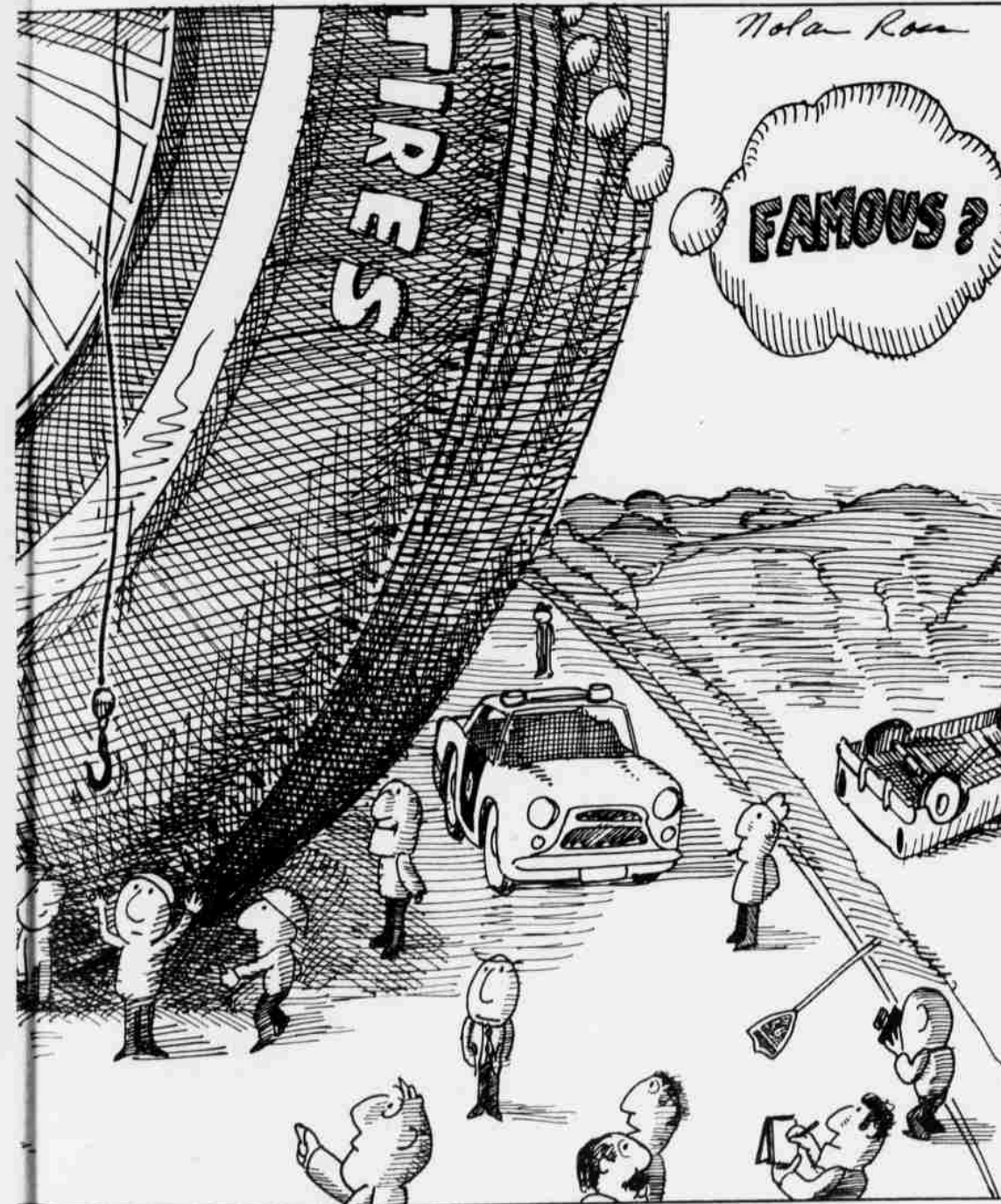
A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single revolution, Uni sensed. And it was also painfully clear that that first turn would be the stickiest, because the bottom of the supertire was imbedded in concrete.

Uni tentatively tightened its inner tube and attempted a quarter turn. Nothing. Again it tried. Again, nothing. It was stuck.

Then it remembered a bit of advice from the AAA—when bogged down, rock back and forth.

Its cords straining with effort, Uni pushed against the stony grip of the concrete, first forward, then back. Forward, then back.

Detroit Free Press, March 31, 1974



Again and again, for two full weeks, Uni was at it (tires, if nothing else, are persistent.)

"I'll never stop trying," Uni vowed. "That blimp's days are numbered! I'm not new, but I'm no retread, either. I've still got 30,000 good miles left in me."

Then, late one afternoon, as rush-hour traffic whizzed along the highway past Uni, the concrete began to give. A fissure appeared on the base of the pedestal. Like an old porch, the base began to crumble.

"Freedom!" grunted Uni.

Summoning up one last burst of energy, the big tire turned itself forward and rolled off the pedestal, across the dirt shoulder and into the middle of I-94, causing incredulous, panicky motorists to slam on their breaks and swerve to avoid the mammoth obstruction.

Free at last, Uni attempted a right turn to roll with the flow of traffic. But it could not move. Frantically, it tried again. No go.

"Am I stuck?" Uni wondered frantically. "Do I have a flat?"

No, the horrible truth was that Uni was just

too tired to roll another inch. It had totally exhausted itself breaking free of the concrete.

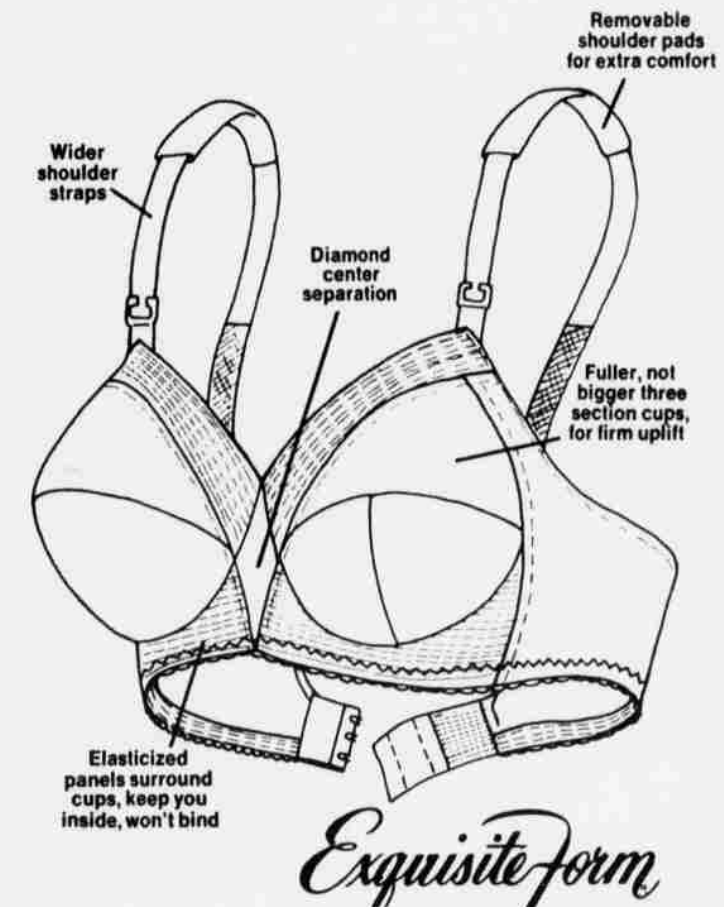
By now, the Michigan State Police had set up roadblocks around Uni to prevent accidents, and the Uniroyal people had called for a wrecking crane to lift the tire back onto its base. Reporters, photographers and TV camera crews had arrived.

"This is Bill Bonds, on the scene in Allen Park," one furrow-browed newscaster began as he stood in front of the tuckered-out tire as his camera crew began filming. "Only minutes ago, the concrete base holding the famous Uniroyal Tire inexplicably cracked, causing the tire to roll into the east-bound lane of I-94. Police theorize a strong gust of wind caused the mishap. Work crews are now..."

"Famous?" thought Uni as the crane began to lift it back to its old home. "Did he say famous? If Bill Bonds says I am, then I must be! What a foolish tire I have been to be jealous of that blimp! I'll just stay here in Allen Park, where I belong."

Moral: The AAA is right. You can get unstuck by rocking back and forth.

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