

June 6, 1998

Road and Track
Letters to the Editor
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Dear Letters to the Editor,

I am writing to express how much I enjoyed Peter Egan's article, "Real blue highways" in the July issue of Road and Track. Rarely do I read in automobile magazines the experiences of African Americans or other groups who have experienced stigmatization and discrimination while traveling in the United States.

In the late 1950s, my family made a memorable cross-country trip from California to Florida. Many gas stations in the South had segregated facilities. I did not understand what "colored" water fountains were. Towns were often segregated by railroad tracks—with the nice side being populated by whites and the shanty town populated by African Americans. As an 8-year-old white kid from the Valley, I had never seen overt racism before and had my first glimpse into the dangers African Americans must face when traveling where they were not wanted.

Although the Civil Rights Movement has brought many changes across our land, there is still one group that face similar hurdles. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people can, and are, legally discriminated throughout the United States. With no blanket protection from the federal government, the country is a patch quilt of laws that either protect or prosecute non-heterosexuals. For example, the Cracker Barrel chain of 1400 restaurants proudly proclaims its company policy to not hire employees or serve customers who are lesbian or gay. Depending on which state or city you are traveling, Cracker Barrel may or may not serve you if you are perceived to be gay. Similarly, it is legal in most of the country to deny housing or hotel accommodations to lesbians and gays.

While traveling, I consult the *Bob Damron's Address Book* or other gay travel guide to assure myself that the cities I am traversing are "safe." I also try to avoid states that still have sodomy statutes (20 still have them). Each year, about 150 men and women are arrested and convicted of sodomy in the United States. I do not want to become a statistic.

The automobile culture is often hostile toward women, and racial and sexual minorities. I have been a long-time auto enthusiast and use to build custom cars for shows in Southern California, however, I was always offended by the circus atmosphere of the shows and need to have Playboy Bunnies parading around. This Spring I attended Winternationals in Pomona and the man sitting next to me yelled at the announcers "Get that faggot off the track." He said this 30 times, all the while his friends were laughing. My group and I

move a number of rows away. Likewise, my women friends report how unsafe they feel at most racing events. Perhaps an article in Road and Track about racism, sexism and other discriminatory “isms” that exist in the automobile industry my help address our concerns.

Sincerely,

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