

Beating the cops on speeding

POWERING MY STURDY compact car along a lovely tree-lined road in Larchmont, I spot a sign reading: "35 MPH — Patrolled by Radar." I smirk. Speed limits mean nothing to me. Newly installed on my dashboard is a radar emission detector called Fuzzbuster. It will warn me to slow down when the car draws in range of a police radar unit. I have Smokey the Bear at bay.

Or do I? After spending an afternoon driving under the protection of a radar detector, I find that I could have been arrested for having one in my car.

Radar detectors are the latest toys for adult motorists. Electronics dealers say that they are the hottest thing to hit the shelves since CB radios, and they seem to be selling by the tens of thousands.

New York State says the devices are legal to sell and legal to buy, but state police regard their use as a misdemeanor or punishable by a maximum fine of \$1,000 and up to six months in jail. Certainly, no driver caught with a detector goes to the pokey or is fined anything like \$1,000 — but the legal menace is there. Indeed, in Connecticut, state police confiscate the devices on sight and motorists are liable to fines up to \$100. New Jersey, on the other hand, does not have a law restricting them.

A miracle of modern electronics, the Fuzzbuster is simplicity itself to operate. The motorist need only place the unit — a small black box — on the dashboard, plug a wire into the cigaret lighter, and adjust the dial. Then, a light will flash and a shrill beep will sound when the car nudges into range of a police radar unit. In the speed war between motorists and the law, the driver has the winning edge.

Manufacturers blandly promote the devices as "designed to help conscientious, safety-minded operators maintain legal speeds by making sure they do not inadvertently exceed posted speed limits." Police scoff, sometimes with an epithet, and they call the units "licenseless" or "speeders." Major Nicholas N. Giangualano, director of traffic for the New York State Police, said, "I don't see any other use for these things other than to avoid getting a speeding ticket."

The other day, I plugged a Fuzzbuster in my car and drove through the backroads of Westchester, on well-traveled highways, over parkways and thruways, in search of a speed trap to escape. Gradually, I developed a feeling of security, a sense of freedom from speed limits. I found I was ignoring the speedometer and moving as fast as seemed safe on the road.

For a hundred miles, I drove while my Fuzzbuster remained silent. Apparently, there was no police radar for my detector to detect. In Yorktown Heights, I stopped for gas at an Amoco station and the attendant, John Baylis, recognized my radar detector. "The police don't like them," he warned. "I was talking to one cop and he said he takes them away from drivers. Not all the time — it depends on his mood."

Baylis did mention two locations where local police often set up radar operations. I fooled past both, at speeds higher than was wise. The black box sat quietly on the dashboard. Back in New York City, with 134 miles clocked on the odometer, I still had not heard from

the Fuzzbuster. It had been a bad day for speed traps.

Radar detectors have not been popular long enough for their legal status to be clarified. Until two years ago, police believed the devices were undependable and ineffective and did not bother with them.

In New York now, arrests are based on a section of the vehicle and traffic code which makes it illegal for a private citizen to receive signals on police radio frequencies. Prosecutors and courts, however, repeatedly have found the statute inadequate and have thrown out many radar detection cases. Some judges rule that the 1933 law was passed before the invention of radar; and therefore cannot apply in any case involving it.

But the future of the radar detector in New York State may well hang on the outcome of an appeal filed by a truck driver who was fined \$100 last February for possession of a Fuzzbuster. The appeal will be heard in county court, which will be the first time the legality of using the devices will be tested above the justice of the peace level.

Of course, state police are notoriously sensitive about motorists employing guile to outfox their speed traps. Some years ago when police enlarged their radar network upstate, motorists possessing installations retaliated by flashing their headlights to warn oncoming cars. The irked police began arresting the light blinkers.

As it turned out, one of those nabbed was a News editor, since retired, F. Heizer Wright. Fined \$10, he appealed the conviction, contending that the police were misconstruing the law. Police argued that the law forbids the display of "constantly" flashing white lights. Wright won on the grounds that the section did not mention any display of lights. Blinker arrests stopped.

In fact, radar detectors have been on the market since the early 1960s, but not until the mid-1970s was a device put into mass production that was reliable and had enough range to allow a driver time to slow down to avoid a speed trap.

Three companies supply most of the radar detectors on the market these days. Electrolert, maker of the Fuzzbuster, is the undisputed kingpin in the field with sales of 500,000 units worth \$28 million. Autotronics, a Texas electronics firm, makes the Super Snooper and claims sales of \$12 million. Radartron does not give out dollar sales for its Senturion detectors, although they apparently sell well enough.

Cost of the devices runs from \$50 for a simple battery-operated unit to \$150 for a more sophisticated device that will monitor two police bands. The more expensive detectors are designed to receive signals from the new one-man radar "guns" that police departments currently favor.

In effect, the detector is a radio receiver tuned to police frequencies. Some companies boast that signals can be detected up to three miles away, but many electronic specialists find this ridiculous. Detection distance can be affected by numerous factors, the experts say, factors like terrain and climatic conditions.

For sniffing out "Smokeys," three radar detectors have captured most of the market. The most sophisticated, the long-range Super Snooper (left), costs \$179.95. The Radartron Senturion (center) sells for \$89.95. The popular Fuzzbuster (right) costs \$105.



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Generally, they argue, a device will function reliably at twice the distance being tracked by radar. That is, if the radar unit's range is half a mile, the detector will pick it up at a mile. The driver then, will have a half mile to brake down to legal speed.

And in explaining why Fuzzbusters and the like are not "licenses to speed," industry executives stress that such short notice will not help a motorist roaring down the highway at 90 miles an hour.

The devices, one promotional pamphlet suggested, are for those "who casually drift over the normally safe limit." They are designed "to help you keep aware of speed limits and keep you from feeding the Bears."

Not surprisingly, Jeff Wood, national agent for the International Truckers Association, agrees. "Sure, police are irritated by the radar detectors, but it actually helps them," he says. "A trucker hears the beep-beep and he slows down. It's like the CB radios and their 'Smokey' reports. Some policemen say they help. One California traffic safety officer told me these reports make 16 police cars sound like 50."

As with CB radios, truckers were the first customers for the devices. Gradually, they became popular with road salesmen and other folks who spend an inordinate amount of time behind the wheel. Drivers like these tend to push the speed limit. Tickets are a constant hazard and loss of their licenses means loss of their livelihood.

BUT PROBABLY the biggest impetus to the national 55-mile-an-hour speed limit — particularly in the West where drivers think nothing of 75 miles an hour, and 200-mile day trips are routine — Bob McLaughlin, assistant to the marketing director for Autotronics in Richardson, Texas, said, "The 55-mile-an-hour limit drove people mad out here. The interstate thruways were designed for high speeds — 70 to 80 miles an hour. What was the use of having them if we couldn't use them?"

With the 55-mile decree, police became more intense in their efforts to control speed and introduced an increasing number of radar units. Electrolert, which makes the Fuzzbuster, reports that police around the country now employ 50,000 radar units compared with only 3,000 or 4,000 a few years ago.

Worse for drivers, the companies charge, the police radars are often placed in "unfair" locations — at the bottom of hills or at town lines — where even the most prudent driver might find himself speeding. And there is also the contention that too many police are using their radar skills to raise local revenues, rather than as a speed check.

In a way, motorists and police are engaged in an arms race in which there is little possibility of detente.

Dale Smith, inventor of the Fuzzbuster and head of Electrolert, argues that his device puts the motorist on an equal footing with the policeman who stalks him. The story is that Smith, who had been designing police radar units, got caught in a speed trap and hurried home to put together his own radar detector.

"Speed radar is a symptom of a society headed for a police state," Smith insists. "The Fuzzbuster negates the effectiveness of radar and in its own way, adds to our storehouse of personal freedom."

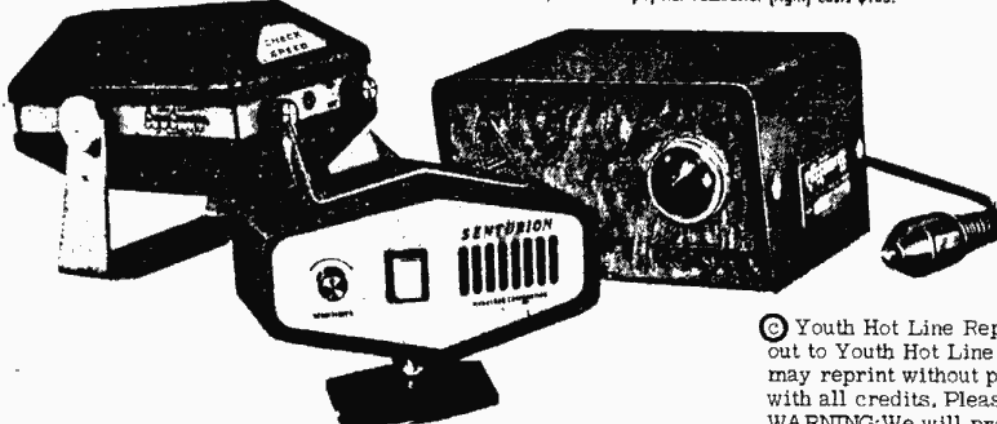
In Virginia, where radar detectors are banned, the fruding between state police and truckers who are devoted to the devices can turn nasty. In the last few years, authorities have confiscated 4,000 detectors, mainly from truckers. Their owners were fined an estimated \$500,000.

To tweak the sensitivities of the law, some truck drivers rolling through the Virginia hills place cardboard replicas of Fuzzbusters on their dashboard. When a trooper stops a truck carrying what appears to be a banned device, the joke is on him.

Last month, a trooper not only failed to laugh good-naturedly at the trucker's ploy. He arrested the driver, Henry Hillard, and brought him before a magistrate who levied a \$125 fine. The trooper recalled that the trooper was "spitting 10 penny nails."

In effect, Hillard had been arrested and fined for possession of a small cardboard box.

The trucker appealed with the help of Fuzzbuster's manufacturer, Electrolert, Inc., and the Independent Truckers Association. During a five-minute court session, the state attorney decided to drop all charges.



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CB BULL by Joe Greyhound

Writing this month's column may be a total waste, but I'm writing it anyhow. I've been let in on the financial status of TAP and it isn't good at all. There isn't even enough greenery in the bank to pay the bills and rent on their hole in the wall! If you think us writers and workers here are getting payed, you're full of shit!

I'm waiting for the word on whether to write this column or not, but figured I'd write it up any way just in case.

I was supposed to give a modification for CBs using the type of synthesizer explained in my last column, but while thinking about it, I figured out an easier way to do the entire syntha series, that is if there is still something to write it for!???

The mod. will come after all the synthas are looked at. So, this second type of synthesizer is used in 23 channel radios manufactured by Sharp, Teaberry, Courier, Pearce Simpson, and probably others. Again there are six main crystals used in both the transmit and receive modes. They happen to be, 23.290MHz used for channels 1-4, 23.340MHz used for channels 5-8, 23.390MHz for channels 9-12, 23.440MHz for channels 13-16, 23.490MHz for channels 17-20, and 23.540MHz for channels 21-23.

In these radios there are another four crystals that are used in both modes. Channels 1,5,9,13,17, and 21 use the 14.950MHz crystal - Channels 2,6,10, 14,18, and 22 use the 14.960MHz crystal - Channels 3,7,11,15, and 19 use the 14.970MHz crystal - and channels 4,8,12,16,20, and 23 use the 14.990MHz crystal.

When the radio is in the transmit mode on, say channel five, the 23.340MHz and 14.950MHz crystals are added in the synthesizer mixer to produce a 38.290MHz output. Next the 1st IF frequency of 11.275MHz is subtracted from the above 38.290MHz to give a frequency of 27.015MHz, channel five. The procedure continues all the way from 1 through 23.

The receive mode works the same way, even though a 11.730MHz crystal is thrown in somewhere. This has to do with heterodyning in order to produce the 455kHz 2nd IF frequency, but don't worry about it. Just remember, in order to check your receiver's frequencies the frequency of the 1st local oscillator equals the sum of both main crystals (the two crystals that are used for one channel in both modes) plus 11.275MHz. But forget it, since this is all constant and in doing modifications they always stay the same. Whew!!!!

Even though all this shit is probably boring to read, don't sweat it. I've got some goodies planned for future issues (I hope!!!!?) of TAP.

If any of you out there would like info on any type of CBs or equipment just drop me a card along with a long stamped self-addressed envelope, and I'd be glad to send you back manufacturer's pamphlets of whatever.

Member, send any info, questions, comments, money, requests for info, money to:

TAP
c/o Joe Greyhound
152 W. 42 Street
Room 418
New York, N.Y. 10036

GET DOWN!! by TOM EDISON

I'm sorry that my column in this month's issue is so small but I want to use as many new articles and columns by readers as possible in each issue. There are many new developments that I wanted to write about but these will just have to wait until the next issues. I'm gonna be a bastard and pull a cliff hanger on ya by telling ya that in our next issue, we'll tell ya where ya can LEGALLY by a Blue Box! How's THAT fer balls?!

I couldn't end the year without thanking Stan & Duff fer making this one of the most expensive but far fuckin out summers that I've ever had! Thankx again, ya burn-outs!

Let me end my column with a plug for a fantastic new store that's opened in New York City, better known as Cin City. The name of the store is simply The Computer Store. For all you real techno-phreaks just dying for a place that deals in computer info, this is the place to go. Three books that all you phreaks should be interested in are listed below. For more info, write or visit The Computer Store, 55 West 30th Street, New York, N.Y. 10018. Tell em Tom Edison sent ya!

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Turn kids on to real grass

GREENBURGH, N.Y. (AP) — Neighborhood kids gave a 60-year-old woman 15 plants several weeks ago, telling her they would grow "beautiful flowers."

The flowers never came, but police say the fruit of the woman's labor was a thriving marijuana garden, with the plants two feet high.

"She had no idea they were marijuana plants," Lt. Michael Gangemi said Friday. "She planted them right in front of her house. She thought they were real pretty."

The police removed the crop.