

Mblem

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Mensa in Georgia will be holding their "Memories Then and Now" Regional Gathering the weekend of October 3rd. One of the great advantages of having the gathering so late in the year is that the weather will be fantastic, which may lead into an evening group finding their way to the outdoor pool. The hotel is the same one that was used two years ago, which is just off of Highway 285 and in a great centralized location. It is a very easy drive to some fantastic dining establishments. There are a lot of great RG veterans in Atlanta, so you can expect an excellent event. On a personal note, at the Atlanta RG three years ago, I received the second best hug of my life before I was even able to enter the hotel. Go to www.georgia.us.mensa.org for the details.

Since this is a slow news month, I am going to use the remainder of this article to write about what I, as your Regional Vice Chairman (RVC), do for you.

My primary role is to sit on the Board of Directors of the American Mensa Committee (AMC). There are 21 seats on the Board with 10 of them reserved for the RVCs. The largest function of the AMC is to set new rules and guide the direction of the national organization. As your RVC, before every vote that is taken, I first ask myself "how will this change the Mensa experience for my members." Many times the motions will have no significant affect, and I will not spend very much time on them. A surprising number of motions will hurt the Mensa experience for the members. The most common reason for these is to protect the organization. For example, a motion was once made to restrict the consumption of alcohol at Mensa events so that if someone got hurt due to an intoxicated member, the national organization will be able to say that the actions were not condoned. I am not as conservative as many of the other members of the AMC, so I frequently vote against these types of motions. There is always a risk-reward tradeoff and I do not like to avoid a small risk while giving up a large reward. The motions that expand the Mensa experience frequently cost money. Some great examples include dramatically upgrading the Mensa Bulletin, and expanding the game options on the national website. These motions are more difficult for me to decide, but it helps to consider the per member cost. For example, it may cost \$500 to add a game to the website, but when you realize that is one penny per member, it doesn't sound too bad.

The other major function that I, as your RVC, serve is to be a liaison to the members and groups. Most things that a member needs and wants can be provided by their local group, but when that is not enough I step in. More commonly, though, a local group will need my assistance. Some of the requests that I have fielded include; reviewing bylaws for a specific issue, forwarding a membership list, taking a motion to the AMC, and working with conflicting members. If there is anything that your local group cannot do for you, then please feel free to send me an email.

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Really nothing interesting in this issue*

Letter to the Mblem editor:

I just want to say how much I've been enjoying David Skaar's writings. I was especially entertained by his recent piece on intelligence, stupidity, and communication-all fun topics.

This and other laudable contributions would inspire me to do more writing myself, but I'm apparently too lazy.

Suzie Bolotin

Words From Nick

RVC Column

Nick Sanford

The Annual Gathering is just around the corner and with it comes another American Mensa Committee (AMC) meeting. There are several interesting topics on the agenda including some finance items that are of interest to the local groups and to you.

One of the items on the agenda is a redefinition of the Finance Committee. Previously this committee was charged with setting and monitoring the annual budget. The new Finance and Audit Committee will also be charged with “working with the auditors ... to ensure compliance with standard accounting practices”. This distinction is critical due to several newish accounting regulations that have come out. Specifically since there is some sort of relationship between the national organization and the local groups there now has to be financial reporting on those groups. For the 2006 tax season our auditors gave us the third degree for not reporting on the local groups, but eventually let it slide. For the 2007 season we did report on a fair percentage of the groups, and they let the remainder slide. The 2008 season is going to require significantly more reporting. I am a huge fan of the local groups being as independent as they possibly can be, but with the IRS involvement on this one I am going to have to say, please respond to the 2008 tax year request in a timely manner.

This is the second meeting that a dues increase to \$59 will be on the agenda and hence will be the first opportunity for it to pass. I do not expect there to be too much discussion on the topic. The bottom line is that it is required. Inflation, expanded services, a particularly bad round of legal fees, and a terrible downturn in bond rates has finally caught up with the old \$52 standard. The only thing worth discussing is how much of an increase is appropriate. The finance committee settled on \$59 since it will have a long life before another increase is needed and because of the psychological affect of ending with a 9. If I’m still around the next time an increase is proposed I will probably suggest that we make it an automatic \$1 increase every single year.

On Thursday, two days before the AMC meeting, the Annual Business Meeting (ABM) will be held. This meeting includes the current membership. In other words, this is your opportunity to directly influence how American Mensa is run. It is a very interesting event to say the least. However, if you want to see the real politics then attend the AMC meeting instead. It is far less exciting, but is where the functional details are decided.

Region 5 will have an informal Meet and Greet in room Plaza Court 3 on Thursday, July 3 from 12:00 noon until 1:15. I’ll see you there.

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(Editor’s note: Received June 20.)

Air Bread

Shiangtai Tuan

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “even a skilled cook can not make rice soup without rice.” Since we seldom use rice and rice is the staple food in China, a more appropriate translation of this saying maybe: “Even a skilled baker cannot make bread without flour.” I waited for two and half months, the only contribution to this news letter is Ed’s two comments in life (namely, jokes) in addition to the three month worth of the two RVC columns. Ed told me that if we do not send our calendar regularly the national Mensa office may dissolve us as a Mensa charter, MENC. So, if things does not improve, this Mblem will either be printed with calendar only or becoming my own Blog — and a poor one at that. Well, maybe we can print it in fancy fonts, with flowery layout, and better paper — but with air as flour in bread.

For the June issue, there was an accident: the printer usually send the printed Mblem, a 17” X 12” X 11” fairly heavy box, to my porch so I can label them. For June,

I was out of town. A gracious volunteer was also out of town. When I came back, the box was stolen, later found open and discarded at a near by roadside. In the mean while, the printer printed a set without charge. In the confusion, while I was still waiting for submissions, I decided to print a directory. Another Mensan suggested to save money and combine it with the August issue. So here it is, the June issue, the directory plus the July/August issue. Since the directory took place of the July issue, I call this one the July/August issue. Since all are mailed together, I simply label it “August” on the outside.

If you do not send articles to me, please do not hesitate to tell me to whom you would rather send your articles. Maybe we can convince that person to be the editor. Of course, do volunteer your self if you like to do the bread baking without flour.

I found it quite nice to sit at the Mad Hatter coffee house to write articles for Mblem. If you want to join me, send me a message or give me a call so we can all sit there to do our creative writing.

International and Internal Affairs

Ed Williams

A university professor of English took advantage of his wife's business trip to do some informal business with a female colleague. They were in bed together at his home one afternoon when his wife returned a day early and caught them. She exclaimed: "Timothy, I am surprised!!" Looking embarrassed, he replied: "No, dear, you are amazed. It is I who am surprised."

A Frenchman, an Englishman and an American were chatting about the meaning of the phrase "savoir faire". The Frenchman said: "Of course, since it is my language, I am best prepared to explain the meaning. As an example, a man comes home early in the afternoon, goes up to the bedroom, opens the door, and finds his wife in bed with another man. Instead of causing a scene, he quietly closes the door, goes back out, and comes home later. That is 'savoir faire'." The Englishman then said: "Well, our froggy friend has it almost right. Same scenario, except that instead of just closing the door, he says "Carry on, old chap!" That is 'savoir faire'". The American said: "No, you're both a bit off. Same scenario, but when the husband says "Carry on, old chap!", if the fellow CAN carry on, THAT is real 'savoir faire'".

Gallons per Mile

Shiangtai Tuan

Well, it would not take gallons -- plural -- for a car to run a mile. I actually mean gallons per hundred miles. Please let me explain what I mean.

When I was a graduate student, in our department, we used to have quite a few research fellows from Europe. They complained about the way we measure a cars efficiency by miles per gallon.

Once I said to one of them, "What is the big deal. You are a physicist. Is it that hard to multiply the number by a constant to convert it to Kilometers/liter? The Constant is, by the way, 0.42. That is, if a car runs at 20 miles/gallon, it is 8.4 km/l. Is it really that hard?"

"No, no," he answered, "it is completely different. We use liters per 100 kilometers. It makes much more sense." "Well, just a different convention. While you are here, why don't you learn how we do things here. If you easily have to make comparison to your old car, just take the reciprocal." He grumpily mumbled something like "our way is more logical" or something like that and walked away.

At that time, I thought, "how could one ratio be more logical than the other" and left it at that.

Now, many years later, when I started to think of fuel economy, I cannot help but to admit that it is more logical to think in terms of fuel used per definite distance. Well, it is perhaps "easier". I would not say more logical because I tend to think the word "logical" does not have superlatives. Something can be either logical or not.

Saying "more logical" is like saying "more perfect." Some people actually say things like that. It does not drive me crazy, just makes me laugh. Now, enough aside, let get back to the topic. What we really are interested in is how much we spend, say, on a trip, or per month knowing an average car is driven about 1000 miles per month. To compare the difference of these two way of thoughts, let's propose a realistic situation. Say, in your family, you have a car you use to drive to work and a car you drive your children to play soccer, softball, to piano, ballet lessons and to family vacations. And, for some reason, you drive those two cars about the same number of miles per month. (Of course, this makes our comparison easier.) Now that many people are selling their gas guzzlers, you have a chance to buy a good 15 miles/gallon SUV from a friend to replace your 12 m/g guzzler. Well, the gain is merely 3 miles per gallon. In the mean while, you also consider the 32 m/g little wonder to replace your common place going to work car which only has 25 m/g, a fantastic improvement of 7 miles per gallon. So, you choose to replace the work car, at least for the time being, before you save enough money in three years for any other improvement.

Now, let's see what the fantastic gain is. A 32m/g car is 3.13 in the language of gallons per 100 miles, or \$12.52/100miles, or \$125 per month if you drive 1000 miles per month. A 25 g/m car is a 4 gallons per 100 miles or \$16/100 miles or \$160 per month at 1000 miles. So, you will save \$35 (160 - 125) a month with this switch.

Well, how about spending big buck and go all the way to a hybrid car that has 40 miles per gallon. Well, it is 2.5 gallons or \$10 per 100 miles. It will increase your savings up to \$60 a month. Now, let's look at the gas guzzlers replacement.. A 12m/g car is 8.33 in the language of gallons per 100 miles, or \$33.32/100miles, or \$333 per month if you drive 1000 miles per month. A 15 g/m car is a 26.68 gallons per 100 miles or \$26.68/100 miles or \$267 per month at 1000 miles. A 3 miles per gallon gain in this case will save you \$66 a month!!

Let me make the following chart to show the conversion of miles per gallon, in the first column, to gallons per 100 miles, in the second column. I also list the dollar amount per hundred miles in the third column, assuming the price of gas is \$4. It is a cinch to find the monthly expenditure from the miles you drive in a month (usually 1000) out of this number.

M/g	Gallons/100 miles	\$/100 miles
12	8.33	33.32
14	7.14	28.57
15	6.67	26.68
16	6.25	25.0
18	5.56	22.24
20	5.00	20.0
22	4.50	18.2
24	4.17	16.68
25	4.00	16.0
26	3.85	15.4
28	3.57	14.28
30	3.33	13.32
32	3.13	12.52
35	2.86	11.43
40	2.50	10.0

Of course, the real saving is to switch from the range of "teens" to "tweens" in the miles per gallon language. To avoid confusion, I will leave that to a sister article on SUVs and "cars". (See P.4 in this issue.) By the way, I did not present anything new above. I merely repeated some known facts, hoping to serve as a reminder to draw your attention.

SUVs vs "Cars"

Shiangtai Tuan

In a sister article, "Gallons per Mile", in this issue on page 3, we have introduced a chart for you to see how much gas or money a car uses per unit distance you drive. In that article, we talked about saving money by switching cars within a category. Of course, you get better saving if you switch cars from a teens category (by that, I mean 12 to 19 miles/gallon) to a "tweens" category in term of "gas mileage" (measured by miles per gallon, heaven forbid), that is, switching from a gas hog like an SUV to a "car".

Are SUVs not cars? Of course they are. However, they have some special characteristics that regular cars do not have. Originally, the car manufactures took the frame of pick-up trucks and replaced the cab and truck bed combination with a unit cover. Since they are basically trucks, they follow less strict pollution regulations. They are, therefore, officially classified as trucks. (Sometimes I wonder why some SUV drivers drive on the left most lane in an eight-lane, four-lane each direction, highway where it is clearly marked "NO TRUCK.") Sometimes they are fitted with a four-wheel drive. They were really designed for the purpose of "sports" or "utility", for people to carry things or driving into rugged terrains. In a election year, you are probably reminded of the fact that what helps people make decisions are mainly TV commercials. Of course, they have learned it from the industry. The auto industry ran an ad-campaign for SUV and won many unexpected buyers, among them the red neck nouveau riche who preferred something closer to their life style than a Mercedes; the white collar office workers who want to take their frustration out somewhere; dissatisfied husbands or wives who wanted something they feel they could control; people with inferiority complex who wanted to feel superior ... So, the SUV market exploded. The owners started to create excuses like "we Americans like it big", "we want to show we are patriotic". (Honestly, I don't see the relation between driving an SUV and being patriotic.) I remember seeing a TV news segment when a little lady driver of an SUV was interviewed way back when SUVs were gaining publicity. She said: "I feel good to be sitting high up here and look down at all the other cars. I feel I am in control and no one can ignore me anymore, at least when I am in my SUV."

I quite sympathized with her. I was happy that she gained as much as going to a shrink but only more, however, unfortunately, at someone else's expense. Why? SUVs block the vision so you cannot see the traffic if you are in a car. In fact, even if you are in another SUV you still cannot see through because just about all SUVs have darkly tinted windows. Another justification of owning an SUV was a "safety factor" -- if an SUV had a head-on collision with a "car", the SUV driver had better chance to survive. "For my child's safety, I rather drive an SUV" was what you might hear from an SUV driver. "Well, what about the car you hit", I thought, "or if you hit another SUV." In the same analogy, it is better still if you drive a school bus or a ten-wheeler truck, of course, until all others wise up and all drive school buses. (In fact, there are some statistics that indicates there are more accidents, more single auto accidents, more fatalities per SUV but that is a more involved subject, way beyond the scope of this article.) Of course, a better solution is to stop the "arms race" (heavy weight race) and let all people drive regular cars. However, who is to make this rule and who would obey? This is a free country and all want to exercise our freedom unless, yes, you guessed it, unless gas starts to cost \$4 a gallon. So, the time has come.

SUVs are NOT intrinsically "bad". They have their places. Maybe you really need a "sport" or "utility" vehicle to drive at lower than highway speed in rugged terrains. Or, maybe you are the dedicated driver of your children's softball team. In cases like that, an SUV is just about a must. Otherwise, look at the chart in the other article on page 3. Say, if your SUV has fairly good gas mileage, at 15 miles per gallon. In terms of gallons per 100 miles, that is 6.67. At \$4 a gallon, it uses \$267 a month if you drive a national average of 1000 miles per month. If you could trade it in for a car with 25 m/g, or, 4 g/100m, you would use \$160 for the same amount of driving. It would be a \$107 per month or about a \$1300 per year saving. Not bad, eh! Would it cramp your style? Not necessarily. True, your children would not be able to stand up and fight in the back. However, they can sit comfortably in the back seat and there would still be ample room in a station wagon. Yes, a station wagon at 25 m/g. That is what I drive. My car is a Saturn station wagon. It has a lot of luggage room behind the back seats and on the top if needed. Mixing driving highway driving between Raleigh and Durham plus some downtown driving, it uses an average of 3.45 gallon per 100 miles, or, in terms of gas mileage, it pushes 29 m/g. It is better than the 25 m/g in the example I used above. So, you see, a car like that is not far fetched. Of course, you might want to do even better and to go all the way to get a hybrid. At 2.5 g/100m (40 m/g) or \$100/month, you might save another \$60 or so a month in addition to the above calculation.