

## **Fortieth Anniversary - The Way It Was** **September 1, 2005**

I wonder how many people in Del Mar remember the traffic conditions on Highway 101 before I-5 opened.

In 1960 I drove up to DeHahn's Shoreline Nursery in Northern Leucadia. There are dozens of condominiums there now. It was a Saturday in the summer. Christine and I had just purchased our home on Balboa Avenue, and it desperately needed some landscaping.

We had no experience with race day traffic, and when we entered the highway for the return to Del Mar, we encountered bumper-to-bumper traffic. And the only route home was right down the coast! The plants we had purchased nearly died before we got them home to Del Mar.

Highway 101 was the only route between Los Angeles and San Diego and Tijuana. On weekends, you couldn't even find the pavement for the cars. The State Division of Highways had closed all the median openings except those at 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Del Mar had thirteen gas stations then, one on every corner; now there are none.

The Del Mar City Council appealed to the highway people to install a traffic light at 9<sup>th</sup> Street, so that school children could cross safely to get to the Shores School. A survey was conducted of how many people crossed at 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The request was denied. It turned out that the criterion for the installation of a traffic light would have required everyone in town to cross the highway at 9<sup>th</sup> Street twice a day. After more pressure, Del Mar got its traffic light.

Traffic conditions in Del Mar are approaching those that existed forty years ago. Earlier councils exacerbated the conditions by installing STOP signs at strategic intersections, trying to discourage commuting drivers from going through Del Mar. The two STOP signs down in the beach area were installed over twenty years ago as an experiment. There were never any criteria established to evaluate the experiment, so it is still going on, and traffic from bridge to bridge pokes along waiting for that breath of fresh air in Solana Beach.

It was reported recently in a local newspaper that one of Del Mar's numerous committees has recommended that the council direct its traffic engineer to conduct a traffic movement efficiency study, since not only is Camino Del Mar full of cars, but side streets are also being jammed up.

The "send 'em somewhere else" philosophy isn't working. It is predictable that Del Mar will eventually adopt a different strategy. Instead of "stop and go," which is the name of the game today, Del Mar's engineer will convince the council that Rowdy (Clint Eastwood) of Rawhide had the better approach: "Head 'em up; move 'em out!" In other words, get the cars moving, and keep them moving.

A stream of cars moving at 25 MPH, with 30 feet between cars, moves at about 60 cars per minute. The same stream of bumper-to-bumper vehicles travels at ten cars per minute—maybe. And don't bother talking about the pollution in downtown Del Mar from the slow-moving traffic!!

We used to describe Del Mar as being a "semi-rural residential community." But guess what?

Del Mar has changed dramatically as development has surrounded the town, closing in from all sides. And the bridge at the south of Del Mar, which has been designated a historical structure? It's not as old as I am, and I haven't been consigned to history yet. Personally, I'd much rather see a new, technologically modern bridge joining Del Mar to San Diego, reflecting the upbeat, energetic attitudes of the community, as we move aggressively into the new century.

Del Mar wants to dress up its image, and attract more business into town; let's start with a new bridge!

"Head 'em up, move 'em out!"

###