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fool around with one. You'll see that we haven't exaggerated in the least about the Sharp PC-1211 Pocket Computer.

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8 May 1981

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COVER

With their general interest in dolphins, the ancient Greeks realized the animals could hear underwater and make sounds, but even Aristotle misunderstood their vocal capabilities. Greek coin from about 250 B.C. See page 676. [R. Stuart Mackay, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts 02215]

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Research and Development: AAAS Report VI, by Willis H. Shapley, Albert H. Teich, and Gail J. Breslow, will be provided in advance to colloquium registrants. The *Report* covers R&D in the federal budget for FY 1982, and other topics on R&D and public policy. Registrants will also receive the published proceedings of the conference.

For further details, write: R&D Colloquium, AAAS Office of Public Sector Programs, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, or call (202) 467-4310

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LETTERS

Universe Beyond the Galaxies

The statement that four giant elliptical galaxies are "the most distant celestial bodies ever studied" (Research News, 20 Mar., p. 1334) needs qualification. They are the most distant galaxies but not the most distant celestial bodies. Many quasars (or QSO's) are much more distant. The most distant known object, quasar OQ172, has a redshift of more than 3.5 as compared to 1.2 for the most distant of the four ellipticals. The redshift for OQ172 was established by Margaret Burbidge, President-Elect of the AAAS, and a team of Lick Observatory astronomers in 1973. In a Hubble universe with a radius of 18 billion lightyears, OQ172 is at a distance of more than 16 billion light-years from Earth as compared to about 11 billion light-years for the four ellipticals.

JOHN KRAUS

Ohio State University Radio Observatory, 2015 Neil Avenue, Columbus 43210

Cattle Breeding

George E. Seidel, Jr.,'s review article "Superovulation and embyro transfer in cattle" (23 Jan., p. 351) raises two important issues. First is the welfare of donor cows. Codes or regulations need to be established to limit the number of surgical interventions performed annually on these animals if the surgical method of ova collection is used. Second, while this technique can certainly help improve herd utility, the possibility of narrowing the genetic base of domestic livestock should be considered, especially since there is further reduction through widespread practice of artificial insemination. There are hazards associated with rebuilding the nation's herds on the genetic material from only a few bulls and cows. It would be wise, therefore, to maintain some livestock of different lineages and phenotypic characteristics not deemed useful in order to preserve genetic diversity. A program along the lines of the Rare Breeds Trust in the United Kingdom, for example, should be seriously considered.

MICHAEL W. FOX Institute for the Study of Animal Problems, Washington, D.C. 20037

Codes or regulations to limit the number of surgical interventions performed on a donor cow annually would serve no useful purpose. As indicated in my article (1) and in the references I cited, embryos are recovered by entirely nonsurgical methods in the commercial embryo transfer industry, except in occasional cases of infertility affecting fewer than 1 percent of donors; surgery is rarely repeated on the same donor in these cases.

Embryo transfer is unlikely to contribute significantly to narrowing the genetic base of cattle unless coupled with some form of cloning. For example, limiting donors of female gametes to 100 per generation would only decrease heterozygosity by about 2 percent per century (1, 2). To date, in fact, it appears that embryo transfer has functioned more to broaden than to narrow the genetic base of cattle in North America, primarily through the rapid proliferation of purebred animals of the so-called "exotic" breeds, such as Simmental and Limousin (1). Before the availability of embryo transfer technology, these populations were precariously small as a result of import restrictions.

Superovulation followed by cryopreservation of embryos for transfer some years hence is an ideal solution to the problem of maintaining genetic stocks of animals that are currently of marginal economic value. This is already being practiced in mice (3). The cost of frozen storage of embryos is much less than that of maintaining equivalent live animals. The freezing of semen is also an excellent method of preserving genetic material indefinitely.

Like embryo transfer, artificial insemination does not automatically lead to narrowing of genetic bases. It is clearly a more efficacious method of spreading genetic material over the population than natural mating and has contributed significantly to the recent broadening of the genetic base of beef cattle in North America.

GEORGE E. SEIDEL, JR. Animal Reproduction Laboratory, Colorado State University, Fort Collins 80523

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Auto Safety

The article "Auto crash tests unsettle Japan and Detroit" (News and Comment, 9 Jan., p. 150) calls attention to the

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results of recent government studies comparing the crash test performances of selected new car models. The article begins and ends with reference to a Chevrolet dealer-sponsored advertisement, as an example of how the results of these tests can be used competitively by automobile manufacturers to advertise the safety performance of their products.

Although the advertisement was neither approved nor endorsed by General Motors or the Chevrolet Division, our reluctance to embrace the results of these specific government tests does not stem from any competitive shyness. Rather it evolves from our own recognition of the many technological complexities of assessing vehicle crashworthiness, which, at present, preclude a scientific correlation of the test results to realworld accident data.

For about a year, the National High-Traffic Safety Administration wav (NHTSA), as part of its New Car Assessment Program, has been conducting vehicle crash tests in an effort to demonstrate that substantial differences exist in the occupant protection capabilities of today's new cars. In this test program, one each of selected new car models are crashed into a concrete barrier at 35 miles per hour. On the basis of these single, frontal tests, each vehicle is then rated as having "passed" or "failed," depending on whether the resulting impact and acceleration forces on the test dummies meet specified occupant injury criteria. Such representations are based, however, on the flawed assumption that the test results can be easily translated into injuries that would be expected to occur in actual highway crashes. This is simply not the case.

It is well recognized within the safety community that a test dummy Head Injury Criteria (HIC) value in excess of 1000 is not necessarily indicative of a serious or fatal injury. Yet, in representing their test results, the NHTSA has consistently classified HIC values in excess of 1000 as "failure"—meaning serious injury or fatality and values under 1000 as "passed"—meaning no serious injury. How high the HIC value must be and what shape or type of object must be contacted to indicate reliably a specific level of injury are not within today's science or technology.

Particularly inappropriate and misleading are "pass/fail" distinctions at or near the 1000 HIC threshold, where the test result differences are relatively small. In one of the NHTSA tests, for example, vehicle "A" with an HIC value of 997 was classified as having "passed," while another vehicle "B" with an HIC value of 1024 was classified as having "failed." The extent to which such small differences in HIC values can be considered as evidence of real performance differences and not the result of test variation cannot be demonstrated.

Moreover, the variety of real-world accident configurations essentially defies classification. Our analysis, for instance, of the NHTSA's own accident data file indicates that only about 5 percent of total real-world accidents are representative of the full-front barrier-type test as used by the NHTSA to justify its 'pass/fail'' results. This fact alone is enough to bring into question the usefulness of the NHTSA tests. Yet, regrettably, by relying on the NHTSA's simplistic "pass/fail" designations, consumers are likely to perceive car "B" as being less safe than car "A" simply because it is labeled "failed."

With increasing regularity, the tendency among industry critics is to attribute improvements in vehicle safety solely to the implementation of government safety standards. While in many instances these standards have had a beneficial effect, history documents clearly that many significant voluntary safety design improvements have evolved as a result of industry's traditional concerns for motor vehicle safety. Indeed, many of these voluntary initiatives, such as the collapsible steering column, side door beam, and so forth, were later simply translated into federal safety standards. Unfortunately, this is a fact that is generally overlooked.

As with vehicle improvements, commitment to our customers' safety also extends to consumer information. In this regard, General Motors supports the concept of providing consumers with information which can be helpful in making informed purchase decisions. However, to lead car buyers to believe that one car is more or less safe than another, when the observed differences in individual tests are so small as to be within the band of test repeatability and when "real world" cases exhibit no such "safe/unsafe" response, is categorically wrong and injects into the marketplace spurious factors which unfairly affect the competitive position of responsible manufacturers.

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Progress Toward Energy Independence

Recently, several oil-producing countries have announced small decreases in their prices for oil. They have done so because supply has been exceeding demand. The world, and particularly the United States, is lessening its consumption and dependence on imports of oil. Saudi Arabia could cut its production and cause higher prices, but these would provide further impetus to curtailment of the use of oil. In 1978 U.S. imports of oil and its products totaled about 8.3 million barrels a day (mbd). This year the annual rate is about 5.6 mbd. A further reduction to 3 to 4 mbd would make this country relatively secure against a disruption of supplies. Attaining such a goal in a few years is looking more and more feasible.

The three principal factors in the decline of use of oil have been conservation, enhanced energy efficiency, and substitution of other energy sources. Of these, conservation has been the most substantial contributor, but in the future the other two items will be important. In addition, a new factor is becoming significant. The refining of oil is being improved to obtain higher vields of essential products.

Conservation has had a substantial effect on the use of oil, natural gas, and electricity. Suppliers of fuel oil and natural gas have noted that, on average, individual householders have decreased their use in the home by about 15 percent. Higher prices for gasoline and mandated changes in new automobiles have resulted in a decrease in consumption of motor fuel. In 1978 demand was 7.4 mbd; currently the annual rate is 6.1 mbd. As older cars are replaced by fuel-efficient models, consumption will probably drop further.

However, the major potential for diminishing consumption of oil is in nontransportation uses, which in 1979 consumed 8.4 mbd. At least 5.5 mbd of oil is burned in applications for which coal or natural gas could suffice. This replaceable oil includes 3.0 mbd of residual and distillate oils (mainly residual) burned in utility and industrial boilers. Another 2.1 mbd of fuel oil (mainly distillate) is used for residential and commercial space heating. Natural gas, if it were available, could replace oil in some of the uses not filled by coal. At this time precise data on 1980 discoveries of natural gas are not available. However, industry sources say that the amount of gas discovered last year was the largest in a decade. In part this reflects recordbreaking drilling activity. It also reflects exploration of hitherto untouched areas and depths. Favorable prospects for more discoveries enhance the desirability of further substitution of natural gas for oil. The American Gas Association has stated that if taxes on natural gas and federal regulations governing its use were relaxed, substantial substitution of gas for oil would occur quickly.

A major target for replacement is residual oil-a dirty, asphalt-like material that remains after vacuum distillation of petroleum at temperatures up to 550°C. It is made up of very large complex molecules, some of which contain sulfur and nitrogen; vanadium and nickel are also present. In electric power stations residual oil is in competition with coal and nuclear energy, both of which are cheaper energy sources. The major oil companies realize that they must find higher-value uses for residual oil, and they have been adding equipment to their refineries to enable them to convert it into gasoline and light fuel oil. As a source of gasoline, residual oil is an inferior feedstock, but it is still much better than coal. It has a hydrogen-to-carbon ratio of about 1.4 to 1.5; the corresponding value for bituminous coal is about 0.8. There are two methods for upgrading residual oil: adding hydrogen through hydrogenation at high pressures and temperatures, or subtracting carbon through a coking process. Both methods are practical, and successful plants based on them are in operation.

Substitution of coal, gas, and wood in applications where they can replace oil is the quickest practical means of further reducing dependence on imports. Technical know-how is well developed. What is needed is a continued infusion of national will.-PHILIP H. ABELSON

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