



Life in the other

LANE

August is a particularly difficult month for me each year. It's not the heat and humidity. It's not the Japanese Beetles that eat anything in my garden with the slightest hint of color. It's not the fact that summer will be over in a few weeks, I haven't taken a day off yet and my skin tone rivals the Pillsbury Doughboy's. It's not even the fact that eleven (count them, eleven) members of my family celebrate a memorable occasion during August, requiring frequent trips to the funny card aisle at the local stationary store.

It's the budget. Specifically, the New York State Budget for NEXT YEAR! You see, in my other life, the one that doesn't require nomex or helmet, but favors pantyhose and dresses, I work for the Empire State. Part of what I do for the Empire State, when I'm not busy arguing the relative merits of wood studding over metal studding for new walls, is to prepare new budget initiatives for consideration. In simpler terms, I come up with all sorts of snazzy new ways to spend your tax dollars.

Under the best of circumstances this is a horrific process. Think about it. I am just one of hundreds of curmudgeon civil servants holed up in front of a CRT being creative. How many more ways can your state government come up with to fritter away some bucks? If you only knew the half of it! (At this point, our friend Andre Sigal is squirming around in his chair just waiting for me to have another tantrum about the Department of Transportation ... so I ain't gonna. But trust me, he's squirming!)

Anyway, the preparation of a fair, equitable and reasonable budget can sometimes be made logical by simply drawing a relationship between that and something you are familiar with. Full time housewives can understand the process by simply relating it to their annual food costs, broken down into categories like dairy products, meat products, baking or canned goods, fresh veggies, fish, etc. Your average twit teenager multiplies his weekly allowance by 52, gets a total and then decides how many tapes, pairs of Reeboks, gallons of gas, tubes of mascara, permanents or visits to the tanning salon that will buy (it's never enough).

So with this simple and foolproof technique in mind, you will not be at all surprised to learn that I relate the whole budget process to the care and maintenance requirements of the MASS.

Budgets are broadly divided into two major categories: personnel services and

non-personnel services. These are then sub-divided into two or three million mini-categories to cover just about any expenditure that could conceivably be made in the course of a fiscal year. Of course, just in case someone is clever enough to unearth an unanticipated need there is another category called "Contingency Funds" that neatly ties up the whole package and sends the average taxpayer kicking and screaming to the Savings and Loan Department.

Personnel service costs at Wolf Creek Racing are easy to compute. The formula is simple. You compute the average salary of all the crew chiefs on the NASCAR circuit before bonuses, add to that the fee charged by Richard Petty's orthopedic surgeon, add to that one half of the profit made by the Harry Stevens Concessions at the Meadowlands Grand Prix and multiply that sum by zero. VOILA!

Non-personnel services are a bit trickier. And they require us to delve into several hundred thousand of those mini categories so for the sake of brevity (now there's a first!) I'll pick a select few of the more interesting ones.

FLUIDS: gasoline, motor oil, transmission fluid, coolant, greases, goos, Gatorade, Pepsi, Pink Grapefruit Juice and, of course, water.

TIRES: some for the MASS (pavement and dirt), some for the Service Vehicle, some for the Trailer. All different sizes, different makes, different rims, different pounds of pressure, different lug nut configurations. Why some have four and others five is beyond me but I'm sure that the same guy who engineered the location of the oil filter on The Bull came up with the odd one.

TOOLS: (this category drives me to distraction). We have metric and we have the other kind. We have power tools and we have those that require muscle. We have mini-generators (we also have a maxi generator but it needs work), we have a MIG welder (no snickering, please) we have an air compressor, we have an engine hoist, we have testing tools for everything except measuring one's sanity. We have (are you ready for this?) an Electronic Digital Torque Wrench. (Rental rates upon request).

ACCESSORIES: You name it, we've got it!

Bungee cords (these things mate and multiply when you're not looking); Nuts, Bolts, Washers (metal and rubber), Screws, Rivets, Brass Fittings; Rubber, Steel, Plastic and Stainless tubing, Electrical wire, Plastic slinky that holds all the electrical wire together, duct tape, electrical tape, colored plastic tape, velcro (male and female - even I know one without the other is useless); fuses, itty bitty light bulbs (red and clear), WD-40 (oops, that's a fluid); funnels, gas cans. Got the picture?

Now we get to the interesting category. Contingency budgeting, even for the most optimistic Pro-Rallyist, is a necessary evil. Contingency funds are those that may be required sometime during the year to bail one out of an unanticipated jam. (This is logical as there already is a category for anticipated jams.) Contingency funds are mystical in that they never really exist unless you need them and then only materialize after debate on their actual need and a decision on what gets traded off to make the purchase.

For example, we had to jump head first into the world of MIG welders this season after our full gainer at Tiadaghton. The trade-off was entry fee and expenses at the next two planned events. That one was simple and we also ended up with the home made engine hoist as a bonus. Other expenditures are peskier. The replacement tire for the old trailer (in our zeal to get going we forgot the spare) required no debate but prompted a few glares as we dug deep for cash. The extra case of oil, high ticket replacement parts, the cost of a tow truck, the cost of a U-Haul after the tow truck, the item in the Buzzard Gulch catalogue that TH can't seem to live without. (The minute he says, "OH, OH, I've always wanted one of these." I know there's a debate brewing). Plan as one might, this stuff is going to happen occasionally and in retrospect there is little gained by complaining about it.

The thing about budgeting that keeps me sane is my firm belief that we are directly contributing to the well being of our nation's economy. I like the idea that Wolf Creek Racing's expenditures are helping to keep interest rates down, the dollar strong, inflation in check and free enterprise thriving. I believe in the democratic process that keeps those parts and accessories catalogues clogging up our mail box, that allows us simple access to just about anything and everything the car enthusiast could want.

But then, I also believe in the Tooth Fairy!