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Service With Smile No Longer in Style

WHO would have thought that gasoline would ever look like a bargain at a dollar a gallon?

We are told that Oklahoma has the lowest-priced gasoline in the nation, as "cheap" as 94 cents a gallon including 11 cents taxes, down from a high close to \$1.50 a couple of years ago.

There's more to the gasoline situation than the cost per gallon, however. The supply scarcity, imported oil prices, and moves to make oil prospecting profitable again in the United States have had side effects.

Before World War II and immediately afterward, before the government made it possible for people to subsist without working, the corner gas station was a real service state — with a smile.

When you drove in someone popped out to fill your radiator, wash your windshield and check your tires. You didn't have to ask to have your engine oil measured. The owner or manager would offer a friendly greeting and, perhaps, a free road map.

There still are a few stations oper-

ated like that, for a price, but such service no longer is typical. Fill it up yourself and check your own oil. Go somewhere else to pump up your tires or use the restroom. Road maps may cost a dollar each, if available.

These practices and attitudes now seem to be standard operating procedure. Some self-service stations don't seem to be happy even when they are taking your money and credit is discouraged.

Loss of service station assistance may prove costly to motorists not well enough acquainted with engines to detect trouble.

When gasoline became scarce, drivers had to buy whatever kind or quality of "mobile fluid" they could get. Brand name loyalty was shoved aside. Major refineries became less strict with both company-owned stations and authorized dealers in maintaining high standards of cleanliness, service and quality products.

Now many stations display "Mechanic on Duty" signs and some have personnel capable of diagnos-

ing troubles and making repairs. Operators who trade used cars on the side may resent being interrupted by a gasoline customer if they have a used car prospect on hand.

Wednesday, April 14, Atlantic Richfield Co. became the first major company to stop accepting credit cards for gasoline. Credit cards may be a luxury but motorists have come to expect them.

This may have a bright side for those who carry enough cash to pay for their purchases. Exxon has been offering four cents a gallon discount to cash customers in a test program operating in Arizona, Mississippi and Massachusetts. This idea might spread if it is shown that credit costs can be shifted to credit users.

Sociologists keep telling us that this country is moving rapidly toward becoming "a service society" but that seems to be a general term that does not denote "service with a smile."

The "good old days" when the corner gas station actually was a service station may be gone forever!