

Ferdie J. Deering

JAN 27 1983

Don't Let TV Show You How to Drive

FORTUNATELY, most citizens don't drive their automobiles the way manufacturers demonstrate them for TV ads. Unfortunately, some motorists may mistake the ads for examples of how to drive.

The ads portray a variety of practices that have been condemned by safety experts for years — jackrabbit acceleration, turning corners at speeds which make the tires squeal, zigzagging in traffic or around rubber markers, bouncing over rocky hillsides, diving over sand dunes, and splashing through streams.

In the TV programs we may see pretty much the same patterns followed by stunt men, by racing car drivers, by "private eyes" chasing or fleeing from outlaws, and by comedians just for laughs.

Interspersed with all of this smashing and crashing are beer ads portraying macho types getting off work for a merry time at the nearest bar before they drive home.

The combined implication is plain. The way to be happy is to imbibe freely so you can hit the home-

ward bound traffic in your macho car with speed and vivacity.

Half of all automobile fatalities are reported to involve drinking drivers and national polls indicate a majority want something done about it. Oklahoma public officials have virtually stopped enforcement of laws against operation of open saloons and a movement is under way to legalize more of them. That's what we're doing about it.

Evidence is strong that driver incompetence, more than high speeds, causes accidents. A federal survey said that "low speed drivers are more likely to be involved in accidents than relatively high speed drivers." One driver's license test may last a lifetime.

Yet, since Congress overstepped states' rights to enact a national highway speed limit, changes of numbers of fatalities have been attributed to it in generalizations without proof.

Before that, reductions in fatalities were credited to use of congressionally dictated seat belts and increases often were blamed on small cars and compacts.

Annual state inspections of vehicles for safety have turned out to be just a way for service stations to pick up an easy \$5 for 10 minutes spent checking lights, horns and signals. Ten states have repealed such inspection laws and Oklahoma should.

An amendment to the state's financial responsibility law requiring motorists to carry liability insurance goes into effect on July 1, 1983. It will require a lot of costly paperwork on security verification forms. Even so, the next driver who runs his car into yours may be one who canceled his policy the day after verification.

Announcement has been made that the federal Department of Transportation is considering exemption of certain highways from the widely disregarded 55 mph speed limit. State control would be better.

Sober, careful drivers will continue to be so. Those who drink and drive won't change their habits. Those who ignore traffic laws will keep on doing so. And accidents will happen.