



# **FREEWAY ADVENTURES** *in the big city* **DALLAS**

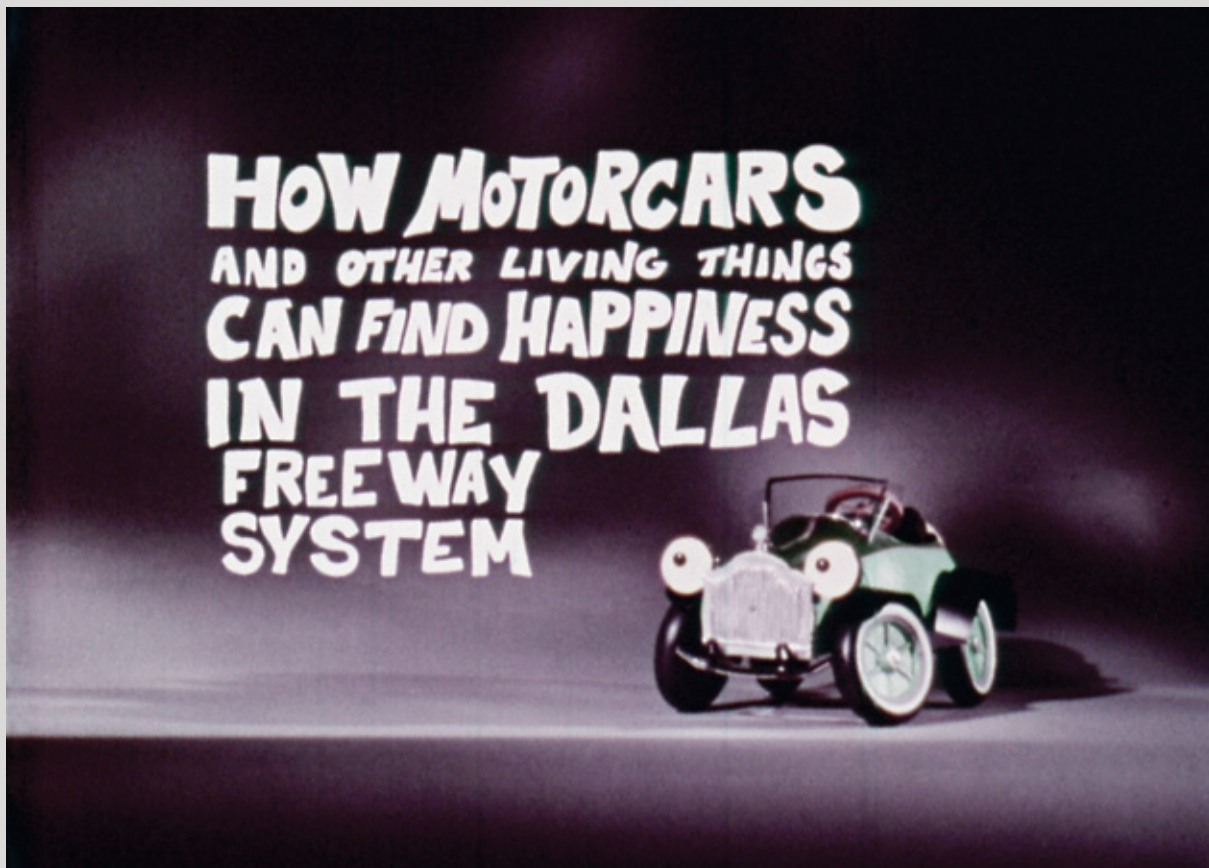
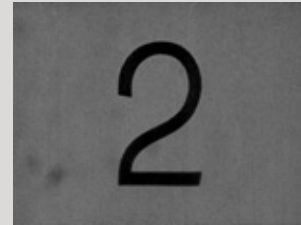
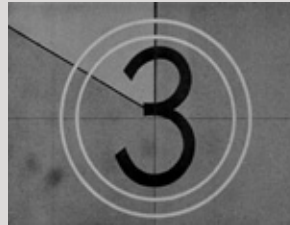




CHAPTER

7

# Freeway Adventures in the Big City



During a search in the *Dallas Morning News* digital archive for an unrelated topic in 2009, a 1970 article with an interesting title appeared in the results: "Freeways Spotlighted in Movie". That headline certainly warranted a closer look, and the article did not disappoint. It revealed the existence of a highly unusual historical artifact of the Dallas freeway system.

The article began, "How Motor Cars and Other Living Things Can Find Happiness in the Dallas Freeway System," a 25-minute locally produced film, will be premiered by the City Council at the close of its business session Monday.

"Star of the film is a whimsical little automobile named Candide, who, accustomed to frolicking about the byways and country lanes of the wide open spaces, is one day suddenly swept onto the Dallas freeway system. His route takes him along North Central Expressway, LBJ Freeway, Stemmons to the Mixmaster area onto Thornton and back to Central. The color movie, narrated by Mel Blanc, will be made available to schools, civic organizations and businesses."

The storyline and narration by legendary anima-

tion voice Mel Blanc, one of the best-known voice actors of all time, certainly suggested it was no ordinary highway safety film. It had the potential to be a fascinating part of Dallas freeway history. A search for a copy of the film began right away.

The search started with the film's owner, the City of Dallas. Several departments and the city's archivist were contacted, but no one was aware of any copies in the city's possession. The local firm which produced the film was then contacted. The firm was well aware of the film and the film's chief animator was still alive, but neither the firm nor the animator had a copy or any suggestions for finding one. TxDOT, a partner and funding source for the film, was contacted but nothing was found. The search moved on to libraries. Local libraries with film collections were contacted and the catalogs of other libraries were searched, but nothing was found. Then it was on to the next hope for discovery, school district archives. That turned out to be a dead end since Dallas-area school districts had disposed of films long ago. The last hope for finding the film was national-level film archives and the federal Department of Transportation. Once again, nothing.



The film can be viewed online at the web site of the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, [www.texasarchive.org](http://www.texasarchive.org)

*Mel Blanc (1908-1989) is probably the best-known voice actor of all time. He was the voice of many Warner Brothers animated characters from the "Golden Age of American Animation", circa 1930 to 1960, including characters Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Sylvester the Cat, Tweety Bird, Foghorn Leghorn, Yosemite Sam, Woody Woodpecker and many others. In the photo Blanc nibbles on a carrot in honor of his most famous voice, Bugs Bunny. In the 1960s his voice acting broadened to numerous studios, including the Hanna-Barbera studio where he voiced Barney Rubble of the Flintstones and others. It is somewhat unusual to find Blanc in the lead narration role for a small-budget, local-interest educational film, making How Motor Cars and Other Living Things Can Find Happiness in the Dallas Freeway System all the more unique.*

Sadly, the quest to find the film in 2009 came to an end with the unfortunate conclusion that the film was a lost artifact of Dallas freeway history and we would never know what the character Candide did on Dallas freeways while Mel Blanc narrated.

Then, in 2010, an amazing stroke of luck occurred. An employee of the City of Dallas streets department was retiring. While sorting through old department files in preparation for his departure he came across a film labeled "Dallas Traffic". The film was with the records of the defunct Dallas Civil Defense Office which had been merged into the streets division long ago. The retiring employee contacted the Dallas city archivist and of course he was willing to take the film into city archives. But at this point, with the label "Dallas Traffic", there was no indication of the potential importance of the discovery. When the archivist unrolled the film and took a closer look he soon realized that the long-lost 1970 film had been found.

Everything that is known about the origins of the film is from the September 26, 1970, *Dallas Morning News* article and the film's credits. (There was no report in the *Dallas Times Herald*.) The \$26,400 film was commissioned by the City of Dallas with a funding grant from TxDOT. The film was coordinated by the traffic safety education division of the City of Dallas

traffic control department, and many highway-related organizations are listed as advisors in the film's credits. It appears that the film's producer, Dallas-based Bill Stokes Associates (known as Post Asylum in 2013), was responsible for the story and creative content. The producer most likely brought in Mel Blanc for the narration and sound effects.

The film's main character Candide is a Ford Model A, a design manufactured between 1927 and 1931 immediately following the hugely successful Model T. There are two parallel storylines in the film: the on-location freeway scenes and the animated sequences. Scenes filmed on Dallas freeways and streets follow an actual Model A as it drives the route, while animated sequences show a cartoon depiction of a Model A using mainly stop-motion photography with some additional sequences using conventional drawn animation. The film screenshots shown on the following pages include both on-location driving views and animation views.

It is difficult to make any definitive superlative conclusions about unique and distinctive highway safety awareness films. But it is surely safe to say that the film is among the most creative and unconventional films ever produced on the topic, and perhaps the most distinctive ever. And it took place in Dallas, on Dallas freeways.

*This map shows the route followed for the on-freeway scenes in the film. The Ford Model A was filmed mostly from a nearby vehicle on the freeway, but also from aerial and fixed ground positions. The numbers indicate the locations of the photos in this chapter.*







*Note: The framed text boxes have excerpts from the narration of the film by Mel Blanc. Additional information is provided in this font.*

There was once this artless motorcar named Candide who cavorted about the countryside honking happily and feeling deep within his deferential differential that this was certainly the best of all possible worlds.

Filled with simple joy and a few gallons of classical gas, Candide spent hour upon hour frolicking along the utopian lanes. Wow, it was wonderful. Look how wonderful it was.



Then one day Candide found himself on the road to the city, and a shadow fell across his day. The shadow of a trash truck, and a cement mixer, and a moving van full of anvils.





But wait. Let's begin this whole thing at the beginning, which in this case is as follows:



*#1: This view is at the south end of the downtown Mixmaster interchange, IH 30 at IH 35E. This freeway interchange is being fully rebuilt and modernized by the \$798 million Horse-shoe project, underway in 2013 and scheduled for completion in 2017.*

Not too long ago somebody sat down and invented the freeway. It got so popular that most cities bought a whole bunch of them to decorate the urban landscape. And they wove them together into great systems leading here and there and everywhere about the great city.

Whether the father of the freeway will live in history is debatable, but the thing he invented is either a blessing or a nightmare depending on your point of view.



*#2: This view looks northwest along the downtown Mixmaster, IH 30 at IH 35E.*

If you know how to drive the freeway properly, then they're the safest, most convenient way to get from here to there. But if you don't, then they can truly be a nightmare, or a daymare as the case may be.

And so with the help of Candide here, we're gonna explore some ways you can keep out of trouble on the freeway. Ways to stay alive and healthy in one of the world's most potential hostile environments.

As you remember, Candide had found himself on the road to the city. And before he could say "Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang" he was swept into the freeway system. Heading south on North Central US 75, and if you've ever been there about five in the evening, you know what he was getting into.

*#3: This view looks northbound along Central Expressway just north of LBJ Freeway with the Midpark Road overpass in the background.*



*#4: This view is on the connector from southbound Central Expressway to westbound LBJ with the Texas Instruments South Building visible in the background. The connection at the original interchange was a ground-level ramp. The connection at today's High Five interchange is an elevated structure.*

And so he escaped west to the wide, inviting stretches of LBJ, or more correctly known as Interstate 635.

*#5: This view is westbound on LBJ just west of White Rock Creek.*





# The Road Rogues

At first things seemed to go pretty well, and just as he began to think maybe this freeway driving stuff wasn't so bad after all, he began to notice some weird things going on all around him. He looked in his mirror and found to his horror that he had been set upon by...the Road Rogues—that singularly dangerous bunch of characters who have been known to turn freeways into cemeteries at the drop of a hat.



For instance, there was the Unassociated Road Rogue. He can usually be found wheeling along the freeways at the top legal speed limit with his right arm draped across the back of the seat, his mind draped along a day dream, driving purely on luck and intuition. His thoughts are a million miles away and his days are numbered.

Then there was the Rattled Rogue. This dangerous character usually operates at speeds near the minimum and his break lights come on frequently for no apparent reason. The rear-end of his car is redesigned at regular intervals.

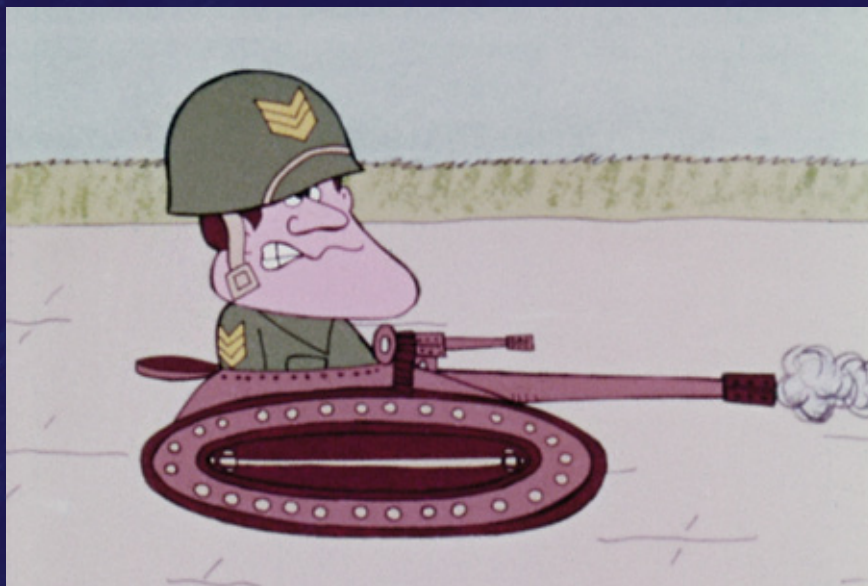






Meet the Jelly Rogue. The Jelly Rogue rarely exposes himself until he is forced to make a choice at an interchange. Then, in a flash, he turns to jelly - a quivering mass of indecision.

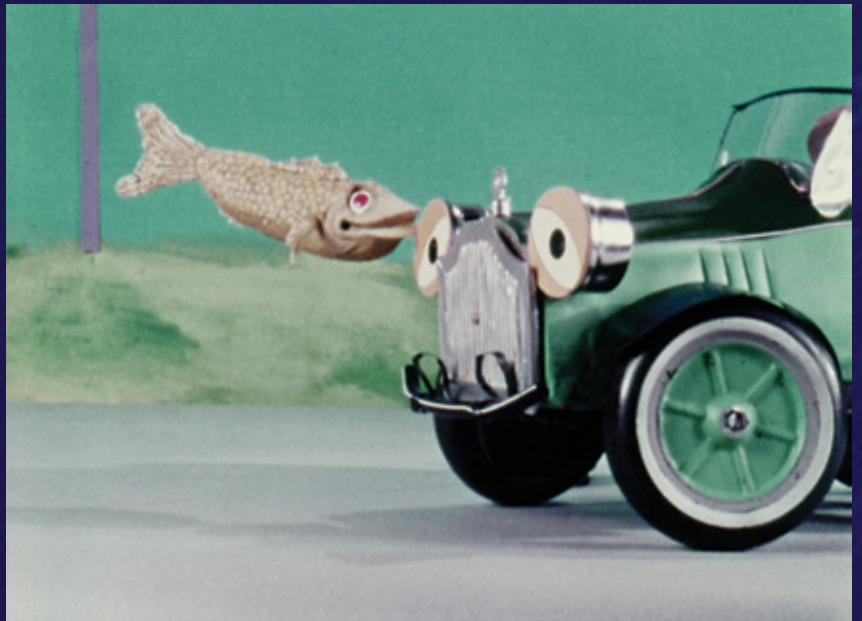
And then there was the Road Hog Rogue. He's the one you see tailgating and speeding and cutting people off and breaking every rule in the book, and at the same time being totally convinced that all other drivers are incompetent.



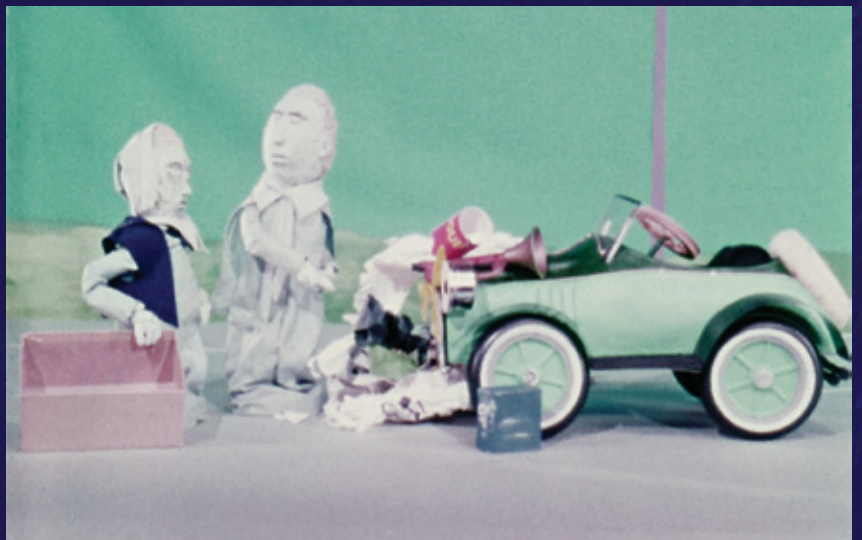
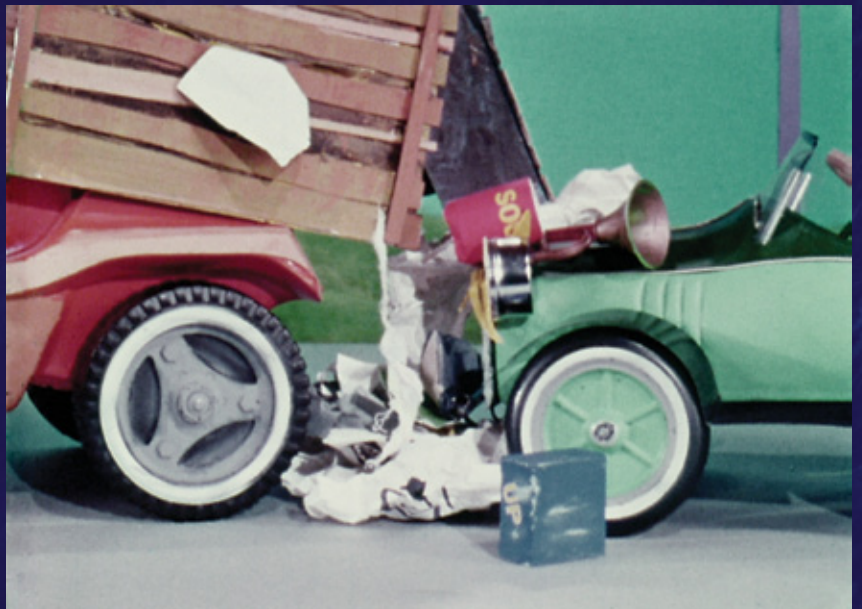
What can you do about the Road Rogues? Absolutely nothing at all. Just don't be one of them, and keep out of their way.



Strange as it may seem, there's a similarity between freeway driving and deep sea diving. They say, when a diver gets deep beneath the sea he sometimes gets what's called "rapture of the deep", a deep and peaceful illusion of invulnerability. It's easy to get lulled into this same illusion on the freeway - it seems so straight and orderly and easy, and the day is so peaceful. Remember this: no matter how peaceful a freeway may seem, things can happen, and they can happen fast. The best defense on the freeway is to avoid the possibility of being surprised.



And of course, it's especially important to watch out for ... trash trucks and other people entering from acceleration lanes.







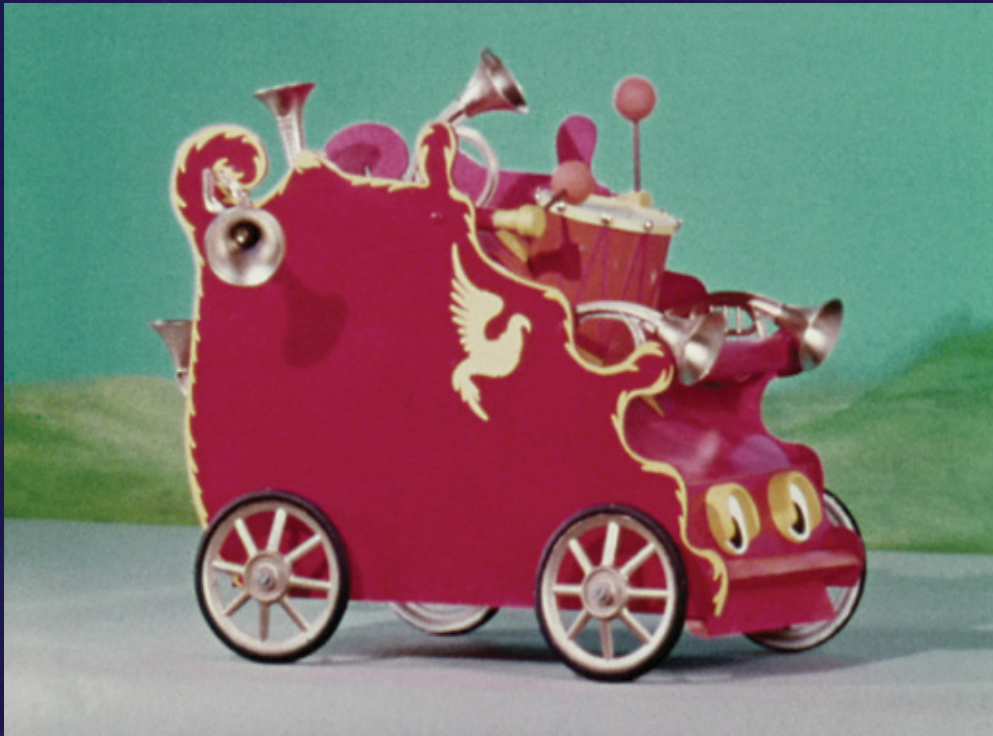
#6: This is the most interesting roadside landmark in the film—a billboard for George H.W. Bush on the northeast side of the LBJ-Stemmons interchange in the summer of 1970. Bush (born 1924) was a congressman representing a Houston district and in 1970 was making a second run for a United States Senate seat, facing Democrat Lloyd Bentsen in the November election. The text on the billboard reads “We can’t solve today’s problems with yesterday’s programs.” Bentsen defeated Bush with 54% of the vote. Of course, Bush recovered nicely from his Senate election defeats in 1964 and 1970, becoming vice president under Ronald Reagan and once again facing Bentsen in the 1988 presidential contest, with Bentsen the running mate on the Dukakis ticket. Bush easily won the election over the Dukakis-Bentsen ticket and served a single term as president. See page 262 for additional Bush biographical information.



#7: This view on Stemmons Freeway is on the Empire Central Drive overpass with three office buildings under construction in the background along the 8700 block of Stemmons Freeway.



# The Bandwagon



And so Candide moved on toward the city. This might be a good time to mention the one thing that causes more accidents on the freeway than anything else, and that is when people follow too close behind another car.

For instance, take the case of Candide. As Candide zipped along Stemmons he suddenly found himself crowded from the rear by a bandwagon. If for any reason at all Candide would have had to stop suddenly, he probably would have had to join the musicians' union.





# The Pink Unicorn



Another way to measure a proper space cushion is to allow a two-second space between your car and the one in front of you. As you move along, pick out a conspicuous object along the road ahead, like a sign, a light pole, or a pink unicorn. As the rear of the bandwagon passes the checkpoint, Candide begins to count. One thousand one, one thousand and two. That's two seconds. If the front of the car passes the checkpoint before you finish counting, then you're too close. So let up on the gas a little and increase your cushion.





Although Candide seemed to be doing pretty well at this point, he is about to have one of the most harrowing experiences a driver can have. Up ahead, Stemmons and Carpenter Freeway converge.

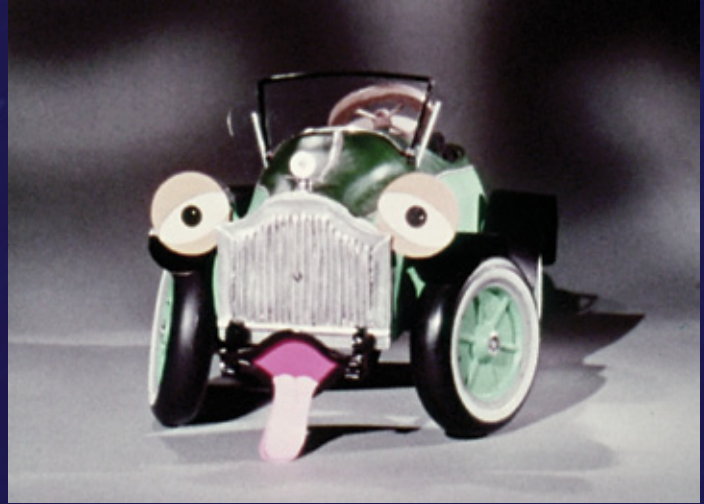
*#8: This view shows the merge point of Stemmons Freeway on the right and Carpenter Freeway (SH 183) on the left. This highway location remains basically the same in 2013.*



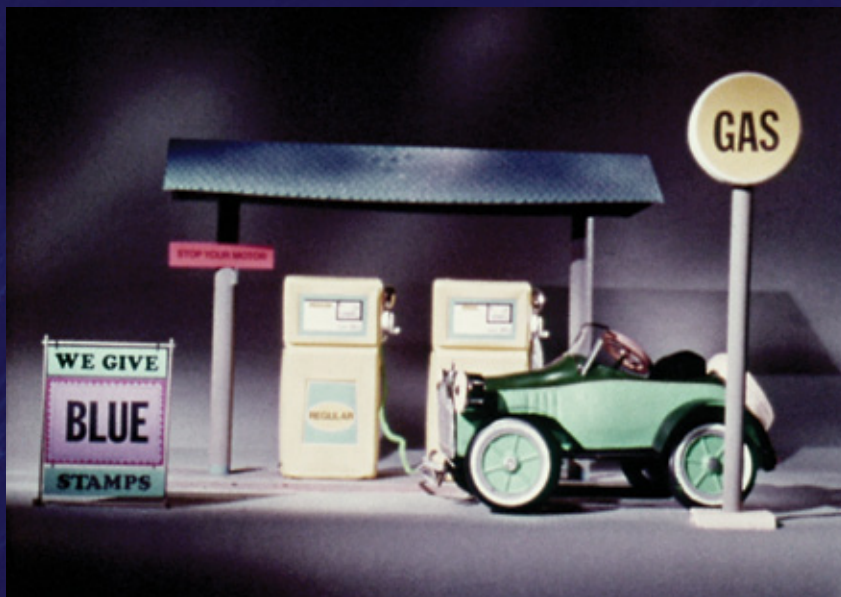
Exiting from Stemmons across the incoming Carpenter traffic to the Irving exit is not easy. At this interchange and several others like it in Dallas, there is one major rule to follow. Whatever you do, do it one lane at a time. If you don't, the results may be something like this.



As Candide headed on toward town, he did have a few things going for him — finding things that could keep him and you out of trouble. For instance, if he had been fatigued or ill,



or if he had been taking a cold medicine or other drugs, or if he'd been hitting the booze, then his physical and mental reactions would have been inhibited and the odds of having an accident would have been greatly increased.



Or, if his seat belts had not been properly fastened



or if his front and back lights and signal lights had not been working properly, then again his chances of staying safe on the freeway for very long would have been very slim.



*#9: This view at a Stemmons Freeway on-ramp includes a billboard for the Marriott Motor Hotel along Stemmons at Market Center Boulevard. The Marriott opened in September 1960 was billed as the world's largest motor hotel after a 1963 expansion. It was a fixture alongside the freeway until its demolition in 1989. See photos page 194.*



*#10: This closer view of the Stemmons Freeway on-ramp shows that the US 77 highway designation was still used as a route indication.*



*#11: This view on the overpass at Medical District Drive, which was then called Motor Street, shows downtown ahead. The Southland Life building is visible above the Model A car and the Republic Bank building with its spire is visible on the right.*



*#12: This view shows the Dallas Steam Power Generating Plant alongside Stemmons Freeway and a good view of the 52-floor First National Bank building on the left. The power plant remained operational until 1995 and was demolished in 2002 to clear land for development after the opening of American Airlines Center just north of the power plant in 2001. The First National Bank building at 1401 Elm Street opened in January 1965 and its 628-foot height made it the tallest sky-*

*scraper west of the Mississippi River. Known as Elm Place in recent years, it became totally vacant in 2010 when its last tenant moved out. The building was purchased in August 2011 by Eastern European investors who had plans to renovate the asbestos-infested building but instead sold the still-empty building to a New York investment firm in November 2013. In February 2014 plans were announced for a \$170 million redevelopment of the tower including 500 residential units.*



About this time old Candide began to feel pretty good. There was the city dead ahead, a straight and easy shot right into Dallas. It looked like he had it made, but then, just as he began to relax a little, he came over a rise. And leaping lizards, he was suddenly enveloped in a weird sort of psychedelic people-eating nightmare. Four major highways going everywhere at once, and no city.



#13: This overhead sign on IH 35E southbound approaching the downtown Mixmaster shows some interesting historical sign artifacts. The Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike was in existence at that time, with motorists being guided by the “Turnpike Ft Worth” sign. IH 20 went through downtown Dallas. IH 20 was shifted to its present-day route on the south edge of Dallas in 1971 and the freeway formerly IH 20 became IH 30. We can also see that US Highway markers dominated the overhead signs, and two different styles of US route shields were used—the standard-shaped US markers in the middle sign and the markers on a square white background in the right sign.



#14: This image shows the most interesting artifact—the IH 35E shield. Notice that there is a very small “E” beneath the “35” number. Modern signs have the “E” immediately to the right of the “35” in the same font size as the numbers.

And even when you know where you're going the downtown interchanges can be pretty frightening. But they really needn't be. For one thing, traffic moves slower here, and the signs are placed in such a way that, if you're observant, you're given plenty of directional warning. And so he follows the signs, maneuvers into the indicated lane, being careful to watch for vehicles moving up on his right, and remembering to move only one lane at a time.



#15: This view shows a guide sign to Central Expressway with "button copy" on the lettering and outlines. Button copy placed small reflectors along the paths of letters and outlines to illuminate those features. It was typically used on signs which did not have independent lighting. Today, freeway guide signs are made of highly reflective material which is brightly visible from automobile headlights alone, eliminating the need for sign lighting or button copy.



#16: This view shows a reassurance marker along the downtown street section of Central Expressway near Commerce Street. The downtown section of Central Expressway was renamed Cesar Chavez Boulevard in 2010. This old-style US route marker included the text "TEXAS" and "US". Modern US route shields do not include text.



#17: This view shows a guide sign along Central Expressway with a white background and black lettering. The sign was probably a relic from the early days of Central Expressway. In January 1958 green was designated as the standard background color for signs on the Interstate Highway System and became the standard for all highways. Signs conforming to obsolete standards, such as this one, were replaced with signs having a green background.





*#18: After reaching downtown, Candide went north on Central Expressway. This remarkable view captures a moment in time when construction was just underway on the elevated main lanes which were built on both sides of the original Central Expressway, shown here. The elevated structures were completed three years later in August 1973.*

Homeward-bound at last. But this is a different kind of freeway than any he's traveled before. It takes some additional rules to drive it safely. For instance, take a look at this. This is just one of the things that can happen to you if you drive North Central in the right-hand lane. And none of them are good. Every once in a while like here at Washington and Lemmon the right lane simply ends and you're forced onto the service road.



*#19, 20: These views show the original exit and intersection at Lemmon Avenue, with Central Expressway crossing over Lemmon on the left. Today's Central Expressway is in a trench at Lemmon.*



#21: These views show the original Central Expressway north of downtown Dallas. This view on the northbound frontage road shows the narrow width of the freeway corridor, with only a thin strip of grass between the main lanes and the frontage road. The high cost and disruptiveness of widening the corridor made it very difficult to find a feasible solution for expanding the freeway. Study and controversy, particularly on the subject of proposed elevated lanes, lasted for twelve years between 1974 and 1986. See page 120 for complete coverage of the Central Expressway expansion controversy.



#22: This view is approaching the Fitzhugh Avenue intersection. The original Central Expressway went underneath all intersecting streets between Lemmon Avenue and Walnut Hill Lane, but was at ground level between the intersections. Today's freeway is in a continuous trench between downtown and Park Lane, just north of Northwest Highway.



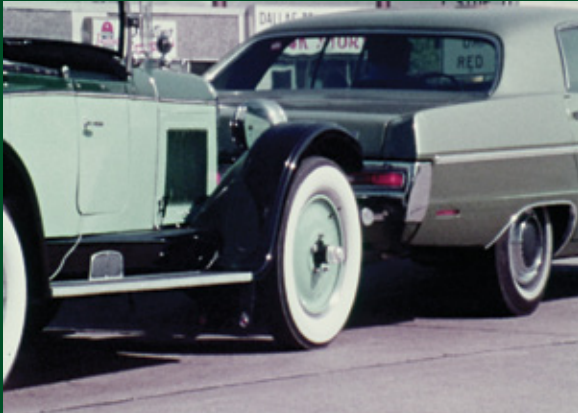
#23: This view shows the exit ramp at Fitzhugh Avenue with its minimal merging space. Most motorists who experienced the original Central Expressway remember the harrowing on-ramps which had virtually no merging space. The exit ramps were also poorly designed but not nearly as stressful as the on-ramps.





It's a funny thing about North Central. Not only can you get swept off of it, but you can also get swept back on. Just as *Candide* was feeling safe and secure on the frontage road, he got up close to Mockingbird and got forced back on. And this, entering the old freeway like North Central, requires a different technique from that on the newer freeways where we have longer acceleration lanes.

But here on North Central we now have signal lights to help you. The lights are tied into a computer which records and analyzes traffic flow. It's actually simple. When it's red, you wait. And when it's green, you make your move. But make sure the guy in front of you has entered the traffic stream first.



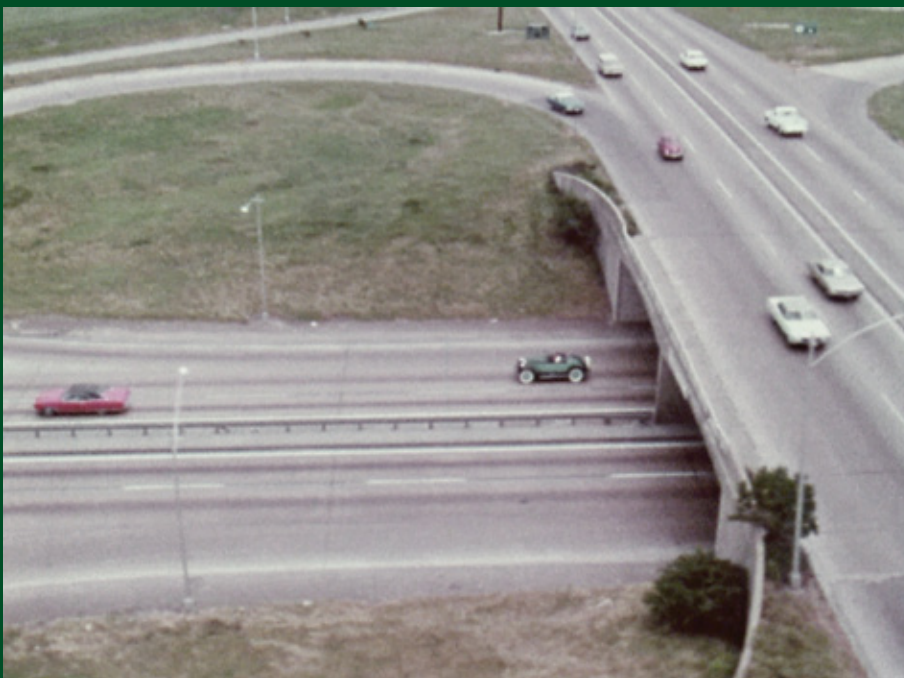
#24: The film shows *Candide* bumping into the vehicle ahead of it at the on-ramp to help educate viewers of the risk of rear-end collisions. On-ramp rear-end collisions were a common occurrence in the 1950s and 1960s due to the virtually non-existent merging space of the on-ramps and vehicles which would stop on the ramps to await a gap in the traffic.



#25, 26, 27: The first ramp signals had just been installed in the summer of 1970 when the film was made. These views show the northbound entrance ramp and ramp signal at McCommas Boulevard. At the time, there was a gap in the frontage roads between McCommas and Mockingbird Lane due to the railroad tracks of the MKT railroad, which is now the Katy Trail walking and biking path.



The sign in the background for "sick-room equipment" shows an interesting language oddity. The word "sick-room" has fallen into total disuse in American English. The use of the term "motorcar" in the film's title also seems curious because the term is rarely used today in American English and is more associated with British English.

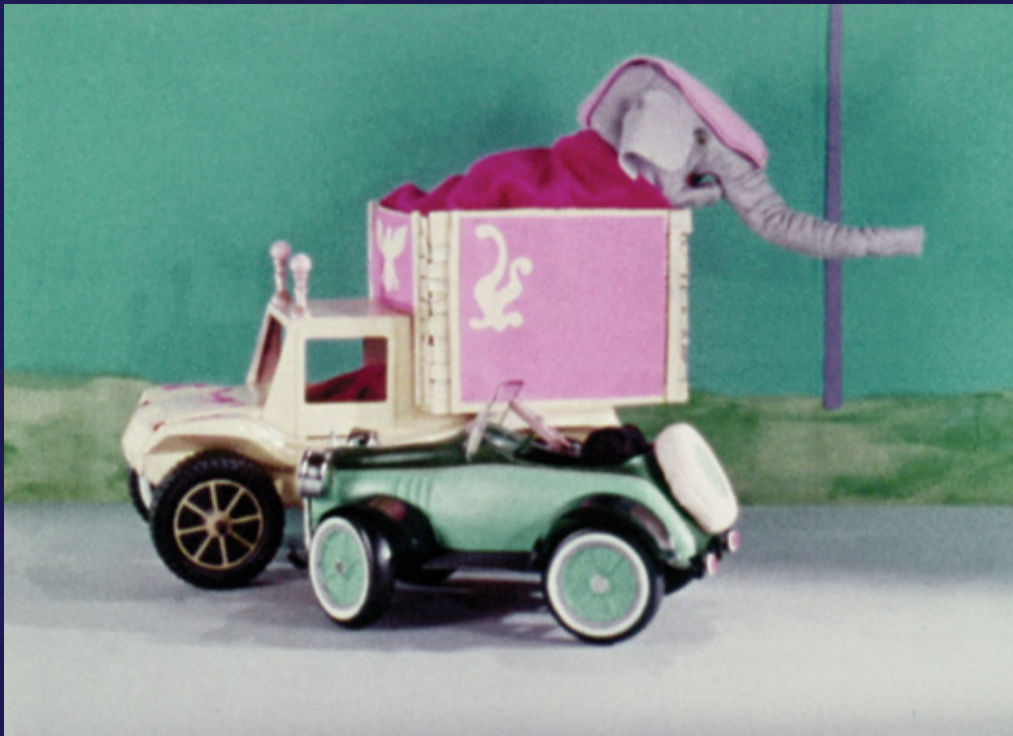


#28, 29, 30: These views show the intersection at Loop 12 (Northwest Highway) which was a cloverleaf interchange. Northpark Mall opened on the northwest corner of Central Expressway and Loop 12 in 1965, but the other three corners were vacant in 1970. For additional historical photos of this intersection see page 100, and for modern photos see page 145.

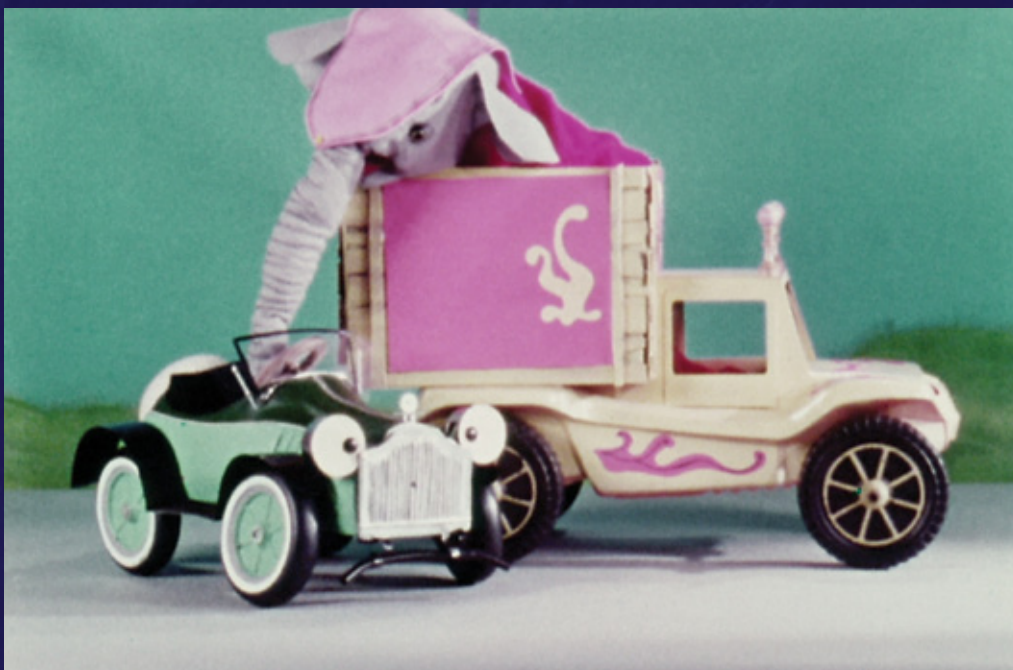


#31: This view at the Park Lane exit is the end of the freeway driving tour. The freeway lacked a median barrier north of Loop 12 and was recognized as a safety hazard in a March 1970 report. A median guardrail was installed in 1971.

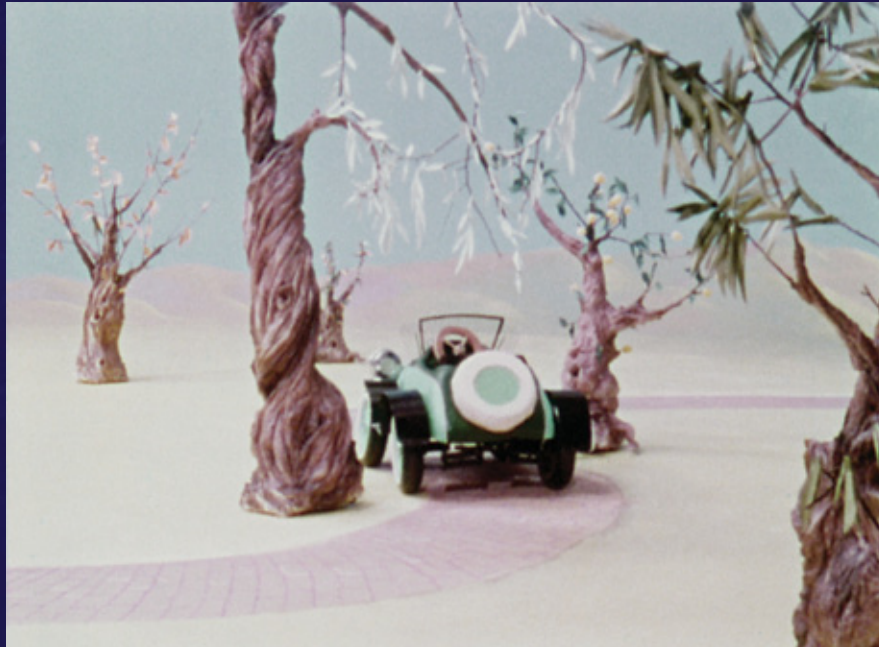




Be alert to everything that is going on around you. Watch where you are going and where you have been. Help other drivers as much as possible, even when they do something wrong.



And so my friends, our story draws to a close. *Candide*, a weary but wiser motorcar, moves homeward through the friendly countryside. Behind, somewhere in the cement labyrinth, the trash truck and cement mixers and pink unicorns and road rogues and elephants are merely memories now mercifully fading. But *Candide* knows if he must ever leave his gentle meadow road and head for the city he will never be quite this innocent again.



And that's how motorcars and other living things can find happiness in the Dallas freeway system.

# The End