

ENGINEERS ARE VICTIMS OF THE MARKET

Mr C. E. H. Benson ("The Solicitor's Lot", May letters) contrasts the "bellyaching" engineer with the professional outlook of solicitors, yet is very reticent about their status.

The Law Society, as the professional body for solicitors, provides its members with guidance on the fees to charge for professional work. It prohibits advertising for clientele, thus limiting competition*. A law graduate who aspired to qualifying as a solicitor, but was in temporary employment, recently explained to me that practical training in law was difficult to obtain because the permitted number of training positions with firms of solicitors was limited. Thus competition was further limited. Overall, The Law Society has resort to the courts to protect its members from competition in legal work from outside the profession.

On the other hand, engineering is not a regulated profession. A qualified engineer has to have an aggregate of engineering education, training and responsible experience of not less than seven years to attain corporate membership of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, which has learned society status, and has to compete on the open market not only with other engineers but with many unqualified persons who trade and advertise as engineers. Because there is so much competition, skill and expertise cannot command economic rewards. Qualified engineers have to resort to the trade unions to prevent a continuing fall in living standards. Neither the engineer nor his institution can take action to prevent competition from unqualified persons.

The professional exercise of law differs from that of engineering. For example, last year The Law Society succeeded in obtaining a conviction (*The Guardian* 28 Jan. 1978) against Mr Barry Powell who runs a non-profit organisation called Assistance in Divorce. The complaint was that he had helped people prepare documents to get undefended divorces. The difference between the professional practice of engineering and law is that the former is subject to the caprices of market economics while the latter is the exercise of real power in the community.

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*But the Law Society itself advertises for the profession as a whole, pointing out, incidentally, that individual solicitors can be found in Yellow Pages. — Ed.

RELATIVITY AND TIME SIGNALS

Initially failing to grasp Dr Essen's point (October 1978 issue), I did not at the time give his article the attention it deserved. However, the "answers" to his problem which you have published, together with some inconsistencies in the recent BBC television programme "Einstein's Universe", have convinced me that it is high time we physicists awoke from our relativistic dreaming.

It is implied in the April issue that this correspondence is regarded as being closed by Professor Fremlin's letter in that issue, but



I hope you will allow me space to pose the following extension to Professor Fremlin's scenario: consider a third party, "Observer", positioned along a line at right angles to that joining Sirius and Earth, far enough away that "Traveller" moves virtually at right angles to his line of sight. What is "Observer" to make of the proposed relativistic, or rather Lorentzian, caperings of "Traveller's" clock? Surely, he will see both "Traveller's" and "Stay at home's" clocks running always at the same rate.

A little more open-mindedness and a little less blind faith than has been revealed by this correspondence might reduce the present resemblance of physics to a moribund branch of theology.

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AUDIO KITS AND MODULES

I would most strongly like to endorse the comments of Ivor Abelson regarding reviews of kits and modules (May issue). Not one of the major electronics magazines even attempts to review such items, unless one absolutely pathetic attempt in April is to be counted (most of the samples never arrived so the magazine could not say very much).

The market in modules seems to be so cut-throat at present that unless the buyer wants something rather special which he is prepared to spend many hours building, it is pointless to build completely from scratch—designs and Veroboards etc. Hence anyone simply restoring disco units or building p.as (which I do for churches and halls etc.) naturally turns to the "module" or kit market. But although there are some excellent units, I've discovered, there are some very dodgy specimens as well and specifications are often misleading — especially when the figures only apply when the unit is chassis mounted with an elaborate p.s.u. (not supplied!). To take an example, the Klifco 30+30 amplifier module, if ordered with a stabilised p.s.u. comes complete with both mounted on a solid chassis which acts as heat sink. The BiPak modules do not. This, in practice, is a major consideration and makes a great difference to installation.

In more esoteric fields, kits are often the answer to component buying problems. I tried to build a magazine project recently just buying the parts from their cheapest sources and it took nearly 20 orders and cost a fortune in postage charges. I do, however, have the satisfaction of knowing that all the semiconductors are first grade,

that the capacitors in the power supply are computer grade and of recent manufacture, that the output and input socketry is both of the type I want (Standard jacks rather than DIN-plugs) and that the cabinet-work is very rugged. Some of the socketry supplied with kits that I have bought is better thrown away. With these kits it is not the electronics that form the bulk of the expense but the hardware, the socketry and the transformers and smoothing capacitors and these can vary enormously in quality. In my opinion, there would be no greater service you could do for many of your non-professional readers, than reviewing and monitoring such items.

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OWNING CB SETS SHOULD BE AN OFFENCE

The mere mention of citizens' band radio in the technical press almost invariably precipitates heated correspondence. However, despite this, one fact seems to be generally overlooked — that certain people do use c.b. equipment within this country and as such are openly flouting the law of the land. Furthermore c.b. sets are both widely advertised and are readily available from several retailers, despite regulations which expressly forbid their importation. Unless action is taken soon it will be impossible to clear the 27MHz band if and when such a service is legally introduced on more suitable frequencies.

The activities of these c.b. pirate operators cannot possibly assist the efforts of many hardworking and responsible people who are at present campaigning for a recognised c.b. radio service within the United Kingdom. The apprehension of the 27MHz and other pirate operators is, however, seriously hampered by the present regulations, and I suggest that only by changing the law to make it an offence to possess radio transmitting equipment without the appropriate operating licences will the situation be readily brought under control.

J. Berry of Bristol (June letters) is mistaken in his belief that the "high and mighty" radio amateur is opposed to c.b. as such. The two services are fundamentally different and each has its part to play in a responsible society. The majority of radio amateurs do, however, take exception to the belief that c.b. should be introduced as an amateur band for unqualified operators, especially so since a radio amateur licence is readily available to any person who has sufficient interest to pass a simple examination.

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RSGB TO CONTROL CB USERS?

I have no intention of entering into a discussion about the benefits that would result if we had a citizens' band in the UK; obviously very powerful financial interests are at work behind the scenes. But, as a member of the RSGB, I doubt the wisdom of compelling c.b. users to join this body as suggested by Mr