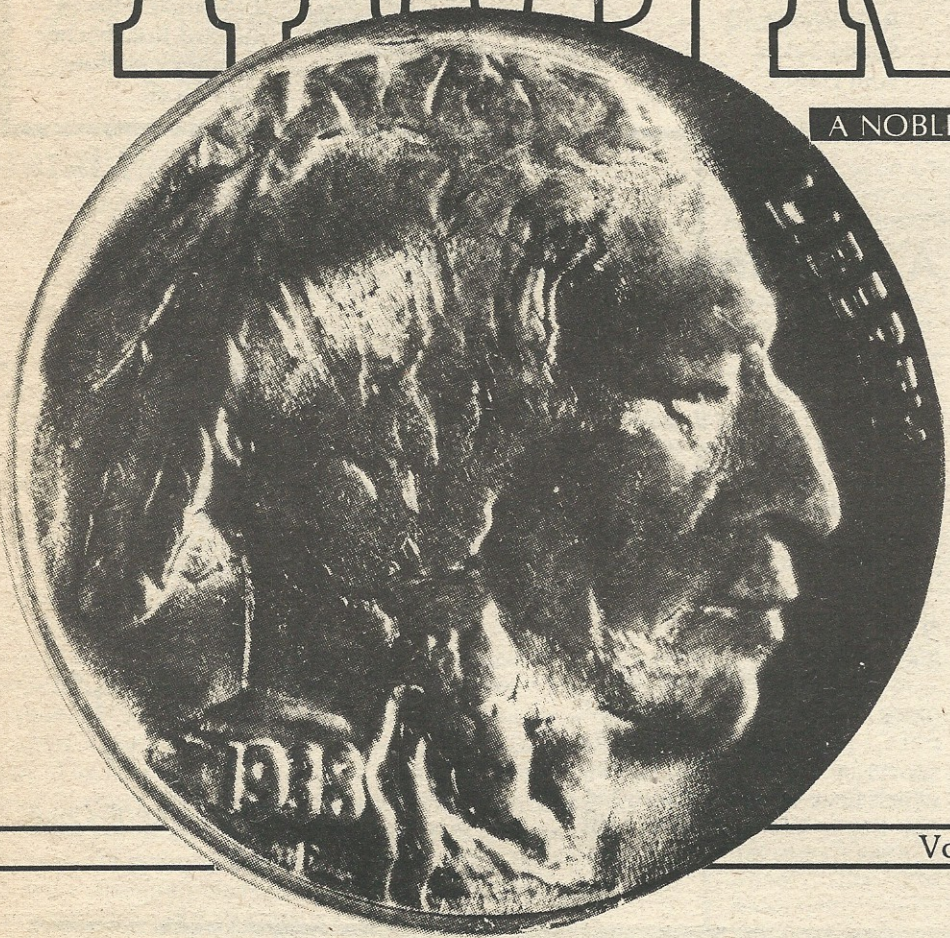


THE NICKEL

A NOBLE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER SERVING THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



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Volume One Number One August 27, 1979

Breakthrough Racing: est is taking some new turns, fast

Werner Erhard is a man to be admired. He has taken a plethora of buzz words out of the psychobargon of the sixties, mixed in a tad of pop Zen, a few old bromides wrapped in newspeak, and a lot of verve, and has molded it into a series of weekend seminars which allegedly can make the sheep into lions and lions into worldbeaters. It's psychotherapy for the person on the go, hot and ready, prepackaged like a Big Mac, chewed quickly, swallowed whole, and digested on the run. It's just what America's huddled masses have been looking for—consciousness expansion, self-awareness, actualization, without wasting a lot of valuable time prone on a horsehair couch.

The organization is est, spelled demurely with small letters. Attendance at one of its four-day seminars is called "taking the training" and costs \$350.00. What "taking the training" means for the initiate is that he or she is subjected to a barrage of lectures and insults, called an anus (in the vernacular), scolded for being a namby-pamby in life, and is allowed to scream and throw tantrums, vomit, and so forth, until finally he or she gets "it," a mysterious feeling of confidence and well-being that comes from having gotten "it." Those who have never been through the training, or those who have and don't get "it," can never, supposedly, know what "it" is. And those that do get "it" go trotting off through life looking to Werner Erhard as a sort of secular guru and are often heard affixing "Werner thinks..." to about everything they say.

What Werner is thinking about lately is automobile racing—according to *The Graduate Review*, a slick and glossy monthly newsletter of sorts, sent free to est "graduates." The

periodical documents the various doings in the est camp, promotes seminars, advertises W.W. Bartley's glowing biography of Werner, and the like. Its feature article in the July '79 issue was on Formula Super Vee automobile racing, Werner's newest undertaking.

A creative and enterprising entrepreneur like Werner Erhard doesn't just have a hobby. A hobby is expensive, something to lavish treasure on without hope of remuneration. What Werner Erhard is doing is "research"—not just enjoying himself—and therefore he's accepting donations to bankroll his participation in the sport. He calls it "Breakthrough Racing."

What is being researched is not something quite as mundane as mechanics or aerodynamics, stress, propulsion, and other aspects of the science of speed. That isn't grandiose enough for Mr. Erhard. He's asking the question, he says, "What is the communication that will allow people to realize within themselves the qualities which they need in order to fulfill the opportunity to make the world work for everyone?" But unlike other researchers, he does not expect "to give people the answers," nor, sir, he's going to empower them with it. Sounds mystical, almost god-like.

This "empowering" business is of course newspeak doublethink only a true initiate could take on faith. And apparently a lot of them do. The money to keep Breakthrough Racing going, *The Graduate Review* article states, has been coming in from individual contributors.

Raising so much money is a source of pride to Werner Erhard, apparently. The article quotes him as saying, "One of the highest qualities is to be able to be supported by people. Every

time someone makes a contribution to Breakthrough Racing the team has to expand to include that someone actually did that. When somebody gives you something, it can make you small. But when the people who are contributing to the race team are of such quality and give in such a way, that the people on the team have expanded."

In other words, Mr. Werner Erhard not just shamelessly but boastfully takes money for his hobby from people, most of whom have far less than he, and it makes him feel "expanded." Big, in other words.

This individual contributor method of sponsorship is reportedly a new departure for Werner Erhard. Formerly, the finished product was presented, then money was solicited. *The Graduate Review* confirms this and adds that Breakthrough Racing is the first time money is being solicited in advance of results.

There is a further difference. In the seminars, consumers were coming to Erhard wanting a service, and he was giving them something. Now he is taking contributions and giving no service, only promising they will be "empowered." And when people look to men as spiritual leaders and give them full faith, they will surrender their worldly goods on a promise, a word, with astounding generosity. This new departure for Werner Erhard's est is the same departure taken at some point by all such messianic movements searching to make the world work.

Jim Jones made that departure, once. He was then thought a man to be admired. He was going to make the world work for everyone, he said. And some poor fools believed him.

—James Frey

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