

IN BRIEF

Electric cars for US

Congress last week won a small, but important, skirmish with the Ford administration over a plan to develop an electric car industry in the US. It overrode a Presidential veto on a Bill to devote up to \$160 million to research, development and demonstration of electric car technology over the next six years. The key part of the Bill—and the part which stuck in Mr Ford's throat—is a scheme to create a market for electric vehicles through direct government support. In the next three years, the Government is empowered to purchase up to 2,500 electric vehicles, with a further 5,000 within five years. Mr Ford had vetoed the legislation feeling that the technology was not sufficiently advanced for a subsidised purchasing programme of that size.

Engineers building up

For all that is being said about the sad state of recruitment into engineering, figures just released by the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) show a steady growth in the number of applicants, and admissions, to universities for engineering courses (Statistical Supplement to the Thirteenth Report, 1974-5, UCCA, £1.25). Since 1973 electrical civil and mechanical engineering have each registered gains in applicants—firm figures for 1975, and reliable forecasts for 1976 show that in three years engineering has gained 30% more applicants. Mathematics, physics and chemistry remain in the doldrums; chemistry was a few per cent up both in 1975 and 1976, but physics dropped several per cent in 1975 and just held its ground in 1976.

Soyuz in orbit

Carrying photographic equipment developed partly by the East German company Carl Zeiss (Jena), the latest Soviet space-shot, Soyuz 22, went into orbit last week. Special emphasis is being paid to the photography of large tracts of Soviet territory, and while practical results are anticipated—similar, it is hoped, to those from the Soyuz 12 survey which revealed potential oil- and gas-bearing zones in the region of the Mangyshlak and Buzachi peninsulas—the main aim is to develop new techniques. Additionally, as a follow-up to earlier experiments during which cultures of *Proteus* bacteria grown in space showed signs of developmental deviations, experiments aboard Soyuz 22 have been designed to investigate the phenomenon.

SCIENTIFIC meetings used to be almost routinely enlivened by projectionists who inserted slides upside down, backwards, and so on. But the introduction of carousel projectors has largely done away with this form of amusement, especially when the lecturer is artful enough to load the slides in advance. I always try to meet projectionists ahead of my talks. Most of them are males, often students who take the job as part-time employment. I usually scrutinise the projection booth for copies of *Sports Illustrated* and soft-core porn magazines, which I scan briefly to soothe my nerves. If present, such reading matter shows that the projectionist will not be listening for slide-changing cues during my lecture, and I know that I must shout my requests.

One of my adventures as a lecturer had an almost dream-like quality. It was in Las Vegas. I arrived at the "meeting hotel" to speak to a convention of dietitians. After threading my way past slot machines and blackjack tables, I found that the theme of the day was "Nutrition in the Age of Aquarius". The delegates wore emblems proclaiming their zodiacal signs. Some of them were multiparous married women whose badges stated "I am a Virgo", which seemed incongruous to me. The slide projector had somehow been overlooked, and it was one hour to launch time. A hotel employee was delegated to drive me on a hunt for the machine. We bowled along a road that headed west, past shacks, into the relentless desert landscape until I realized that we were well on the way to Death Valley. Eventually we backtracked and spotted a Quonset hut that yielded a pro-

jector, and we got back to the casino in time. I was so stimulated by the experience that I preceded my lecture with an impromptu summary of my unvarnished opinion of the zodiac and of horoscopes.

Previously in these pages, I have described the incident in which

Slide slips



THOMAS H. JUKES

Marianne Grunberg-Manago disappeared from sight at the start of her lecture, in a manner similar to the descent of Erda in *Das Rheingold*. I made a mistake; I have received a peremptory letter of reprimand from the head official of the American Society of Biological Chemists, pointing out that it happened in Philadelphia in 1958 rather than in Atlantic City in 1963. Another correspondent, more sympathetic, says that he re-

members that Marianne blew kisses and waved to the audience as the platform went down. Be that as it may, I recall another Federation Meeting—I think it was in Chicago—addressed by Larry Irving, in which some interesting slides were shown at a long lecture on respiratory physiology. They were remarkable for all being projected sideways. The large audience developed a transient form of torticollis resembling a sort of a lateral whiplash injury. I believe that the explanation for the misoriented slides had a nationalistic background. It seems that British slides used to be 3½" square, American slides 3¼"×4", while the Canadians, with their altogether admirable trait of self-assertiveness, used slides that were 4" square. The slides in question must have been prepared by a Canadian for showing in US projectors, which the Canadian evidently thought received 3¼"×4" slides vertically rather than horizontally.

One of the new amenities is an antenna that is coiled around the lecturer like the string around a parcel. I cannot vouch for the following story that was related to me, but even if it didn't happen, it has obvious possibilities for users of Citizens Band radios. An unfortunate scientist swathed in his antenna, switched on the microphone and started his talk. Or tried to. But instead of the lecturer's voice the equipment picked up, on the same wavelength, the thunderings of a fire-and-brimstone preacher at a nearby revival meeting. I am told that the scientist plucked the offending antenna from his body in a vain effort to quell the interruption.