

EDITORIAL

UNFAIR FARES

"It's not so much the rocks in the road that wear you down as the bit of gravel in your shoe," says the old maxim. Little annoyances over which we seem to have no control are the ones that take their greatest toll and raise our frustration level to the highest point. I feel fortunate to be the editor of a magazine, so I at least have some means to vent my frustration.

One of the pieces of gravel in my shoes is the way the airlines are taking advantage of business customers. If we all treated our best customers the way airlines treat their business passengers, none of us would have businesses very long. Deregulation has hit the airlines, and the competition among domestic carriers is fierce, but it is the business customer that is being taken for a long and and mostly very unpleasant ride.

More and more often, customers who visit me at my machinery business are complaining about the exorbitant cost of the airline ticket that they found necessary to buy a day or two prior to the trip. From Chicago, \$500 to Dayton; \$655 to Houston or LaGuardia, New York; \$700 to Boston and \$800 to \$1000 to Los Angeles or Seattle, and these are *coach* fares!

And what does the business traveler get for these princely sums? Crowded lounges, narrow seats with less leg room than the back seat of a Yugo, jammed overhead racks, filled hanging luggage space, terrible food, delayed and cancelled flights, and, of course, a bag of peanuts and a free airline magazine, because, after all, we are told, flying is fun.

Travelling coach class on the airlines today reminds me a good bit of pictures I've seen of "steerage" class on the ocean liners of another era. At least our immigrant grandparents could comfort themselves with visions of better life at the end of the voyage. All the business traveler has to look forward to is an interminable wait for luggage which may or may not be there and an identical return trip in a day or two.

If this kind of service were the best the airlines could do and if everyone were in the same boat — or airline cabin — it would be unpleasant, but at least it would be fair. As it is, most often the person sitting next to you, who stuffed the overhead rack with all his worldly possessions, and brought along his wriggly, moist and sticky two-year-old, has quite probably paid 20% to 50% of the price of your ticket. He planned his trip six months ago and took advantage of all the cut-rate prices.

Let's get this straight. I'm not opposed to grannys and two-year-olds flying at bargain prices, nor am I opposed to airlines marketing their product the best way they can in a tough competitive environment. The budget traveler, of which I am one for my planned travel, gets exactly what he pays for. He grits his teeth and bears several hours of discomfort in exchange for very low travel prices. But the regular business flyer, who is the backbone of the U.S. domestic airline market



and who cannot plan every trip six months in advance, is being ripped off.

The airlines, through their multi-level pricing structure, are selling virtually the same product at vastly different prices, and the business traveler, who has least control over the circumstances under which he must make his travel arrangements, has to pay the most. Worse yet, as airline competition becomes even fiercer, it is the business traveler's rates that are being jacked up to support the low-end fares.

Frequent mileage programs, which were originally started to reward the airlines' best customers, the business travelers, are now being used as an excuse to raise the cost of our part of the fare structure. And now, perhaps because the frequent flyer programs were too successful for the airlines' own good, even they are being taken away. United recently announced that it has increased the requirement for its top bonuses from 75,000 miles to 250,000 miles. Nice guys!

It's time to bring fairness back into the airline ticket prices. If businesspeople have to pay premium prices for the necessity of travelling at a moment's notice, then there ought to be some additional value received. A business class, available now on some international carriers, is one idea. Such a class should cost present full-fare coach rates, not some additional premium. Some recognition that the business traveler is *at work* when he or she is flying would be nice. Little amenities like additional leg room and work space would help a lot. Better food and drink would be appreciated. Conveniences like free land telephone lines or expedited baggage pick-up and special parking and land transportation services would help too.

(Continued on page 33)

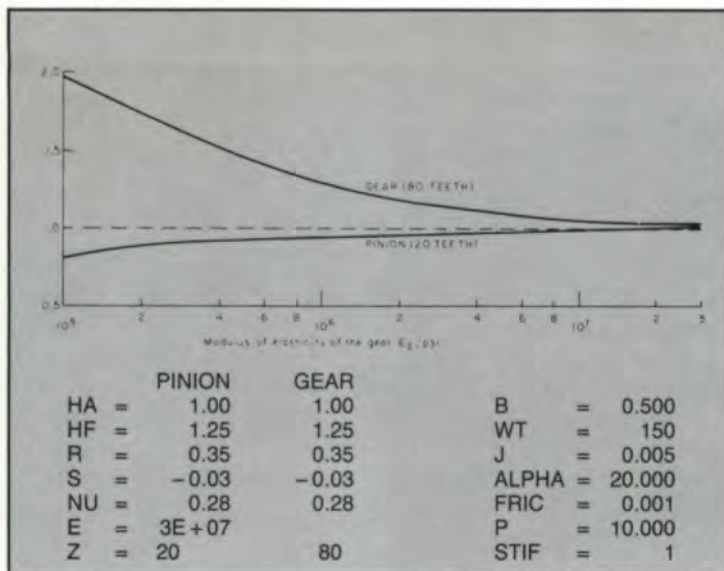


Fig. 6—Effect of the Young's modulus of the gear, E_2 , on the load sharing ratio, m_N

useful to analyze metal gear pairs. The load sharing portion of the program can also be useful during the design process of a metal gear pair, but it becomes almost mandatory for the analysis of plastic gears or pinions. Also, the freedom it offers in determining the gear geometry makes that program perfectly adapted to plastic gearing design, which is not as rigidly limited by the standardization as is metal gearing.

The program can be improved in several aspects. In particular, it would be interesting if it had graphic capabilities. Actually, we are working on an addition to animate the gear tooth action. In another field, it is intended to add a dynamic analysis module using the spring model that calculates the tooth deformation. That model will also be used to study tooth errors and wear effects.

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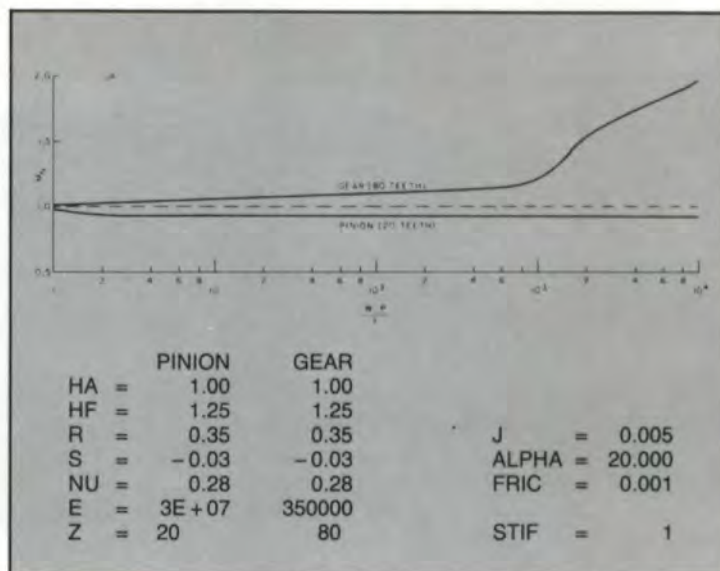


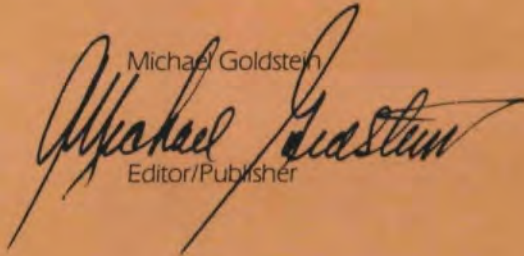
Fig. 7—Effect of the group of variables ($W_t P/F$) on the load sharing ratio, m_N

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Editorial

(Continued from page 5)

The bottom line is that the airlines' best customers are being treated shabbily, given K-Mart services at Gucci prices. The only reason the airlines have gotten away with this for so long is that they are, in a sense, the only game in town. But that will not last forever. Surely someone in the airline industry will have entrepreneurial sense enough to see the vast well of resentment filling among its business flyers and take advantage of it. Some alternative that acknowledges the needs of business travelers and meets them at a fair price will be found, and when that happens, the airlines that have continued to ignore these important customers will be left with a lot of empty seats. It can't happen too soon for me.

Michael Goldstein

 Editor/Publisher