



# ROGER'S RANT

SO MANY RANTS, SO LITTLE TIME!

## The *Tyranny* of Stuff



Since I was a boy, I've always had a keen interest in things mechanical or electrical. That's likely the reason I chose engineering in college while simultaneously pursuing a tool & die apprenticeship. Throughout my seventy-five years there has always been something either new or interesting that I "needed" to acquire or build. Thus, I've always had a penchant to acquire or build things such as race cars, hot rods, boats, motorcycles, computers, tools, flower irrigation systems and much, much more. However, I'm not a hoarder, as the above illustration might lead you to believe, but nonetheless, let's just say I've always had, and enjoyed having, a lot of stuff.

So, when I first heard John Lennon's song "Imagine" many years ago which included the line "imagine no possessions," I scoffed that idea. Imagine (no pun intended) a multi-millionaire musician who lived in a multi-million-dollar apartment at the Dakota overlooking Central Park in New York City telling me to give up my stuff!

However, as I've aged (and perhaps become a little smarter), I've begun to realize that there may well be downsides having all that stuff, especially in light of a spate of recent, irritating failures of some of my stuff. A few examples follow:

- Surface Pro 2 tablet failing to recognize its keyboard, especially during PowerPoint presentations in front of clients
- iPhone 13 temporary facial recognition failure in the midst of a Washington, DC vacation
- Thermistor failure in my digital shower resulting in no water temperature control
- Apple Watch intermittent rebooting and subsequent total failure
- Random incidents of ThinkPad insertion into docking station and failing to connect to peripherals
- Security camera failure
- Repeated plant irrigation controller failures
- Central air conditioning cooling failure

Come to think of it, the bulk of my waking hours, other than work related, have been consumed by searching for, acquiring, installing and maintaining and ultimately disposing of, stuff.

There is another important point concerning stuff: a lot of individual stuff requires even more stuff to support it.

Here are a couple of examples:

### **Mustang Shelby GT350**

When I decided to purchase my current high performance Mustang Shelby GT350, that seemed like a simple matter. However, as is often the case with stuff, that was not the case. First, I had to buy it, but that model was on restricted availability with only selected dealers able to order it. Thus, hours and hours were spent locating a dealer and ultimately negotiating the purchase. (Hmmm, "negotiating" in this case was bringing down a markup from list rather than obtaining a discount.) Then, there was the six months of anxiety waiting for when and if the car would be built. During that wait, I had to acquire a suitable car cover and wheel locks.

But there's more! I already had two vehicles and only a two-car garage, so I needed to acquire a lift called the Autostacker. But, first, that required a 3-D CAD layout to be certain it would fit in my garage bay. The lift requires 230 Volt AC power, so I had to have a 60-amp service and sub panel installed in the garage. Then, as a result of the CAD layout, I determined that the garage door apparatus had to be replaced since the existing setup interfered with the lift. Once everything was operational, I suffered through months of uneven lifting caused by air bubbles in the hydraulic system.

### **Ham Radio Station**

When I was a boy, my father and I were avid ham radio operators. Later college and life intervened, and I lost interest in the hobby. Now that I'm semi-retired (working only forty hours per week instead of eighty), I've decided to get back into the hobby, mainly relearning and using Morse code in an attempt to maintain some degree of mental sharpness. So, I needed to purchase a transceiver. Of course, finding a suitable unit on Ebay took substantial time and effort. (I eventually purchased a suitable unit from a guy in Japan.

Ah, but there's more! The unit didn't come with a power supply, so back to Ebay and then a subsequent fabrication of connector cable. Next, I needed to install a dipole antenna in my attic. But then I needed to run a coax cable from the antenna in the attic to my basement, two stories below. Of course, you can't have a ham station without a desk, so I need to procure a suitable desk and chair. Next came the purchase of an antenna matching device. Then, while I was at it, back to Ebay for a special microphone to match the transceiver. To facilitate my Morse code learning and subsequent

usage, I then returned to Ebay for an electronic keyer. However, an electronic keyer needs a specialty keyer paddle, so back to Ebay. Next came the purchase of special computer software for Morse code training. Whew!

The foregoing examples are just a couple out of the hundreds that have been my life.

Another thing about stuff is what I call the enjoyment ratio. That is the ratio of the amount of time spent preparing, maintaining and repairing stuff versus the time spent actually enjoying the benefits of the stuff. That ratio varies considerably. In my auto racing days, that ratio was likely 100:1 (100 hours of work to 1 hour of racing). In my boating days, the ratio was more likely 1:1 (of course, that doesn't include the many thousands of dollars paid to the marina staff who did most of the work). For my GT350, the ratio is .5:1. I guess I'm slowly learning. My Dad had an old folk saying about that: "We get too soon old and too late smart."

Of course, besides the enjoyment ratio, there is also the dollar cost of maintaining and repairing one's stuff. In the racing game, I might win \$100 in the Modified Eliminator bracket one weekend and then spend a couple of thousand dollars to improve my times. In my boating days, I figured it cost me about \$250 per hour (mind you, circa 1995 dollars) for every hour I spent on my 41 foot sport fisherman. With the G 350, it's maybe fifty bucks in gas for a couple of weekend outings a month. (Of course, that doesn't include \$2,000 for a set of specialty tires every 6,000 miles and annual \$200 oil changes.)

The bottom line is that I love my stuff, but with age comes the realization, in retrospect, that the time, energy and money spent on some of it diminished other aspects of life that I could have pursued. Maybe you'll learn that sooner than I did.

**Roger**