

Cigarette Ad Fact and Fiction

By

Robert Littell

WHILE cigarette advertising remained in the realm of fancy one couldn't help admiring it at times, for many were the phrases it added to the language — I'd Walk a Mile for a Camel, Not a Cough in a Carload, Blow Some My Way, Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet. But more recently cigarette advertising has taken to spoiling its pretty flights of the imagination by resort to percentages, analyses, chemical terms, and market reports.

In order to find out which cigarette advertising claims were fact, which fiction, and which a blend of both, The Reader's Digest commissioned a research laboratory to make a series of objective tests. Seven brands were chosen: the best sellers (the so-called "Big Five" — Lucky Strike, Camel, Chesterfield, Philip Morris, Old Gold); the extra-long Pall Mall; and Avalon, a representative 10-cent cigarette.

Twenty-four cigarettes of each brand, taken from packages bought in the open market, were "smoked" in a robot made of glass tubes and flasks, which permitted complete collection, for accurate analysis, of the nicotine and tars contained in the smoke of each brand. Other precise data were noted, such as the amount of nicotine in the tobacco and the length of time required by the robot

to smoke each cigarette down to a butt two centimeters long — slightly over three quarters of an inch.

The laboratory's general conclusion will be sad news for the advertising copy writers, but good news for the smoker, who need no longer worry as to which cigarette can most effectively nail down his coffin. For one nail is just about as good as another. Says the laboratory report: "The differences between brands are, practically speaking, small, and *no single brand is so superior to its competitors as to justify its selection on the ground that it is less harmful.*" How small the variations are may be seen from the data tabulated on page 7.

Smoking Time. The time taken by the laboratory robot to smoke Big Five cigarettes varied from an average of 9 minutes 6 seconds (Lucky Strike, Chesterfield) to 10 minutes (Camel). Here is a claim that has been made for Camel: "By burning 25 percent slower than the average of the four other largest-selling brands tested — slower than any of them — Camels give you a smoking *plus* equal, on the average, to five extra smokes per pack." Note that this ad doesn't say *which* four brands were tested. So "tested" is a weasel word. Weasel words are the adman's way of crossing his fingers behind his back when he makes a somewhat elastic statement. According to the

arithmetic of the tabulation, the average Camel smokes *only six percent* slower than the average of the other four best sellers.

Nicotine. The nicotine found in Big Five cigarette smoke varied from 2.04 milligrams (Old Gold) to 2.46 (Philip Morris). There are 28,350 milligrams to an ounce.

In a recent campaign Lucky Strike made this statement: "For over two years the nicotine content of Luckies has been 12 percent less than the average of the four other leading brands — less than any of them." But it's the nicotine in the smoke that matters, not the nicotine in the tobacco. According to Column 2 of the tabulation on page 7, Lucky Strike smoke contains one percent less than the average of the other leaders. Old Golds have the least of all, 2.04 milligrams. The difference between the amounts of nicotine in the smoke of Lucky Strikes and Camels was something you could put on the point of a pin.

But cigarette advertising copy writers would have little to write about if they didn't use pin point differences. That is why they have become so expert at training a negligible little flea of a fact to hop all over the U. S. and bite its way into the consciousness of the nation's cash customers.

For some months Camel printed advertising has featured this statement: "The *smoke* of slower-burning Camels contains *28 percent less nicotine* than the average of the four

other largest-selling cigarettes tested — less than any of them — according to independent scientific tests *of the smoke itself!*" A simple calculation based on Column 2 of the tabulation shows that, according to our own "independent, scientific" laboratory, the smoke from Camels contained *more* nicotine than the smoke of Old Golds and, instead of 28 percent less, *only 2.11 percent less* than the average of the other four largest sellers. Incidentally, smoke from the 10-cent Avalon contained as little nicotine as smoke from a Camel.

Tars and Resins. These products of combustion are the villains that irritate, rather than the nicotine. When you suck on a cigarette through a handkerchief, it's the tars that stain the cloth a peevish yellow-brown.

Almost all cigarettes have at one time or another claimed superior mildness. Chesterfield, comparatively conservative in its advertising, relies heavily on this vague attribute. Mildness can't be measured — it can't even be defined. But the robot did measure the amount of tar in cigarette smoke. To the extent that tars are uniformly irritant, we have a yardstick.

About all the robot was able to say in regard to Chesterfield's mildness was that Chesterfield smoke contained a higher percentage of tars and resins than any of the other six cigarettes tested. Old Gold had the least. The advertising genius who thought up "Not a Cough in a Carload" seems unaware of Old Golds'

virtues: they had the best score of all seven cigarettes tested for The Reader's Digest as to nicotine and tar in their smoke. Instead of cashing in on these buried treasures, Old Gold is plugging Latakia — the Something New which Has Been Added. Latakia is not a new arrival. It is an aromatic Near

Eastern tobacco which has long been used in certain pipe tobacco mixtures. And Old Gold doesn't say how much of this "costly, rare, very flavorful Mediterranean leaf" has been added.

Filtering. Pall Mall claims that the "modern design" of its extra length "filters the smoke and protects your throat." This is not true if, as obviously happens most of the time, people smoke it down to the same length butt as a regular size cigarette. The laboratory report showed that Pall Mall smoke was third highest in percentage of both tars and nicotine, and that, because of Pall Mall's extra length, its smoke was highest in actual amount of nicotine per cigarette.

Every cigarette is its own filter, poor or good according to how it is smoked. If you tamp a cigarette out after a few puffs, irritants are held back in the unburned tobacco. But

What the Robot Found

<i>Brand (the first five are the so-called "Big Five")</i>	<i>Smoking Time (per cigarette)</i>	<i>Nicotine in Smoke (average milligrams per cigarette)</i>	<i>Tars in Smoke (percent)</i>
Lucky Strike...	9 min. 6 sec.	2.22	2.19
Camel.....	10 " 0 "	2.20	2.13
Chesterfield...	9 " 6 "	2.27	2.37
Philip Morris..	9 " 36 "	2.46	2.24
Old Gold.....	9 " 54 "	2.04	1.98
Avalon.....	7 " 54 "	2.20	2.14
Pall Mall.....	12 " 24 "	3.02	2.23
"Big Five" Average.....	9 " 32 "	2.24	2.18

if you are one of those last-cigarette-before-the-gallows fiends who smoke them down to where they singe your mustache, you'll get a triple ration of tars and nicotine. The longer the butt, not the longer the cigarette, the better it acts as a filter.

This commercial plug was recently heard in a Philip Morris broadcast: "Eminent physicians report that the smoke of four other leading brands averaged more than three times as irritant as the amazingly different Philip Morris — an irritant effect which lasted five times as long."

The findings of the eminent glass robot employed by The Reader's Digest are that Philip Morris cigarette smoke had the highest percentage of nicotine, and the second highest percentage of the tar and resins, of all seven brands tested.

More Than the Market Price. Many of the basic facts about cigarette manufacture are unknown to the

public. Otherwise Lucky Strikes would be laughed right back into their cartons for their current campaign, a series of boasts that the makers of Luckies paid 29, or 35, or 46, or some such percent "more than the average market price" for tobacco at auctions in various southern towns.

Many different grades of tobacco are bought, at different prices, for different tobacco products. There's tobacco for cigarettes, for chewing, for cigars, for pipes. Average the price for all of them and you get the "average market price." The tobacco in all the big brands of cigarettes, being of the highest grades, costs more than the "average market price." There's also ground for believing, according to evidence dug up by the Department of Justice in a recent case against several of the big tobacco companies, that the prices they pay for their tobacco are remarkably uniform.

Because the prices of the finished Big Five cigarettes are the same, because the chemical differences between them are slight, because the tobacco and the method of manufacture are essentially similar, the problem of choice all comes down to flavor. One cigarette is chosen over

another because the smoker, though he knows nothing about cigarettes, knows what he likes.

But does he? Some interesting attempts to answer this question have been made. Consumers Union put seven brands of cigarettes, the names of which had been inked out, before 198 habitual smokers, and asked them to tell what they were smoking. For the Big Five, scores varied from 83 percent wrong on Old Gold to 90 percent wrong on Philip Morris.

Dr. Carl I. Hovland, Director of Graduate Studies in Psychology at Yale, rounded up 95 heavy smokers, each of whom named his favorite brand and another brand which he particularly disliked. Dr. Hovland had them all smoke eight of each brand and guess which was which. By pure chance each man could have guessed eight out of the 16 right. The actual result yielded an average of only 8.6.

So perhaps even personal preference is a myth, and it makes no earthly difference which of the leading cigarettes you buy. That's why the poor ad writers, when they scratch their heads in search of selling points, so often hit the bump in their skulls marked "fiction."