

## Some TV tips for the reluctant chairman

**M**OTORING publisher, John Oxley in a letter published in the last edition of this *Review* labelled the ethical debate around motoring writers and freebies "hackneyed" and then went on to extol the virtues of the average motoring journalist.

Regarding the latter, no doubt he is correct and most motoring writers are upright citizens in good standing with their conscience.

On his charge that the ethical debate is hackneyed, however, it might interest Mr Oxley — a former office-bearer of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists — to know that around the time he was writing his letter to *Review*, the motoring editor of a leading Johannesburg newspaper was threatening to blackball a manufacturer's cars from the pages of his newspaper because he had been overlooked for an overseas freebie. The guild, alerted by the manufacturer, took no action against the journalist in question.

'Hackneyed'? I think not. 'Hack' is probably more appropriate.

**I** agree wholeheartedly with Frederik van Zyl Slabbert that he should not have been appointed chairman of the new SABC board. After all, he gave a rousing display of ignorance about the dynamics of television when he appeared before the board's selection panel and told the six wise men (and one woman) that he doesn't approve of sitcoms and soap operas and that television should play more of an "educative role", as he put it.

I've got news for the reluctant SABC chairman — no sitcoms and soapies, no audience; no audience, no advertising; no advertising, no revenue; no revenue, no television, or else steeply higher TV licence fees to pay for Chairman Van's educational vision. Even then, I doubt we couch potatoes will learn much because we'll all be glued to M-Net soopies.

**S**O, the nasty little secret is out. The reigning editor of *The Observer*, Donald Trelford is being punted as editor of a new ANC newspaper, to be funded — or so it is reported — by none other than that arch neo-colonialist of Lonrho fame, Tyny Rowland.

In the last edition of *Review*, Trelford wrote fondly of his early days as editor of



By Thomas Fairbairn

the old *Nyasaland Times*, explaining that his brief in Malawi was to keep the newspaper alive, "which meant making it acceptable to the country's leader".

Perhaps, having accepted those limitations on his editorial freedom from Roy Thomson, 'Pixie' Trelford is an ideal candidate to edit an ANC mouthpiece.

**T**HERE was a story doing the rounds of the foreign correspondents in Johannesburg after the breakdown of Codesa 2 that when asked if he saw light at the end of the South African tunnel, President De Klerk replied that he couldn't even see the tunnel.

And, if you think that is disingenuous, how about the story doing the rounds in Bosnia that if you see light at the end of the tunnel, it's the headlamp of an oncoming train.

**H**ATS off to the jovial Scottish peer Lord Erskine of Rerrick who has bequeathed his testicles to the Royal Bank of Scotland because, as he put it, "they haven't got any".

He has amended his will to include the gift of his "two most precious assets" after being bankrupted because the bank "didn't have the balls" to accept a trust fund as equity to cover his overdraft.

I think, however, that the good Lord Erskine would make a far more telling adjunct to history if he highlighted the plight of Bosnia by bequeathing the family jewels to the European politicians because they *certainly* don't have any.

**I**T takes real optimists to fly in the face of the doomsday singers by coming to South Africa from the United States to launch a computer magazine in the teeth of the deepest depression since PW Botha. Yet that's exactly what David Allen and Kathy Fielding did by launching *Bit*, a monthly magazine for PC users.

From day one, they adopted a publishing policy of no advertorial which hardly endeared him to powerful interests in the local PC market. But it paid off as *PC Magazine* — arguably America's best computer publication — has signed them to publish that title in southern Africa.

So it appears editorial integrity and flair do pay and that the little guy can still win big in the local magazine market.

**T**HE gutsy female editor of *The New Yorker*, Tina Brown, was paying her favourite contributors around R80 000 an article when she was editor of *Vanity Fair*, and now that she's editing *The New Yorker*, she's said to be paying around R100 000 for commissioned pieces.

Perhaps there's a lesson in this for *Sunday Times* editor Ken Owen whose latest hobby horse is the "obscene frothiness" of South African journalism which, he suggests, offers more "illusion than illumination".

I think Owen should be seconded from the air-conditioned zone to spend a month on a local reporter's pay covering the 'illusion' in the townships, where some journalists are now wearing flak jackets.

That way he might get to see just how dangerous, demanding and poorly paid front-line journalism has become in this country instead of berating his colleagues and indicting his own newspaper.

**C**ARTOONISTS feed on idiocy, and in these barren days of political correctness, they're having a field-day. Witness the recent cartoon in which a mother is reading a bed-time story to her children. The book's title? *Snow so-called 'White' person and the Seven Vertically Challenged Workers*. ●