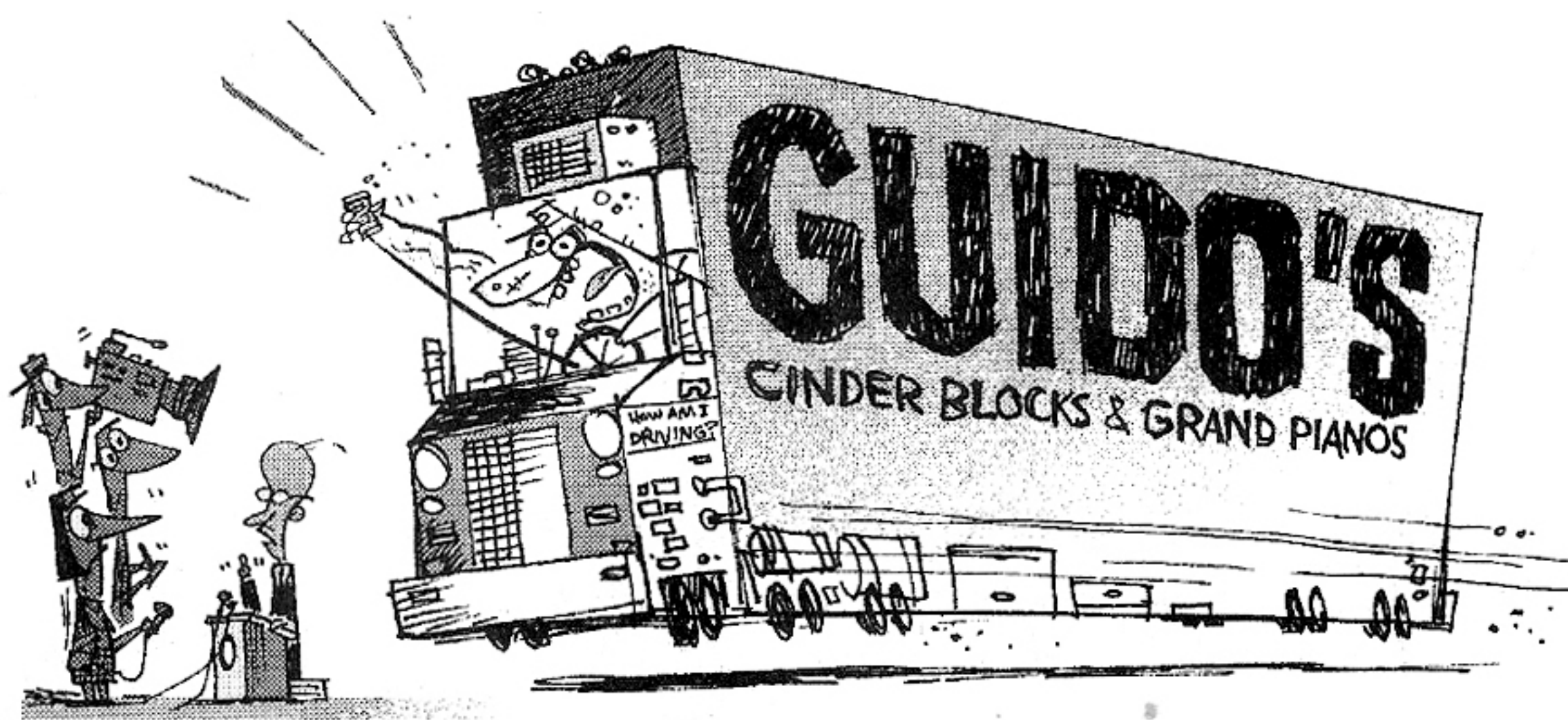


# The Style Invitational

## Week IX: Plainly Ridiculous



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**"This country will be in the damndest crisis it ever faced."**

—Jim Johnson, president of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, predicting what will happen if the nation does not help truckers cope with rising fuel costs.

**Plain English version:** "We are huge. Our muscles have bulging blue veins. We drink beer and drive vehicles that can penetrate brick walls. Do you want us angry?"

**"Property owners are like Regis Philbin: We just want a final answer."**

—Jerry Howard, lobbyist for a national home builders' association, in support of a House bill that would streamline zoning decisions.

**Plain English version:** "Property owners are like Regis Philbin. We just want to make obscene amounts of money for very little work."

**This Week's Contest** is based on Vice President Gore's call for a return to "plain English" in public communication. Gore thinks there is too much obfuscation out there: people talking around a subject, using jargon or babble to hide their real meaning. Your challenge is to take any direct quotation from any article in today's Washington Post and translate it into "plain English," as in the examples above (which were taken from The Post of March 17). Make sure you specify what article the quote is from, and what page it is on. If necessary, explain the context of the quote. First-prize winner gets six English-language tour books published by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1987, detailing the splendors of the republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Moldavia, Estonia and Latvia. These are worth \$50.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-Shirt. The Uncle's Pick wins the yet-to-be designed but soon-to-be-coveted "The Uncle Loves Me" T-shirt. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com, or by U.S. mail to The Style Invitational, Week IX, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. Deadline is Monday, April 3. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and a daytime or evening telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the message field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become property of The Washington Post. Editors reserve the right to edit entries for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes.

### REPORT FROM WEEK V.

In the foul aftermath of "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?," we asked you to come up with the next tasteless offering we are likely to see from Fox TV. (Please do not send us mail complaining that these results are tasteless. They were supposed to be tasteless, to show our revulsion at the depths to which Fox will sink for ratings. In short, our hands are clean. We are decent human beings. In fact, the more tasteless the results below, the more emphatically are we registering our good taste. That's our position.)

Some entries needed no elaboration: **"Bowling for Insulin"** (Brian Broadus, Charlottesville); **"Strip Jeopardy!"** (Joseph Romm, Washington); **"Provoke the Amish"** (Meg Sullivan, Potomac) and **"America's Funniest Laser Eye Surgery Bloopers"** (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

◆ Fourth Runner-Up:  
**Who Wants a Mommy and Daddy?** It's a quiz show. Each contestant is an orphan. The questions get increasingly difficult. For completing round one, the orphan gets adopted by a pair of alcoholic child abusers. But if he completes the next round, he gets to trade up to inattentive career-minded suburbanites. If the tyke is really smart, he wins parents who are warm, nurturing and rich as Croesus, in a home with a treehouse and a real live pony.  
 (Simon Wegner, St. Paul, Minn.)

◆ Third Runner-Up:  
**Win Ben Stein's Kidney.** Desperately ill contestants compete with the Factmeister for a shot at longevity.  
 (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park; Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

◆ Second Runner-Up:  
**The New Family Feud.** Families really get to beat the crap out of each other, using chairs, apple corers and other household items.  
 (Elliott Jaffa, Arlington)

◆ First Runner-Up:  
**Drunk Driving for Dollars.** Contestants must drive themselves to the show, a distance of no less than five miles. Each is followed by a non-carri. Whoever arrives safely with the highest blood alcohol level wins the grand prize.  
 (Russ Beland, Springfield)

◆ And the winner of the Toilet Bank:  
**Just How Hungry ARE You?** Fifty starving people from underdeveloped nations are offered various disgusting substances to eat. These substances—rancid mayonnaise, squirming maggots, fresh hippo dung—are proffered in order of increasing foulness. Last one to keep eating gets a million dollars!  
 (Greg Pearson, Arlington)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

**Do Tell!** Contestants shoot arrows at a target on a loved one's head. The cash prizes get larger as the target gets smaller. The Money Round target: a lima bean.  
 (Don Cooper, Burke)

**Minoritease.** There is a hidden camera. A contestant earns money by insulting a given ethnic group while in a social situation where he happens to be surrounded by members of that group. The contestant is paid per insult, with worse insults being worth more money.  
 (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

**Amateur Doctor!** This 13-week series features a group of 10 seriously ill people who are locked into a small hospital that is fully equipped with everything but health care professionals. Cameras observe the contestants round the clock as they try to self-diagnose, perform tests and administer medications in a frantic effort to cure themselves. The last one alive wins free major medical for life.  
 (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

**Publishers Clearing House Losers.** Vans with the Clearing House logo pull up to homes, and teams of smiling people jump out with flowers, balloons and a TV camera, to tell people they didn't win a thing.  
 (Bob Fowler, Greenbelt)

**Who Wants to Hurl?** After ingesting large fistfuls of Antabuse, contestants are forced to sit at a bar and watch a tape loop of Barbra Streisand and James Brolin discussing their unique bliss. The last contestant to lunge across the counter for the Dewar's wins.  
 (Holly Smith, Frederick)

**Who Wants to Marry a Philosophy Grad Student?** All contestants who were on the "Marry a Multi-Millionaire" show must come back to prove that "it's not about the money."  
 (Rebecca S. Feind, Harrisonburg, Va.)

**X-treme Minesweeper.** Similar to the computer game, but played on a real minefield.  
 (Bob Sorensen, Herndon)

**Road Kills for Bills.** Contestants race their cars around a race track. The winner is the one who completes 10 miles first. However, at the start of the race, hundreds of cats, dogs, raccoons, squirrels and possums are released onto the track! Whenever a driver hits one, he has to stop his car and put the carcass in the trunk.  
 (Robin D. Grove, Laurel)

**Grow for the Gold.** For every pound they gain within six months, contestants gain \$100. But only the person who gains the most gets to keep the cash. The others just keep their new flab.  
 (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

**Who Wants to Win a Hundred and Fifty Bucks?** Child laborers from less developed nations are brought into a Fox studio to compete on the basis of their sweatshop skills. A panel of industry execs will judge the finished products and pick a winning child, who receives more money than he is ordinarily likely to see in three months! A low-budget, high-return show.  
 (Gregory Sanders, Silver Spring)

**Who Wants to Degrade Himself Real Bad?** Fifty contestants are asked to perform increasingly humiliating tasks. The whole prize pot goes to one overall winner, the last person willing to perform whatever act is required. Initially, the prize pot is \$1 million, and the task is only mildly humiliating, such as attempting to yodel. With each successive round, however, the pot is reduced, and the indignity to be suffered becomes greater, until the eventual winner receives, like, \$45 for wearing only a G-string and gargling with someone else's spit.  
 (Patrick O'Connell, New York)

**America's Funniest Confessions.** Fox secretly replaces a priest with a stand-up comedian, and wires the confessional. Let's listen in.  
 (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

**Squeal of Fortune.** The winner is the person able to spend the greatest number of days in Leavenworth posing as a convicted child molester.  
 (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

**Thumbs Up!** This is a standard-format game show where contestants answer increasingly hard questions for better prizes. To try for the next round, the contestant must give the "thumbs up" sign. An incorrect answer results in the loss of the thumb.  
 (Erik Anderson, Tempe, Ariz.)

◆ The Uncle's Pick:  
**Thank God!** Each week, survivors of the latest disaster thank God they lived while hundreds of others perished.  
 (Bob Silverstein, Springfield)  
 (The Uncle explains: We need more uplifting, inspirational shows like this.)

Next Week: Campaignful Developments