



Alan Little, the Road Ranger

## Road Ranger To The Rescue

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simple repairs."

He noted that he gets along fine with tow truck operators, "but their bosses think I'm an outlaw." The California Highway Patrol, at first, was also wary of him. "They must have asked what is that costumed fool doing and maybe we ought to search him for silver bullets," Little said.

However, after a couple instances of putting out car fires, directing traffic around stalled cars and setting out flares to prevent additional accidents, the Highway Patrol has come to know him. A spokesman at the local Highway Patrol office admitted there are both pro and con feelings about the Road Ranger from various officers. "He has helped out in several instances, though," he noted.

Nineteen out of 20 stranded motorists do have minor enough problems that he can fix, added Little. Clogged fuel filters are the most frequent breakdown with blocked thermostats running a close second. No oil appears to be extremely popular with some motorists and there's always many instances of vapor lock on hot days.

Little charges \$8, plus parts. His prices are similar to what motorists would pay in a garage, "but I just save a lot of time and make things a heck of a lot more conve-

nient," he said. "People are so gratified that I do get some awful large tips. It's almost embarrassing, but my largest has been around \$40."

Little gets quite a bit of fan mail from satisfied customers too. He has a portfolio of letters from persons as far away as Minnesota and Massachusetts.

He has also assisted a few famous people. In fact, he was invited to play Baron Von Trapp in "The Sound of Music" by San Francisco director Charles Largent after fixing his car. "I guess he recognized a ham when he saw one," he added.

Little also helped out two San Francisco 49er players — Larry Bailey and Bruce Neffinger. It turned out that the two had car trouble while in Santa Cruz and were quoted a price of \$250 to fix a warped head. They decided to chance it home when Little came across them on the side of the road. He fixed their problem — a pre-ignition wire that cost less than a dollar to fix.

Little's pick-up truck adds to his uniqueness. Named Quixote, it is custom equipped with a flashing amber light, two fire extinguishers fastened on its hood and a motto, "Facta Non Verba" (Deeds not words) engraved on it. A wide assortment of parts, tools and equipment are on hand which he estimates cost about \$5,000.

A native of Watsonville, Little explained that the idea for his business came to him when he used to stop to help motorists whenever he was crossing over the hill to San Jose. After 12 years in the Army, he decided to make his dream a reality. His creed, "I will leave no motorist stranded," has certainly been a welcome sight by many.

Recently he has been filmed for two television shows. CBS's "Evening Magazine" will feature Little sometime in September and NBC's "Real People" show will schedule him sometime between September and December for next season's shows.

Little is also planning on taking on a female partner and "make her the most famous lady mechanic in America," he said. "I want to make a monkey out of a lot of crooked tow truck operators and make a little slip of a lady into a dynamite mechanic."

Some day Little hopes to have a fleet of Road Rangers on Bay Area highways. However, the law has to be changed first.

In the meantime, he will continue to do what he does best and rescue motorists stranded on the road. He is the first to admit he's a "bit schizophrenic."

"When I put on these clothes, I feel like I really am the champion of the road." He is, literally, the Road Ranger.

## Road Ranger Gallops To The Rescue

By KEITH MURAOKA  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Your car has come to a stop just past the summit on Highway 17. You sit there bewildered, not knowing what to do. Your instincts tell you to get out and open the hood. But since your knowledge of cars is lacking — it

was expanded when you earned pump gas at self service stations — you decide to stay in your car.

Before you can say "Hi-o Silver, Away!" a funny looking compact pick-up truck pulls in behind you. The Road Ranger has arrived!

Dressed in a gray western-style jumpsuit, a black cowboy hat and boots, Alan Little, 31, of

Campbell, is the Road Ranger, champion of the stranded traveler. Also known as the "bloodhound of breakdown" or the "scourge of the towhook and long delay," Little prides himself in being the proprietor of California's first and only professional road service patrol.

The absolute picture of the famous Lone Ranger, minus Silver and a mask (although he does have one), his voice is remarkably similar to the Lone Ranger of radio fame in the late 1930s. A quick check and Little attributes your problem to a clogged fuel filter. A few minutes later your car's fixed for a reasonable \$12 fee and you're on your way. The Road Ranger doesn't give out silver bullets, but he does provide a receipt and a card to remind you of the experience.

An extra bit of service centers on Little's following behind his customer for at least two miles to make sure the problem is solved. If it isn't, he'll refund the money. In the seven months he's been on duty, Little has only had to make one refund.

Little has been patrolling Highway 17 between Los Gatos and Scotts Valley since Jan. 22 of this year. He works some 70 hours a week, often well into the night on weekends and holidays. He estimated he contacts or assists at least 100 motorists a week and drives about 300 miles on an average weekend.

Sometimes, he noted, "I will start up the hill at Los Gatos in the morning and not reach the

summit until afternoon."

While section 22520 of the California Vehicle Code prohibits road service patrols along state freeways, Little sidesteps the law on Highway 17 since it is classified as a highway and not a freeway. That law, in fact, is one of his pet peeves. He has been to Sacramento to try to convince legislators to change things, but to no avail.

Another pet peeve are tow truck operators since the "poor man can't afford it," Little said. A minimum tow runs around \$26 and, even the California State Automobile Association does not tow free, but only tows five miles or to the nearest garage. Often the car doesn't even need to be towed, Little maintained, but can be fixed on the spot.

He tells of one experience when two motorists became stranded next to each other. Little stopped to serve one woman after the other assured him she was all right since she had just called AAA. Little fixed the other woman's car while the other watched. By the time the tow truck arrived the woman watching was convinced Little wasn't your every day costumed fool. She sent the tow truck operator on his way and Little fixed her car too.

"That might have been the first case of firing AAA," said Little, smiling. "Most tow truck operators are mighty fine gentlemen, but some charge an arm and a leg just to make

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