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**COVER:** The newly commissioned Anglo-Australian Telescope gives a much sharper view of such southern-sky features as the Magellanic Clouds, where it has discovered carbon monoxide. See p. 116. (Photos: Australian Information Service.)

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# LETTERS

## Plastic pop bottles

The Dec. 6, 1975, SCIENCE NEWS contains an article entitled, "Against Plastic Pop Bottles." While this brief article merely quotes material originating in ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION, you may be interested in facts concerning polymeric beverage containers rather than misrepresentations. For example, in an accelerated test employing the unrealistic exposure to 120°F temperature, we, Monsanto, were able to detect acrylonitrile in the food simulating solvent after 65 days. However, a carbonated beverage would never be subjected to these conditions. Further, 65 days at 120°F is equivalent to four years at room temperature. Obviously, the presence of detectable acrylonitrile under the conditions of the test has no practical significance. Neither the ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION article nor your brief summary pointed out this significant fact.

The article states, "The company manufacturing the bottles won't release relevant information concerning the long term effects of this contamination." This is simply not true if the company referred to is Monsanto. And I am confident no other company is refusing to release information on the toxicology of migrants from their containers. To obtain a regulation from the Food and Drug Administration permitting the commercial use of our bottle, data on both migration and toxicology of migrating species satisfying FDA chemists and toxicologists had to be provided. Incidentally, our studies show no detectable migration of anything from our bottle under standard FDA test procedures. The sensitivity of the test used ranged from 5 to 50 parts per billion.

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## A word from Webster's

May we offer the following reply to Herbert L. Gross (SN: 1/10/76, p. 19) and John W. MacArthur (SN: 1/31/76, p. 67) on a topic which has caused more debate than is perhaps necessary?

Noah Webster himself showed in his dictionaries only second-syllable stress for the word *kilometer*. A son-in-law of his, Chauncey Goodrich, revised Webster's un-

bridged dictionary in 1847 and indicated both first- and second-syllable stress possibilities. The monumental Oxford English Dictionary, the relevant portion of which was published in October 1901, gives stress to the first syllable but appends a note to the effect that the lexicographers Webster, Craig, and Cassell marked the stress on the second syllable. Therefore, both pronunciation variants seem to have been in use for some time.

Quite a few years before the appearance in 1961 of Webster's Third New International Dictionary, our current unabridged, our pronunciation editors initiated an intensive listening program, and since 1940, plus or minus a few years, they have spent a good portion of their time transcribing and recording the speech of thousands of native speakers of English. The unique and extensive files resulting from this program comprise the primary evidence upon which are based the pronunciation respellings in current Merriam-Webster dictionaries. Turning to these files we find that 2.5 percent of the citations for *kilometer* are for second-syllable stress and the remaining 17.5 percent for first-syllable stress. For both variants we have citations from educated and well-respected scientists, statesmen, and journalists with nationwide television and radio exposure. Thus, from the evidence we have collected we can extrapolate that both first- and second-syllable stress are used by thousands, not to say millions, of people, and hence, both should be considered perfectly acceptable, whatever an individual's preference. Our recommendation is that a person should adopt whichever pronunciation feels most natural to him.

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## 'Jowl'—not jool

"Joule" was always pronounced "jowl" by the man who bore the name, and the only pronunciation given for it in the Oxford English Dictionary is "dzhaul." "Jool," now given as the preferred pronunciation by most dictionaries, is clearly a latter-day error. Is it too much to hope that informed usage might restore Professor Joule's honored name to his own pronunciation of it? It would have the added advantage of eliminating any confusion with "jewel," and the awareness of being correct ought to lend a little zest to the effort of pronouncing it properly.

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