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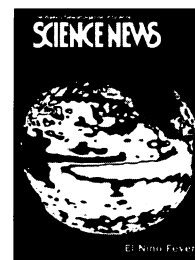
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Cover: Abnormally warm waters, known as El Niño, have spread across much of the equatorial Pacific Ocean this summer, heralding unusual weather around the world. In this image, taken by the TOPEX/Poseidon satellite, El Niño shows up as the long white blob, which depicts warm water sitting 14 to 32 centimeters higher than the normal sea level. (Image: NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory)



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Letters

No-hands drivers hand over control

The real problem with the automated highway concept is not "convincing lawmakers and the public that it will work reliably and safely" ("Look, Ma, No Hands!" SN: 9/13/97, p. 168), it is that few, if any, people will travel an automated highway by choice. The feeling of control and empowerment that comes with driving a vehicle is the main reason our ancestors abandoned passenger railroads for highway travel. On an automated highway, the driver becomes a passenger.

If the federal government were really interested in spending money appropriately on transportation, it would repair the existing interstate highways, promote improved driver education, and expand passenger railroad

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service for those few people who want to get from point A to point B without driving.

*Charles Masi
Bullhead City, Ariz.*

Cars that drive themselves down the highway would be nice. Cars that drive themselves home at 2 a.m. with their drunk owner in the back seat would probably save more lives, though.

*Alden Wilner
Wichita, Kan.*

Timing mammography

Some mammography centers have long advised women to schedule their visits shortly after their periods, that is, early in their menstrual cycle. The breast is usually less tender then and better able to tolerate the compression needed for a good mammogram.

If mammograms are really more accurate at that time, what a happy coincidence ("Mammograms better when timed to cycles," SN: 8/30/97, p. 134). Or maybe the difference in tenderness explains the difference in accuracy—especially since the most tender women often seem to be the ones with the densest

breast tissue on the image, and false negative mammograms are probably more common in such women.

*Michael Lenker
Mecklenburg Radiology Associates
Charlotte, N.C.*

Hypothesis has no room for belief

There is no room in a scientific magazine for comments like Robert Conway's response to the conclusion of Louis Frank that atmospheric water is collecting from comets ("Reservoir of water hides high above Earth," SN: 8/23/97, p. 117).

We have proof of numerous incoming water-bearing comets and proof of high water vapor concentrations in the upper atmosphere. Conway admits these facts, then betrays his profession with ". . . I can't believe that [Frank's] explanation is the right answer." Who cares what Conway believes unless he can propose a reasonable alternative?

This kind of thinking is a disservice to the ideals of scientific inquiry.

*Dana Thibault
Denver, Colo.*