

Metrical Fun and Games

by Nancy Clegg Buck

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The name on the dead battery is Willard. It's no reflection on the manufacturer. No reflection on the inventor of the game either.

Willard F. Reese, a professor of science education at the University of Alberta, started inventing games in 1949. Travel Metre is the first one he has marketed commercially and it's laughs a kilometre a minute.

"Where should we go?" my husband asked me.

"Winnipeg," I replied.

In the center of the board is a map of Canada to metric scale. Each centimetre represents 222 kilometres. My husband measured the distance (a 1.5 tape is supplied) and wrote it down.

"Edmonton to Winnipeg: 1200 kilometres."

We then selected our playing pieces which are different colored cubes one centimetre square with a weight of one gram.

Through shaking dice, we moved out of the parking lot and forward along the highway which is divided into outside and inside lanes of 16 squares each.

Things can happen.

When one lands on a square which reads "Take a Metric Card," he selects the top one from a pile of 31, reads the question aloud, and answers it from multiple choice:

"The average height of a professional basketball player is most nearly: 215 cm., 235 cm., 255 cm., or 265 cm."

The correct answer adds 25 kilometres toward one's destination.

It's fascinating. Sometimes we estimate:

"Using a piece of string, measure the distance in cm. around the neck of the person on your left. Estimate the length of this string. Now, if your estimate was within 2 cm. of the actual measurement, add 50 km. to your score."

One can also land on squares which read: "Give way for a road sign." This is a separate pile of 14 white cards which depict international road signs. The player takes one off the top and tries to identify it.

"Canada didn't sign the convention," Dr. Reese explained, "but is moving toward doing so. I wanted the game to introduce not only the metric system but

also the road signs people encounter with international highway travel."

Hazards en route (and we're laughing and learning as the kilometres go by) are Jake's Garage and Uncle Harry and Aunt Beth's farm. There are penalties for coffee breaks, dead batteries, flat tires, wrecks, detours and viewpoints.

As far as Dr. Reese knows, it's the first metric board game developed in Canada. It took him about six months. He knows of one in the United States but says it's for children only.

"Actually," he told me, "I don't think we need to worry about children learning the new system. I wanted to invent an interesting game for adults that children can play."

The age group for Travel Metre is from 10 years and up. It utilizes two to five players.

Production of the game presented its share of problems but nothing serious enough to deter Professor Reese.

He had 500 boards printed in black and white and family and friends have added the freehand colored artwork. Metric cards are also illustrated (the dead battery, for example) and international road signs depict authentic colors.

Until May 1, Travel Metre is \$8 from Think Metric Associates (being Willard and his wife Barbara), 8452 - 117th Street, Edmonton T6G 2E1, or from Dr. Willard F. Reese, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton T6G 2E1.

After May 1, the game will be produced professionally in St. Albert and the colors on the board and cards plus advertising will raise the price to \$10.

Jaron Summers, currently writing the series on metrication for the *Journal*, says that, in his opinion, Travel Metre definitely teaches the various aspects of metrication and is lots of fun to play in the bargain.

In fact, the only criticism Dr. Reese has had is the fact that after playing it many times people learn the answers.

That could be what Willard Reese had in mind when he invented it, although he suggests in the rules that new questions can be created if play value tends to diminish.

"It's flexible to the point that it isn't an educational game in the true sense," he added. "For one thing, people have too much fun playing it."

That's for sure.

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