

Driving in Jeddah

by Larry Strattner

A Scandinavian chauffer picks me up at my hotel in Jeddah. He works for the European consortium I consult with on occasion. He doesn't seem happy but the money is good in Jeddah. He drives me to my dinner appointment much too fast.

In suburban Jeddah magnificent houses on every corner of the avenues are surrounded by high walls rising up from just inside the roadside curb to much beyond taller than a man.

There are no sidewalks.

My driver approaches each blind, uncontrolled intersection at speed. He toots his horn as he barrels through. As if the big Mercedes horn will trump all comers. All drivers here use horns instead of brakes. Horns spice up life in Jeddah.

The last narrow streets leading to my destination are off the main avenue. Groups of Arab men talk animatedly in doorways and stand among cars parked along the dusky street.

A block before our destination the big side mirror of the speeding Mercedes hits a socializing man in a white thawb square on his butt and sends him flying up on the trunk of a parked car. My driver mutters, "goddamn sand monkey," not even slowing down, continuing up the street and around the next corner.

We pull up to the house where I am invited for dinner. As soon as I close the door of the car the driver speeds away with a chirp of tires. I watch him go and think to myself, *this little jaunt more or less sums up the major problems of the Middle East.*

