

Someday, My Rinse will Come

I feel that Monty Hall and Carol Merrill should have been standing there behind the salesman. "Tell our audience what you have for our winner: A NEW WASHER AND DRYER!" At least some cheering, some oohing and ahing. The previous weekend, I bought the new toaster for \$6.99. This weekend, it was \$1300 for A NEW WASHER AND DRYER!

I'm not a gadget fanatic. I tend to go for the boring and basic. I figure that if it's the latest and greatest, there's a fatal flaw lurking that no one has yet discovered. That's a big reason I ended up at – well, to protect the innocent, let's call the store Tears. But sometimes technology takes over. It's a new millennium. Computers rule, even in laundry, I discovered. And no one ever goes wrong with clean clothes, Mrs. Bertuzzi, my high school guidance counselor told me. She told me a lot of things, but somehow I remember only her advice on clean clothes. But Mrs. Bertuzzi never told me about microprocessors in charge of the rinse cycle.

That Saturday afternoon at Tears, I was an eager customer, probably too eager. My salesman was Eduardo, a twenty-ish, clean-cut guy, who initially looked disappointed to be pulled away from chatting with his fellow Tears-men. I came with credit card in hand, ready to replace my 1985 "laundry center" (even in the old days, they tried to make it sound a little high tech) with its 21st-century equivalent. Eduardo needed no sales pitch. "I want to buy a new washer and dryer." I walked over to the 1985-plus-20 version and patted it on the hood. "What's the best deal I can get if I use my Tears card?"

"This weekend only, we have free delivery, free installation, no interest, no payment until the cows come home."

"And when's that?" I asked.

Eduardo flipped through the papers clipped to his clipboard. "This year, in Eastern Massachusetts, the cows are expected to come home... Oh, the cows are making an unusually early return this year. That will be one credit card cycle."

We finally settled on the other special “this weekend only” promotion, which involved taking the square root of my age and the number of grains of sand on the bottom of an average pair of flip flops in Daytona Beach on spring break. This worked out to 12 percent cash back rebate. Eduardo then started to add on the other necessary pieces, like the indestructible dryer hose and the lint filter carrying case. He started to tap the numbers into the cash register.

“You like to save energy?” Eduardo innocently asked. Sure, who wouldn’t rather lay on the couch than mow the lawn? But Eduardo didn’t mean that. He led me to the next lane among the canyons of clean. There was this super efficient, front loading, high capacity yet space saving washer/dryer duo made by – well, let’s call the brand “Junebug.” “You might like this one. It’s a bit more expensive. But you still get the 12 percent cash back.” He pulled open the washer door and reached in to retrieve the bright yellow energy savings tag. I looked at the numbers and did some quick math in my head. If I washed my clothes twice as often, then with the energy saved per load, I would break even in... 17 years. Then throw in the savings with the efficient hyperdrive dryer, and the break-even point goes down to, hmmm, 15-1/2 years. What would Mrs. Bertuzzi say? You can’t go wrong with saving energy and clean clothes, I was guessing.

The fateful day came, but not without four calls beforehand. First, “you’re going to get a call about when you’re going to get another call.” Same day, “we’ll be calling you tomorrow.” Next day, “your delivery will be tomorrow, we’ll let you know when.” Finally, “we’re so happy you have chosen Tears. Your delivery of the Junebug washer/dryer energy saver will be between 12 and 12.”

And they were right. Delivery did take place between 12 and 12. So there it was. Saturday nights hadn’t been like this for a long time. I figured we’d live a little, go for two loads. I threw in the, as the manual called them, “soiled” clothing. Carefully placed the detergent in the special liquid fulfillment dispenser. And then, oh so many buttons to push. I spent a couple of minutes looking for the “extra normal” setting. Had to settle on something that seemed close. Pushed the start button. The first thing

I noticed was how quiet it was. I pulled my chair in front of it to watch. Very quiet. Two, three, five minutes. Very quiet. No clothes swishing around in the porthole, either. Funny thing, the digital clock – I think that's what it was – seemed fixed at 55.

After about an hour, I got out of my chair. I went over to look at the manual. When I returned, the "55" was no longer showing. In its place, some funny characters, the kind that you have to spell out when you're trying to write letters on a digital clock. S U D S.

I look in the manual. No "suds" there. I call 800-JUNEBUG. "Good evening. Thank you for calling the Junebug Washline."

"Suds: what does that mean?"

"Are you using the specially formulated Junebug detergent?" He was very polite.

"Do I have to?"

"Your machine detects the potential for too many suds. Our low-suds formulation eliminates that problem. May I place an order for you?"

"I've got some dirty, I mean, soiled clothes sitting in the machine. How quick can you get the order to me?"

"Where do you live, sir?" I gave him my address. "Oh, can you hold out until the cows come home?"

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