

# The Lighter Side of Optimization

Collected by Michael Saunders, Stanford University, 1998–2005

In New Zealand, the radio and TV guide is called *The Listener*. Every week a “Life in New Zealand” column publishes clippings describing local events. The first sender of each accepted clipping receives a \$5 Lotto Lucky Dip. The following clippings illustrate some characteristics of optimization problems in the real(?) world.

## Robust solutions

Auckland’s gamblers will still be able to indulge their vice if Wellington is destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake under a plan being formulated by the Lotteries Commission. (Evening Post, 1990)

RECOVERY CARE gives you financial protection from specified sudden illness. You get cash if you live . . . and cash if you don’t.

## No objective function

People have been marrying and bringing up children for centuries now. Nothing has ever come of it. (Evening Post, 1977)

## Multiple objectives

“I had the choice of running over my team-mate or going onto the grass, so I ran over my team-mate then ran onto the grass”, Rymer recalled later.

## Obvious objective

He said the fee was increased from \$5 to \$20 because some people had complained it was not worth writing a cheque for \$5.

## Don’t always minimize

The image of the NZ defence forces must be lifted from a trough of public awareness into which it has descended in recent years.

## Equilibrium condition

“The pedestrian count was not considered high enough to justify an over-bridge”, Helen Ritchie said. “And if there continues to be people knocked down on the crossing, the number of pedestrians will dwindle.”

## Constraints

ENTERTAINERS, DANCE BAND, etc. Vocalist wanted for New Wave rock band, must be able to sing.

DRIVING INSTRUCTOR Part-time position. No experience necessary.

HOUSE FOR REMOVAL in excellent order, \$800. Do not disturb tenant.

PERSONAL All I want is one average, caring, sensitive, interesting, financially dependent man. (Wanganui Chronicle, 1990)

**Integer constraints**

Ten more nurses and one-and-a-half domestics would need to be employed.

Some schools tended to automatically separate twins. Others tended automatically to keep them in the same class. Half the time the decision was likely to be wrong.

An 8c health stamp will this year cost 10c instead of the usual 9c.

**Circular constraints**

The police have been called in once or twice and have told the farmers the best thing for them to do is call them in.

**Exactly one feasible solution**

MATTHEWS RESTAURANT, open 365 nights. Including Mondays.

Buying your own business might mean working 24 hours a day. But at least when you're self-employed you can decide which 24.

Perhaps the most effective way of ensuring acceptance of a dollar coin, he feels, is to give the public no choice in the matter. (Evening Post, 1982)

Sergeant J Johnston said when Hall was stopped by a police patrol the defendant denied being the driver but after it was pointed out he was the only person in the car he admitted to being the driver.

His companion was in fact a transvestite, X, known variously as X or X.

Peters: Oh, it's not that I don't want to be helpful. But in this case the answer is that I don't want to be helpful. (Listener, 1990)

**Bound your variables**

By the way, have you ever seen a bird transported without the use of a cage? If you don't use a cage it will fly away and maybe the same could happen to your cat. Mark my words, we have seen it happen.

**Redundant constraints**

If you are decorating before the baby is born, keep in mind that you may have a boy or a girl.

EAR PIERCING while you wait.

CONCURRENT TERM FOR BIGAMY (NZ Herald, 1990)

Today New Zealanders will get a sneak preview of what it means to be a New Zealander. (Dominion, 1990)

### Infeasible constraints

I chose to cook myself to be quite sure what was going into the meals.

We apologize to Wellington listeners who may not be receiving this broadcast.

How can we look future generations in the eye and tell them we allowed such things to happen?

The model 200 is British all the way from its stylish roofline to its French-made Michelin tyres. (NZ Car Magazine)

$\geq$  or  $\leq$ ?

BUY NOW! At \$29.95 these jeans will not last long!

NOT TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE! We can sell your home for much less than you'd expect! (NZ Property Weekly)

The BA 146's landing at Hamilton airport was barely audible above airport background noise, which admittedly included a Boeing 737 idling in the foreground.

Yesterday Mr Palmer said "The Australian reports are not correct that I've seen, although I can't say that I've seen them".

It will be a chance for all women of this parish to get rid of anything that is not worth keeping but is too good to throw away. Don't forget to bring your husbands.

"I never dreamed I could have such a winning streak", Nigel told FLASH. "It's a dream come true."

"While I would not say that it is an encouraging response, it is encouraging in the sense that it is not discouraging", he said.

The Takapuna home where the late writer Frank Sargeson lived is open to the public, even though its doors are locked.

The French were often more blatant and more active, particularly prop X and number eight Y, but at least one All Black was seen getting his retaliation in first.

### WHAT EVERY TEENAGER SHOULD KNOW — PARENTS ONLY

"Love Under 17" Persons under 18 not admitted.

"Keeping young people in the dark would not stop them having sex—in fact it usually had the opposite effect," she said.

NELSON, approximately 5 minutes from airport. Golf course adjacent. Sleeps seven all in single beds. Ideal for honeymoons. (Air NZ News, 1978)

**Hard or soft constraints**

The two have run their farm as equal partners for 10 years, with Jan in charge of grass management, Lindsay looking after fertilizer, and both working in the milk shed. “We used to have our staff meetings in bed. That got more difficult when we employed staff!” (NZ country paper)

**Elastic constraints**

The Stationary Engine Drivers Union is planning rolling stoppages.

When this happens there are set procedures to be followed and they are established procedures, provided they are followed.

APATHY RAMPANT? Not in Albany—the closing of the electoral rolls saw fully 103.49 percent of the area’s eligible voters signed up.

Auckland City ratepayers are to be reminded that they can pay their rates after they die. (Auckland Herald, 1990)

He was remanded in custody to appear again on Tuesday if he is still in the country.

**Convergence**

“There is a trend to open libraries when people can use them”, he says.

Mayor for 15 years, Sir Dove-Myer wants a final three years at the helm “to restore sanity and stability in the affairs of the city”.

**Applications**

(Yachting) It is not particularly dangerous, as it only causes vomiting, hot and cold flushes, diarrhoea, muscle cramping, paralysis and sometimes death . . . (Boating New Zealand, 1990)

(Ecological models) CAR POLLUTION SOARS IN CHRISTCHURCH—BUT CAUSE REMAINS MYSTERY

Nappies wanted for window cleaning. Must be used.

(Optimal control) Almost half the women seeking fertility investigations at the clinic knew what to do to get pregnant, but not when to do it.

**Stochastic optimization**

Life is Uncertain.

Eat Dessert First. (Marie Callender T-shirt)

**Always room for improvement**

The owner Craig Andrew said the three main qualities for the job were speed, agility and driving skills. “Actually, Merv has none of those, but he’s still the best delivery boy we’ve had”, he said.