

experts offer
some
solutions

BY WHITNEY WALKER
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Asking a New Yorker to complain is like asking a dog to bark, a mouse to eat cheese or a car alarm to go off in the middle of the night.

So it's no surprise we struck a nerve — heck, we hit bone! — when we asked readers to send in their biggest "New York Nuisances." We got 'em, all right, and over the last two months, the letters just haven't stopped coming. Seems there's lots to complain about in this city. (Well, duh!)

Al Friedman of Brooklyn bemoans the lack of public rest-rooms, Ray Harvey of Manhattan gripes about noisy garbage trucks, and Upper West Sider J.R. Bruno grumbles over

takeout menus from Chinese restaurants, Ann Darland of Chelsea can't stand rude shopkeepers, and Cary Ehrlich of midtown hates yokel tourists.

There are still hundreds of letters to go, and no way to run them all, but we promised you solutions to these problems, too. So we scoured the city for street-smart experts, and guess what? If you're mad as hell, you don't have to take it anymore!

"Most people don't know about the laws on the books, and they don't know how to complain effectively," says Raymond Alvin, who kicks up such a fuss — and gets such good results — that he calls himself the "original mad-as-hell New Yorker." Alvin is author of the "Get-a-Grip Newsletter," and the recently released "Get-a-Grip New York Book II" (StreetBeat Publications, \$12.95; (212) 501-9111).

"Those of us who do complain make up for those of us who don't," he says.

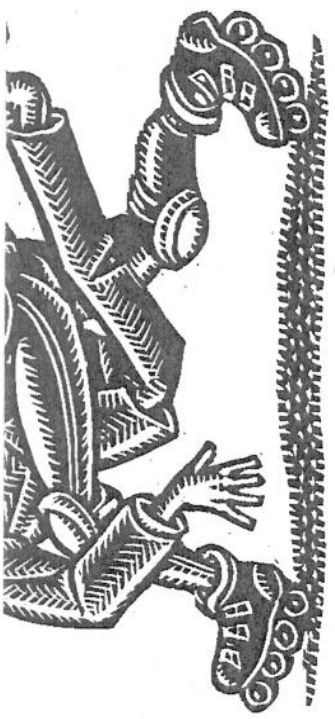
Here are some people who, with



STANDING ON PRINCIPLE: Lou Camporeale with his "Parking Pal" sign.

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Alvin, "that 'First, you gotta get their attention.'"

The Motorist Authority's Brooklyn customer-service department receives more than 5,000 complaints a month, so Alvin always goes straight to the top. Next time, write directly to Jack Lusk, Senior Vice President for Customer Services, 370 Jay St., Brooklyn, NY 11202. (The Bus Customers Relations Center is at 25 Jamaica Ave., Room 1, Brooklyn, NY 11207; (718) 927-7498.)

As for the guy sitting next to you with his legs spread-eagle in different time zones, Alvin says, here are three sure ways to score a seat:

1. Strap on your portable stereo and sing off-key.
2. Munch on some garlic and breathe in his direction.
3. Stick a piece of string in your mouth and let about 4 inches dangle. "A friend of mine tried this one on a DC-7, and no one sat next to him for his entire 3,000-mile trip," Alvin recalls. "Of course, a New York subway is no DC-7. New Yorkers have seen it all."

Get-a-Grip tip: Miniivan services tend to be cheaper and much faster.

A parking runaround

Fred Galbas of Sheephead Bay has a litany of parking laments: "Meters that cheat me, take my money, short me on time or no time at all. Broken meters that police and meter maids issue tickets for parking tickets which I was unaware of until being advised to remember where my car was parked on July 28 at 12:45 p.m., so I'm handicapped to defend myself."

Camporeale, aka The Parking Pal, says, "Unfortunately these things

happen for one reason: money." Still, he insists, there are plenty of parking places in the city if you know where and how to look.

It's legal to park on a street with missing or defaced parking-regulation signs, or at a broken meter, for the maximum time designated. And commercial vehicles can park on residential streets between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. if on a service or delivery call.

It's up to you, the motorist, to prove you know the law and fight bogus tickets.

"Excuse the pun, but motorists need to have street smarts when it comes to parking," Camporeale advises. (For more parking tips, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Parking Pal, P.O. Box 350-003, Brooklyn, NY 11235; www.parkingpal.com.)

The city that never sleeps

Thousands of city-dwellers are driven mad by things that go bump in the night — i.e. noisy neighbors — so Raul Feliciano of Manhattan thought he had it made when he moved in below a harp player. Wrong!

"In almost 12 months, we have never listened to any other tunes than 'White Christmas,' 'New York, New York' and 'A Time for Us,'" Feliciano groans. "Imagine someone who can't play, serenading you at 10 p.m., 11 p.m., 12 a.m., 1 a.m., when you are trying to sleep."

There are five steps for dealing with a noisy neighbor, says attorney Frome: 1. Complain to your landlord. Most will not evict the other tenant without several complaints, and even then it could take years. But to a certain extent, landlords are responsible for resolving these problems. Write a letter demanding action or threaten to stop paying rent. You may get dragged into



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