

OFFHAND

By KEN HAND

There comes a time in the life of every newspaperman when he's tapped on the shoulder by some well-meaning civic booster and asked to judge a beauty contest.

It is as inevitable as desk man's stoop. Judging a beauty contest is an occupational pitfall than which there is none deeper, unless the pitfall happens to be a baby contest.

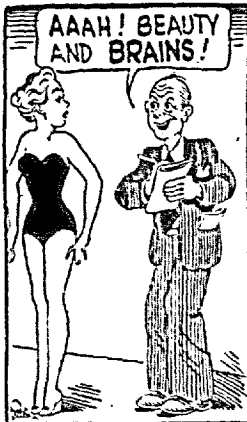
In that case there is but one thing to do: run, don't walk, for the nearest timber; go immediately into hiding where even Will Fritz and all his detectives can't find you.

But if a newspaperman accepts, which is another way of saying he has a hole in his head, he should keep the car engine warmed up and idling for a fast getaway. It would be a good idea also to have enough gas in the tank to last 100 miles.

There's no telling what may happen otherwise. If he stops at a filling station within a radius of twenty miles from the scene of the carnage, he may be served by an attendant whose girl friend ran fifth in the contest. This character may put sand in the contest judge's crankcase.

I am one of those people best described as slow to catch on; when I was in school the teacher said I was No. 1 in the retarded class and I accepted this as a compliment until two years later I learned the meaning of the word.

When I received an invitation from Clarence Bentley of the Denton Jaycees to be one of five judges in the Miss Denton Pageant last week, I plugged up the hole in my



head with chewing gum and accepted.

The list of judges offered a mental hazard. All of them seemed to amount to something except me. There was Dr. Imogene Bentley, dean of women of North Texas State College; Dr. Mary Hufford, dean of women of Texas State College for Women; Byron Nelson, one of the nation's all-time top golfers, and Max Plake, a well-known portrait photographer.

I got into Denton around 6:30 and was ushered immediately to TSCW's Hubbard Hall for an informal tea where the judges drank unspiked punch and chatted with the nineteen beauty contestants.

Never, so help me, have I ever seen nineteen more attractive girls—and who am I to say who should be Nos. 1, 2 and 3? I knew then, too, late, that the job was going to be tough.

I marked my ballots with a fine

impartiality, seeing to it that one contestant who told me she is a reader of this column got a good mark for intelligence, charm, beauty and maybe fixity of purpose.

With the preliminaries over my confidence grew. I'm no beauty myself, but you don't have to be able to lay an egg to judge the quality of an omelet. It is easy, however, to lay an egg, as I was soon to prove beyond all reasonable doubt.

Some of the beauties I picked weren't in the finals, which probably shows why there are so many different kinds of women getting married these days. Marriage is one beauty contest every woman can win.

I don't see how a beauty contest judge can do anything but lose. In this case three women were made happy and sixteen mad, which is not the best public relations in the world.