

Ralph Nader, whose accident of birth was probably the best thing that ever happened to automotive safety, carried his consumer crusade into California the other day.

He came to make the usual university rounds, sit for the regular TV mini-views, repeat his conviction that the present smog-control devices are nowhere near adequate for man or combustion beast.

But loner Nader is no longer alone in his efforts to make the world safe for breathing. Particularly here in vehicular Southern California, where the pollutant action is, Nader's fight against foul air or faulty engineering makes him a kind of visiting hero.

And a sort of fresh air underground has formed around the young, gangling lawyer. Before Nader's speech at UCLA, the underground met for morning coffee at the West Los Angeles apartment of Byron Bloch, an also-young man who writes about cars and designs for human factors.

Bloch had brought a peculiar set of disciplines together for the session:

A local attorney who is working up a ballot initiative so that the people, in lieu of the politicians, may legislate their own lung protection.

A designer of steam engines, Richard Smith, who is convinced



"On the brighter side, one of our 296,000 cars with defective brakes and headlights may be purchased by Ralph Nader."

Derog. In Philadelphia Bulletin

## Crusader Nader and the Fresh Air Underground

BY ART SEIDENBAUM

that external combustion is the salvation of the American road and that steam cars could be right around the corner—if funding were applied to existing engineering.

An editor, O'Cece Rich, whose Road Test Magazine is that rare automotive journal which is not a Detroit

dependent because it deliberately carries no advertising.

An expert on brain research, Ray Kado, from UCLA.

The founder of the Auto Consumers Protective Assn., one Barbara Schmidt, who flew down from Palo Alto to learn where Nader's new battles are going.

A veteran of product safety testing, George Peters.

In all, there were 18 people in Bloch's modest living room, including lawyers who had taken car manufacturers to court—and won—plus other proponents of steam components.

The session started with an examination of a faulty hunk of front suspension, a part that had allegedly driven owners of one of America's most popular 1967 personal cars to fatal accidents. Bloch spread the evidence on the carpet; a couple of struts that failed and caused the vehicles to go out of control.

Apparently, the manufacturer knew what he had done because for this year's model, the strut has been redesigned. But the 1967s have not yet been recalled, gloomed Bloch, and there are nearly 500,000 of them out on the road.

Nader nodded, took notes.

Peters scowled, said the manufacturers do not test their products long enough to discover foreign fatigue factors in metal, moving parts.

Rich smirked, claimed that "autos are tested by the world's largest testing concern—the U.S. public—on the world's largest proving ground," meaning that design failures are discovered on public roads at our expense.

Later, Nader claimed that new automobiles are driven all of 150 yards when they leave the assembly line.

Generally, Detroit's antagonist urged the underground to wage battle on several fronts simultaneously: to persuade the government to order electric or steam propulsion vehicles. To bring suit against auto companies when safety or sunshine are deprived the public. To stimulate citizens' initiatives. To encourage innovators and new entrepreneurs, with information, investment.

No longer do people laugh when Nader sits down to joust with giants. Many professionals are admiring and plain people are grateful.

As the fresh air underground escorted its hero to UCLA, an elderly lady asked me who the celebrity was. "Ralph Nader," I said, not expecting her to know him.

"Well," she beamed, "as I live and breathe." Maybe she knows him.