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The Drive-Thru Restaurant

-by Gerald Reid

At one time, ordering through a fast-food drive-thru window was fairly simple, provided you could understand the garble in the speaker.



Things have gotten complicated. Speedburger is still the homegrown, no frills, no surprises place it always was. I can still negotiate their drive-thru. At Quick Burger, I can drive up curbside and actually talk to a human who will come to my car. Think that will catch on?

The chains are a different matter. First, they added "meals" by whatever name they gave it. That way, they boasted, you got a great value -- the sandwich, the fries, and the drink -- for much less than you would by ordering singly. Then, they pounced on an even larger marketing ploy -- the up-sizing or king-sizing or whatever the various restaurants call it. Now, a calculator or slide rule is necessary to compare the prices. If I leave off the fries, how much will I save?

I drove up to one of the chains a few days ago. There was a new appetizing sandwich on the menu. I knew the challenge that lay ahead. I entered the drive-thru and ordered the tantalizing sandwich with a small order of onion rings. After I ordered, it seemed to be, mostly, a monologue. Occasionally, I would comprehend a word. When I didn't, I would just guess and say "yes". You should try this sometime. It's a real adventure. I ended up with the sandwich I wanted, a huge drink that took two hands to hold, and enough onion rings to feed the 82nd Airborne. I don't know how many times I up-sized, but I almost needed a second mortgage to pay for it.

Maybe we should have the annual drive-thru awards. How about "loudest speaker"? I know which one I'm voting for. We could also see which one gets the most items in an order correct. Or, how about the one that gets by with the least amount of sausage in their "sausage gravy" biscuit?

Do you suppose that, one day, all of these restaurant chains will simplify things again, or will I just have to adjust? I think I know the answer.