



**The Channel One-Nine Special
Channel One-Nine #7
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Todd Dills: [00:00:00] It's Todd Dills from Overdrive Magazine here, folks. Today, Paul's on the line with me...

Paul Marhoefer: You know, I might have to run out these chickens...

Todd: ...fresh off a run and back at his Indiana farmhouse.

Paul: I don't know if you can hear the chickens, Todd.

Todd: No, I can't.

Paul: Well, okay. Denise just closed the window [theme comes in]

Todd: Call it old-home week here for this final edition of the Channel One-Nine Special – we're going to hear about managing pets and staying fit, about hitchhikers, hand signs and more, all while rolling down the road on 18 wheels. So gather round. You brought the questions. Paul's got some answers.

Here we go. [music fades out]

Ethan Horn: [voicemail message beep] [over the phone] Hey guys, my name is Ethan Horn. I am from Huntsville, Texas and I have a big question for you guys. So whenever I'm going down the road, a lot of times I'll see those stickers on the back of trucks that say, "How's my driving?" and then they have a phone number. And what I do when I see those is I'll call up that number and then I'll put on my voice. [deepens voice] You know, I'm from Trinity, Texas, which is a little bit of a smaller town. And I'll get on the phone there and I'll be like, "hey, this truck here it's driving real good. I've never seen a truck driver driving like this. They're letting people cut 'em off. They're doing all sorts of niceties, and I just ain't seen that often before and I need to make sure someone knows that this is one of the best darn truck drivers I've ever seen." But my question I guess is like, do the truck drivers ever hear that?

Paul: Ethan, that's pretty awesome that you do that. So all the years I've been out here, I guess I've gotten two compliments that my boss has relayed to me, and I've gotten two complaints, well, no, one complaint...

Todd: Turns out one was a case of mistaken identity. The other was well, justified you might say.

Paul: I used to drive for a guy who was pure outlaw and they called me in when I was in Missouri and they wanted me to do overnight to load. And so I was flying through Columbia, Missouri, and got called in on. Those conversations are very rare. It's sort of like, you know, the art of war or if a general goes unnoticed, he's usually a good general. I think the same applies for truckers. So if you never get a call, you're doing your job.

Ryan: [voicemail message beep] [over the phone] Hey, this is Ryan from Concord, North Carolina. My question was how do you guys stay fit away on the road? All those hours sitting there in the truck. Thanks, man. Great podcast.

Paul: Well, yeah. In years past, the folks I work for, they made me a custom bike rack. You could really do some great mountain biking on the road

Todd: Was the rack on the back of the cab? I'm guessing.

Paul: Yeah. Yeah, they fabricated it for me.

Todd: Today, Paul's exercise rituals revolve around walking, ideally a mile or more a day, though it doesn't always happen. And accessibility is a constant issue. Paul once loved to stop at the Tennessee exit 451, on I-40.

Paul: That's where I-40 intersects the Appalachian Trail. And it's just a great low impact aerobic workout. But as has happened a lot in Tennessee, you can't park there anymore. And I'm sure they had their reasons. But that was one of the real joys of life on the road was to be able to hike the Appalachian Trail once or twice a week if we wanted to.

Kathy: [voicemail message beep] [over the phone] Hi, my name is Kathy. I'm calling from Acton, Massachusetts. I have occasionally seen truckers with dogs with them in their cabs. I'm wondering how common it is for truckers to take their pets along and how do they manage it. Thanks. Bye.

Paul: It's just more and more common. Our company is dog friendly, pet friendly, and if you want to take the hard line and not allow dogs, you'd better have a really good pay package. I mean, just imagine wanting to be a female trucker out there on the road and wanting to take a mile and a half walk at the end of your shift in a truck stop. So you see a lot of really cool dogs that accompany women truck drivers. But it's really a commitment. You've got to remember things.

Todd: Paul has learned that lesson first-hand.

Paul: I had a dog once that I rode with. His name was Ranger.

Todd: A wiry little pointer-lab mix.

Paul: Well, one day, Ranger locked me out of the truck and I forgot to have my key with me. And it had one of those side windows in the passenger door, you know, for increased visibility. So I busted that side window to get into the truck. And then I had to go load grapes at the port of Gloucester in Jersey. And I had like my laundry bag stuffed in front of that little window. And Ranger got out twice while I was on the dock loading the grapes. I don't know if you've ever been, like, yelled at by a New Jersey Port authority cop twice. But that was the last time I took Ranger with me. [twangy guitar comes in]

Todd: And as Kathy implied in her question, it's not just dogs out there. I've met folks with snakes, gerbils, hamsters, lots of cats, and I know one owner-operator who the last I saw him had a copilot Macaw in the truck.

So not to discount the rest of you guys, but this next one comes from a woman who might just be my number one favorite questioner.

Katie: [voicemail message beep] [over the phone] Hi, my name is Katie and I'm from Louisiana. And I have so many questions and I might have to call back if it cuts me out. But let's see.

Todd: We've answered some of your questions, Katie, in other episodes, but this, I think, was your first one:

Katie: One. Do drivers get annoyed by kids or adults, making the honk your horn sign, like "honk honk" – is that annoying to truckers?

Paul: Well Katie, I just want to give you a shout out, we all of us at Radiotopia, appreciated your calling in. You were one of our first calling questioners. And we when we heard from you, we thought maybe we've got something here. And let me just say this, anybody that won't honk their horn for a kid, he's not my trucker friend. [music fades out]

Todd: Then again, there are exceptions to that...

Paul: Like if you're in town, like at a stoplight and some kid is giving you the air horn sign at a red light. You don't want to do that. You know, you. So it's like when you're on the highway, that's when it's cool to give the air horns sign.

Mavis: [voicemail message beep] [over the phone] This is Mavis calling from Los Angeles, California. I was wondering what you guys think of hitchhikers? My friend and I hitched from New York to Los Angeles a few years ago and it was one of the best experiences of my life. Thank you so much. Have a great day.

Paul: Well, I used to I used to pick up hitchhikers. It's been a long time though.

Todd: There can be pretty strict rules on this for company drivers, but back when Paul was an owner operator, he picked up whoever he liked.

Paul: I guess you just rely on your gut instinct on that.

Todd: And he met some pretty interesting characters that way.

Paul: I met a guy one time in Robertsdale, Alabama, at a truck stop in the TV room who was trying to get to Wildwood, Florida, to become a chrome polisher.

Todd: Chrome polishers, or truck detail men, are kind of a trucking subculture unto themselves. Plenty make a living out it, but for others its side work, more casual day labor, hanging around the larger truck stops to try and make a little money shining bumpers and rims – that might have been what this gentleman was after.

Paul: This is kind of one of the wildest things; he didn't make it as a chrome polisher.

Todd: Which we know because just several days later, Paul ran into that same hitchhiker, *again*.

Paul: On Commonwealth Ave in Jacksonville, Florida, sitting on the ground. [laughs] I'm like, "What happened?" "Well, I had it pretty rough over there. They got some pretty rough cats over there and they didn't want me sleeping on the ground."

And so I thought, "well, I know I got this intrastate load of plants, I can pay you little to help throw this load off."

Todd: So Paul took the would-have-been chrome polisher on the road again, this time as a paid helper.

Paul: I was really living frugally at the time. I had four kids at home and my wife was a stay at home mom. And like, I was eating a lot of cereal back then. And after a few days he goes, "Paul, kind of seems like you're struggling." [Paul and Todd laugh] Like if a homeless hitchhiker, failed chrome polisher takes pity on you, maybe you are struggling. And so I think he decided to find greener pastures. But we parted his friends.

Todd: Truth is, I don't hear a whole lot of stories like that talking to truckers today, not stories that are from recent times. Anyway. It feels like picking up hitchhikers and hitchhiking itself is another one of those aspects of life on the road that's faded with time.

[voicemail message beep] OK, last question.

Caller: [over the phone] Never done anything like this before, but I'm a young mother, and for years and years and years, I have always thought of driving a truck long distance as kind of the ideal thing that I could do, possibly when I'm older, and my kids are grown. Is that crazy? I don't know. [laughs] So how does one get into tracking, especially later in life, and especially when you're a woman? Thank you. Bye.

Paul: Well, that's a great question, and we do see a lot of people who choose trucking as a second career. And they actually become some of the best truckers you see out here because they have this wealth of life experiences that they can bring. You know, it's a really good question: what would be the best path into trucking right now?

Todd: I'll just jump in here to say, you can train for your Commercial Driver's License in both informal and more formal ways, like at community college and private driving school. If you're trying to find good schools in your area, look up the Professional Truck

Driver Institute – they've got a guide on their site. After you get the CDL, though, then comes the hardest part for most.

Paul: It seems like the entrance to trucking has always been difficult and fraught with a hard initiation period. There's a German expression, *Aller Anfang ist schwer*. All beginnings are hard. And be prepared to have a difficult first year if you're serious about it. And be prepared to be able to weather that. That's all I can say. [theme music comes in]

Todd: Thanks for all your questions and hanging with me through these mini-episodes. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. Special thanks to our silent partner, mix-master producer Ian Coss – hey, Ian!

Mr. Marhoefer will be back next week with our final episode, a drop-in to the 2019 Great American Trucking Show, where we explore the automated driving technology that seems to be on every driver's mind of late. We'll also check back with a few of the folks we've interviewed over the course of the series – to see where they're at today.

The Channel One-Nine Special is a feature of Over The Road, and produced by Ian Coss and myself, Todd Dills, with support from Paul Marhoefer, Lacey Roberts and Julie Shapiro. And if you really want to get into the weeds of trucking, find me on Channel 19, the blog I keep at OverdriveOnline.com/Channel19.

Todd: Interesting. Cool. I think we're done there. [music fades out]

Katie: [over the phone] Oh gosh. There were more questions. Okay. I'm going to call back when I think of the rest.

[00:12:46] **END OF EPISODE.**