**Women Truckers**

Adriessc ("Bitsy") Gomez, 33, is a "gear-jamming gal with white-line fever." A woman truck driver from Los Angeles, she is also a pain in the axe to a traditionally macho industry. Her fledgling 150-member Coalition of Women Truck Drivers, an offshoot of the L.A. chapter of the National Organization for Women, already has organization cells in Dallas, Atlanta and central California. Two weeks ago, Gomez won a $6,000 Fair Employment Practice Commission settlement from a California winery on the ground that she had been turned down for a trucking job simply because she was a woman. Bitsy is out to change the industry's traditional attitude toward female truckers. Some docking areas still have MEN ONLY signs, and many truck stops routinely refuse to let women truckers use the showers. Worse, says Gomez: "When you lose your job to some 18-year-old punk boy after ten years, it makes you mad."

Bitsy has another major gripe. Women truckers, she says, often have to pass a "sleeper test"—having sex with a foreman or male driver—to get a job. "I've had trucking foremen tell me not to frustrate the other driver or they'll get someone else to do the job as reported," she says. Archie Maretta, president of Teamsters Local 208 in Los Angeles, says that he has never heard of the sleeper test. "But if Bitsy is a good-looking woman," he says, "I wouldn't be surprised if some drivers didn't try to use it." To lessen chances for sexual harassment on the road, the coalition is demanding separate rooms for male and female drivers on overnight stops, and relay driving (with just one driver on each stretch of the run). The coalition's other demands: on-the-job training for women, no special tests for drivers already licensed in their categories by the state (women truckers charge that the tests are used to weed out female applicants) and adjustable seats and pedals so women cannot be disqualified for being too small to drive a large truck.

**Playing Hooky.** The industry's major complaint about women is that they are too weak, though few women truckers can be described as frail. Says Roger Kennedy, terminal manager for a grocery wholesaler: "We've been reluctant to hire women because the job involves unloading heavy cases at Ma and Pa grocers. But Bitsy has sure got our attention, and if we find a qualified woman, we'll be glad to hire her."

Gomez admits that she is a near fanatic about trucking. As a girl in Chicago, she played hookey from school to watch truckers unload, and at drive-in movies she usually watched the freeways instead of the films. The mother of three, she is separated from her husband, and driving is the most important thing in her life. "A good truck is to a woman what a man ought to be," she says, "big and strong and takes you where you want to go. When a woman gets into a semi, it makes up for all the crap women take in our society."

**Secret Love**

More than 20,000 couples will do something furtive in California this year—they will marry. State law allows confidential marriages with a minimum of fuss: no marriage license, no blood test, no three-day waiting period and, best of all, no public record that the marriage ever took place.

The century-old statute was intended to allow common-law couples to legitimize their marriages quietly and without embarrassment. Now growing numbers of couples are using the law to avoid red tape and keep word of the marriages from parents and friends. In 1972, only 532 such weddings were performed in Los Angeles County and adjacent Orange County. Last year it was 12,212.

"It's one of the greatest laws," says Edie Steinmetz, owner of the Doves of Happiness Wedding Chapel in Inglewood, a leader in the state's $700,000-a-year secret-marriage industry. "It allows a lot of people to get married who otherwise would not be able to"—including the already married.

Couples fill in a confidential marriage form, which is filed with the county clerk and is then unavailable for inspection by anyone. That makes it easy for applicants intent on bigamy. Says William St. John, Orange County clerk: "There is nothing on the form that requires a couple to say how long they have been living together, if they had a previous marriage or divorce, and if the divorce is finalized."

Dr. A.W. Morey, owner of the Lafayette Wedding Chapel in Long Beach, shrugs off the bigamy problem and insists: "This is a very moral enterprise. We're trying to get the largest number of people living together to come in and get married legally." Chapel owners are legally authorized to preside at weddings as long as they have some sort of ministerial certificate, which in California is almost as easy to get as a secret wedding. Last year Dr. Morey, who says he is a minister, got 1,500 couples to come in and marry, at $20 per ceremony.

**Blood Test.** Since the confidential weddings do not require proof of a blood test, some state officials are concerned about increases in the incidence of venereal disease and rubella during pregnancies. State Assemblyman Robert Burke of Huntington Beach introduced a bill last spring that would require a blood test and a three-day waiting period for all marriages, but the wedding chapels lobbied hard against the bill and killed it in committee. "Some of our customers may be frightened to death of needles," explains Steinmetz. Then, too, the tests would add to the cost of secret weddings, which usually run from $20 to $50 for a simple ceremony. Chapel operators also feared that a three-day wait would send customers scurrying for quickie Las Vegas weddings.

Meanwhile, business is growing, partly because the chapels try so hard to please. Steinmetz has a stable of ministers who carry paging devices so that he can keep them in for quickie weddings. Some chapels will perform the ceremony wherever the customers want it—on mountaintops or beaches, in stable or on rubber rafts. One couple told Steinmetz's husband Joe, who helps operate the Doves of Happiness, that they wanted to be married in the nude. "I asked them if they also wanted the pastor nude," he says. "They said they had to disguise it so Dr. I haven't found them but I guess we could do it." He promptly beeped for the pastor, who called in and gamely said that he too was willing to perform in the buff.