

TELEPHONE METER-MINDER

Hydro, gas and water utilities in Canada are keeping an interested eye on an experimental domestic meter-reading system operating in Edmonton, Alberta.

It is an eight-second operation, involving the householder's telephone, that doesn't inconvenience the home owner. One call tells all, with the system. The consumption of gas, water and electricity in a home is "read" by telephone without the meter-user being aware of the "call". A gadget in the phone is linked to other gadgets in the meters, which read off the consumption code when the utility dials.

It saves labour; whether it saves money is not yet known. The system can "read" 10,000 meters a night and the meter call bypasses the ringing bell, so the householder isn't bothered. The meter call is cut off if an outgoing call is made by the phone subscriber. Incoming calls would be delayed by the length of time it takes to read the meters - all of eight seconds. But this system is being used only at night so the interference is minimal.

The major benefit to the consumer is that he gets an accurate utility-consumption reading on a regular basis. It would end the meter man's calls and terminate the guessing games utilities must use where an accurate reading cannot be obtained. Some home owners offer meter-readers the privilege of entering their premises by leaving a key to the door if the occupant is out. It is a service that utilities are reluctant to use (and most often don't) to save embarrassment all round.

TRADE FIRST QUARTER 1972

Canada's \$170-million trade surplus in the first quarter of 1972 had decreased from \$643 million a year earlier. Exports rose in value by \$311 million, or 7.6 per cent, to \$4,383 million, of which about one-third was attributable to higher prices and two-thirds to increased volume. Imports, on the other hand, rose by \$783 million, or 22.9 per cent, to \$4,214 million, with higher prices accounting for one-fifth of the rise.

Exports of fabricated materials rose by \$136 million and end-products by \$216 million, while shipments of crude materials held steady. Strong exports among fabricated materials included lumber and other wood products, paper and paperboard, and petroleum and coal products; and among end-products included automobile products (an increase of \$133 million), aircraft, and "other equipment and tools" such as office machines and electric-lighting equipment. Weak exports among food, beverages and tobacco included grain shipments (down \$36 million). Among crude materials lower-valued shipments of rapeseed and of ores, concentrates and scrap metals

offset higher-valued sales of coal, crude petroleum and natural gas.

Imports of food, beverages and tobacco increased by \$62 million; crude materials \$76 million; fabricated materials \$138 million, and end-products \$516 million. Rising imports in the food group included meat and preparations, vegetables and sugar; in the crude material group, crude petroleum; in the fabricated materials group, wood products, textiles, chemicals, iron and steel alloys, and metal basic products; in the end-product section, automotive products (an increase of \$202 million), industrial machinery, farm machinery and tractors, communication equipment, "other equipment and tools", and personal and household goods.

The trade surplus with the United States increased \$308 million from \$237 million as export gains exceeded import gains. With Britain, the surplus dropped to \$15 million from \$141 million, as imports rose and exports fell. Trade with Japan, the European Economic Community, Latin America, Commonwealth countries, and other countries produced a \$153-million deficit compared to surpluses (with each) totalling \$264 million in the first quarter of 1971. Strong import gains and falling exports, or stable exports in the case of "other countries", accounted for the swing in the trade balances.

Seasonally-adjusted data indicated little change in exports (at \$4,559 million) from the fourth quarter of 1971. Exports to the United States increased by \$239 million but those to Britain fell by \$82 million and the rest of the world by \$130 million. However, imports at \$4,453 million were higher by \$282 million than they were in the fourth quarter. Purchases from the United States rose by \$50 million, from Britain by \$15 million, and from the rest of the world by \$219 million.

CAR-GO-RAIL PLAN

Canadian National has announced details of an experimental extension of its "car-go-rail" plan that will allow passengers to take their automobiles with them on the very trains on which they travel.

Initially, the new plan, to be known as "Auto With You", will operate only on a "through basis" between Toronto and Edmonton. It will start on June 23, when the railway's summer schedule goes into effect.

Its advantages will include delivery of the automobile to the railway on the day of departure and immediate delivery of the vehicle on arrival at destination. The automobiles will be shipped in specially equipped enclosed auto-transporters. Travellers using the plan will be required to make advance reservations.

One way cost is expected to be \$188 plus two single adult fares.