

# Crate thieves milking dairies

SHEREE LEE OLSON

They are eminently versatile, ideal for bookshelves, footstools, bed and table supports, storage bins and, of course, perfect for storing albums. They are readily available from street corners and the back of restaurants,

and almost everyone has a few. They are also clearly marked as the property of a dairy, and carry a warning against unauthorized use. That means the red, green, purple or turquoise plastic milk case in your room is stolen property.

Lyle Roszell of Dominion Dairies, Toronto, the marketers of Sealtest products, is clear about this. "We have never sold a plastic milk case, so there's no possibility of people saying they've bought them." Not that many people bother. Milk case stereo shelves can be seen blithely displayed in windows all over campus. The casual "misappropriation" of these cases is so widespread that it has become a "major problem" throughout the North American dairy industry. "It's not casual from our point of view," says Roszell. He estimates his company loses about a third of the total "float" of 400,000 cases - every year. "That runs into a lot of money." An official at Silverwood Dairies, which bought Borden two years ago, couldn't provide figures, but was quick to admit it's a problem.

Because milk deliveries are made to chain stores at three or four in the morning, the cases must be left outside. When cases disappear, the dairy picks up the tab. Neither Silverwood nor Dominion believes a cash deposit system, such as the one

on the part of the companies to foil music buffs, but the result of metrification, begun in 1981. This fortuitous side-effect had not occurred to the dairy officials, but the man at Silverwoods laughed heartily and was obviously pleased when *Excalibur* described the problem. He couldn't say whether the change has cut losses because their business has been expanding. But Dominion's Roszell didn't laugh; he says there has been no significant decline in losses.

Although a woman at Silverwood said the cost is not passed onto the

consumer "because the Milk Marketing Board sets prices," Roszell disagrees. "Any cost factor is passed on to the consumer," he advises.

The dairies won't sell you a milk case, but Silverwood will tell you where you can purchase one, and Dominion will accept your money for the ones you already have. "We've had people call up years later," says Roszell, "so you can see their consciences are bothering them. We told them the value of the cases and accepted their money. With thanks."

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in use in Western Canada, would work here. "It's a problem of sheer volume," says Roszell, "a problem of room in the stores." In fact, some of these stores are themselves guilty of misappropriation: they use the cases to display fruit and vegetables.

Another "solution" was cited by both dairies. Trade journals are carrying articles about "vigilante" groups in the U.S., sent out by companies to demand the return of their property.

But Canadian companies may have already found a partial solution. It seems newly manufactured milk cases no longer accommodate record albums. Contrary to speculation, the slight decrease in dimensions is not a diabolical manoeuvre



Photo: Mario Scattoloni

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