

Don't judge a fish by its name alone



LOON TUNES and OUTDOOR NOTES by Len Landry

This all happened somewhere in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, back in 1976... a year before the Toronto Blue Jays were hatched.

"Dere she be, Lenny... pretty, eh by?"

"Pretty" was not a strong enough description for the absolutely beautiful little pond that glistened and gleamed in front of us, lined by thick brush and evergreen, with an apron of healthy water-weed jutting out from the muddy shoreline.

The body of water was only about three acres in size, and it lay, wild and untouched in the cool spring air... untouched, that is, save for the remnants of an old, unkempt dock on the opposite shore, a structure that gave indication that someone, sometime, had enjoyed this scene before us, perhaps a long, long while ago.

"Filled wit fish you'll find 'er, by... we don't have a right name for dem doe... but dat's why yer here, Lenny... catch me drift? Yer gonna tell us what dese fish 'er called, and you'll have not a bit of trouble catchin' de tings if yer half as skill as we hear from dat ol' Rita," and Gussie smiled a wide smile and his slit-like eyes twinkled in anticipation.

"Don't believe everything Rita tells you," I warned.

Good ol' Gussie. He always reminded me of the friendly lion in the Wizard of Oz, except that he was younger, even more mischievous, and there was no questioning his courage. In fact, if there was any doubt about bravery right then, it was on my own part.

"Are you sure we aren't trespassing, Gussie? I mean, that dock..."

"Does dat ting look like it's seen any bit of humanity lately? Look at 'er! Jeez, by! Now stop worryin', and jest cast out..."

So, cast out I did, using my favorite tactic whenever I'm in unknown waters: simple... hook and worm.

Bang! No sooner had the bait touched down on the water's mirror-like surface when we had our first fish; thrashing and dashing and busting the calm of the pool, it finally succumbed, and came to hand.

"Looks kind of like a small bass... yeah, like a rock bass in a way, but more like a perch head... and the mouth is softer, frail... ah, I think I know what they are... the Americans love 'em, but I've never caught 'em before. You know, Gussie, if I'm right, well, you're in for a great feed tonight! Yep, I know what they are..."

"You know what dey're called Lenny?"

"Umm, they've got lots of names, Gussie. For now, we'll call 'em... oh... Calico Bass, okay?"

Gussie wouldn't like their real name, I thought to myself.

"Taste good ya tink, eh?"
"The best, according to a lot of people. And they're fair game all year, no limit. Heck, we'll help the pond by takin' a few dozen."

And just then, the loud laughter of a group of other fishermen broke the quiet air. After all, this was Cape Breton, and the breakers of the mighty Atlantic crashed on that rocky shore only an unseen couple of hundred yards away. The fellows were settling in for a feast of lobster and loud music, capped with a bit of butter sauce and beer, after a long shift on the ocean...!

"It's been a hard day's night, And I've been workin' like a dog..."

More laughter, and then all the Breton Beatles joined in.

"It's been a hard day's night, I should be sleepin' like a log... But when I get home to you, I find de tings dat you do Will make me feel all right..."

Somewhere, John Lennon must have winced just a little bit.

Meanwhile, Gussie and I were fishing our freshwater paradise like a couple of frisky fiends, hidden from the view of the salty celebrators from the sea, fishermen of a different world.

"Another one... and another! Fish on every cast... all outside that weed edge! I don't believe this! Hey, Gussie, we're runnin' out of bait," I said to my partner who, in turn, indicated that it was time to leave.

After we spied upon the antics of the Breton Beatles, we aimed Gussie's truck homeward. And somewhere, in Cape Breton on that eve in 1976, we treated the family to a fish feed 'par excellence.'

"Put de lobster and dem Calico Bass side by each, and see if you can choose what's better! Lenny, hurry up wit more fish, by... dey're goin' fast...!"

Yes, those handsome little fish, all about the size and shape of a butter plate, rendered the finest tasting fillets these people had enjoyed in a long while.

The fish are known by many names: Calico Bass, papermouth, slabs, and a host of other titles but the real label is quite a misnomer. Fred Howse, George Hoare, some of you others... you know what we're talking about here, don't you?

Has there ever been a fish more poorly named than... the crappie...?

I can almost hear Gussie yellin' all the way from the east coast... "Crappy? Crappy? Jeez Lenny, dey're lots of tings, by, but crappy dey ain't!"

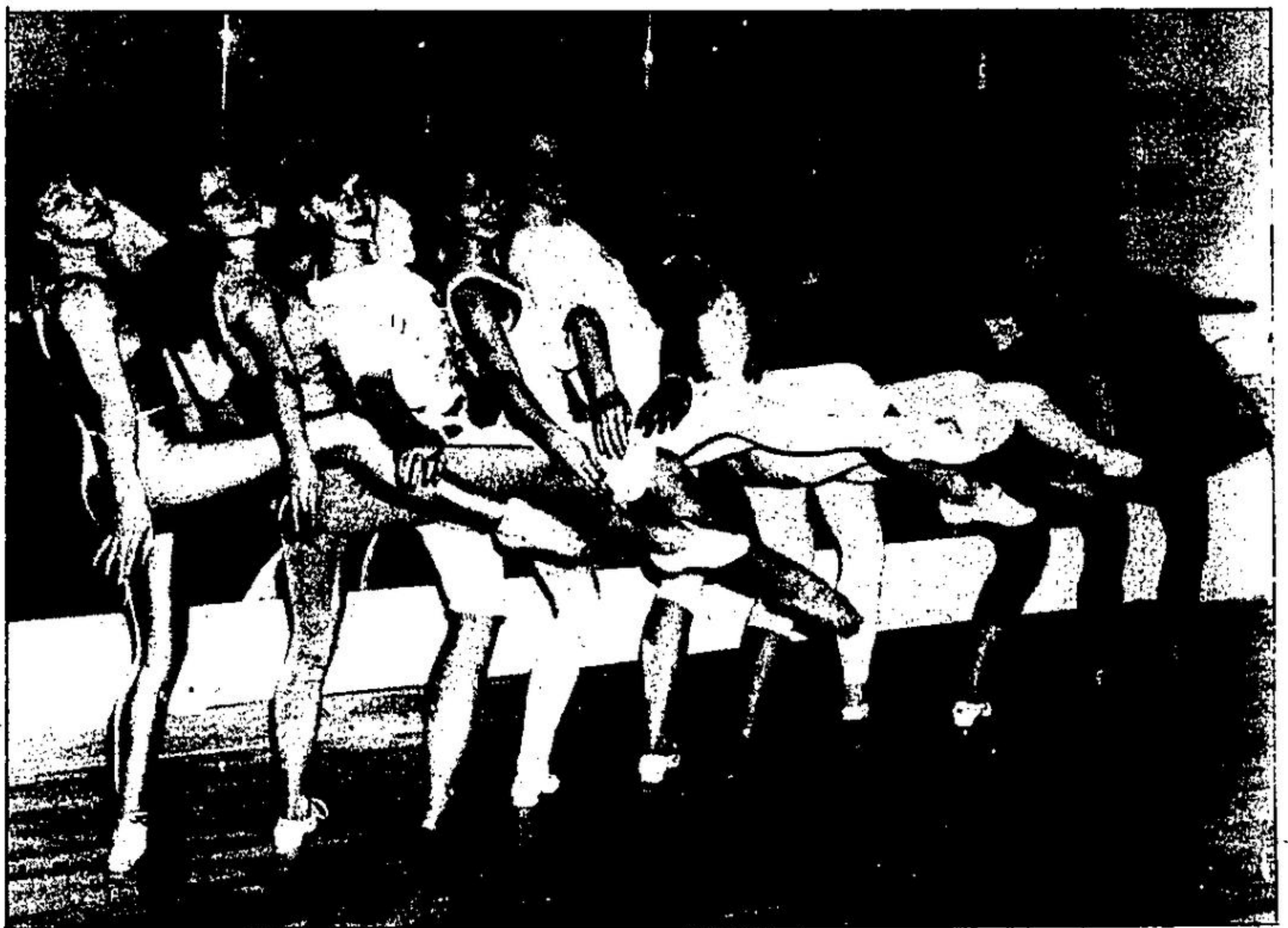
God bless you Gussie and all of your family and the good people back in Cape Breton. For you, they're not crappie, or crappy, or anything like that. For you... they're Calico Bass, okay?

Keep on enjoying them side by each with your lobster... And long live the Breton Beatles... and that slyly stocked little freshwater pond next door to the ocean...

SHORELINES: The King Crappie Derby in Midland is on now, and runs 'til May 22. Call (705) 526-7884 for details. There are nice prizes, including a boat, motor and trailer.

ON THE HORIZON: More fishin' talk.

See you in two weeks.



Top of the class

Students from the Halton Hills School of Dancing who recently passed their jazz and tap exams are (from left to right) Leigh-Ann Cerka, Allison Bobor, Adele Campbell, Beth Cameron, Jennifer Halsall.

Lisa Carter, Kelly Cotton, Melanie Jans, Heather Cunningham and Lynn Wood. Absent from the photo were Julie Ponesse and Suzanne Shein. (Photo submitted)

Dance students waltz off with honours

This year, for the first time, students from the Halton Hills School of Dancing were recently entered in the Canadian Dance Teachers' Association syllabus jazz and tap dancing examinations.

and judging by the high marks, all are to be congratulated for successfully completing their exams.

Those students include:
Grade IV Jazz: Melanie Jans, Honors.

Grade I Jazz: Allison Bobor, Commended; Lisa Carter, Honors; Beth Cameron, Highly Commended; Adele Campbell, Highly Commended; Leigh-Ann Cerka, Commended; Kelly Cotton, Honors; Heather Cunningham, Honors; Jennifer

Halsall, Commended; Lynn Wood, Highly Commended.

Primary Tap: Adele Campbell, Honors; Julie Ponesse, Highly Commended; Suzanne Shein, Highly Commended.

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Mayor's race

Registrations are now being accepted for the Tenth Annual Mayor's Road Race to be held Sunday, June 11. Entry forms can be picked up at the Acton Arena, Georgetown Recreation and Parks Department and the Town Main Street Office. For more information call 877-5185 extension 276.

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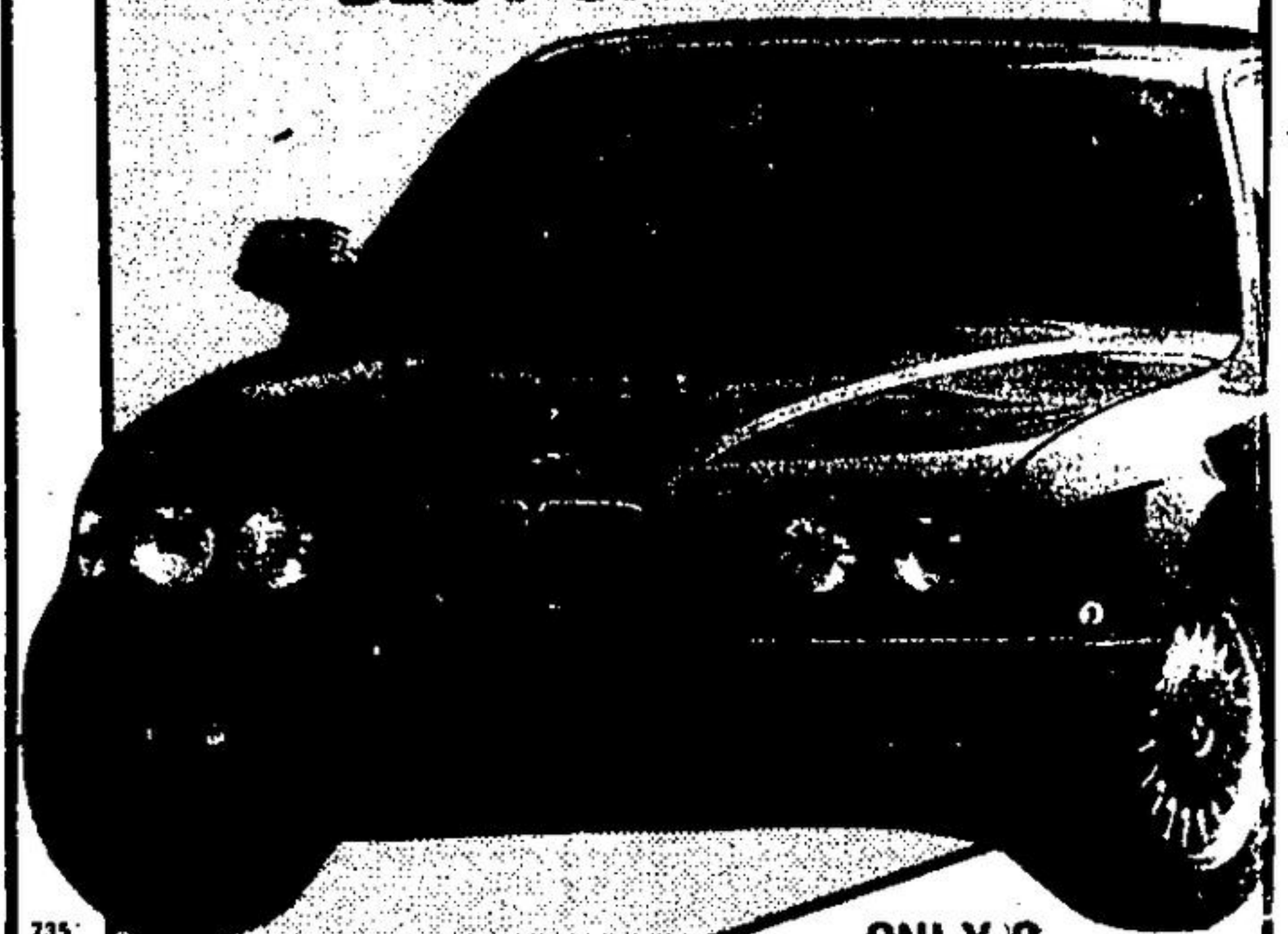
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