

Poise and thinking on your feet

For more years than I care to recall, I've been a regular at the annual Acton Fall Fair's Friday night performance.

From my teen years, through my time as a fair board member, as well as the times I've covered it for the newspaper, I haven't missed a year.

The most enjoyable part is the crowning of Miss Acton during the Friday night festivities.

Acton Fair ran last weekend, and this year was no exception, except for one tiny difference.

I was one of the three Miss Acton judges.

You know how you receive a phone call months before an event, and someone catches you at a weak moment, when they ask you to volunteer for something? That was the case when Leigh Whiting, one of the organizers, called me last summer, and popped the question. "Ted, would you be one of the judges for Miss Acton this year?"

She added how I was such 'an old pro at the pageant, and how I'd just be a natural to do it...'

You know, that usual ego-stroking stuff.

Totally weakened by the whole procedure, I agreed, and wrote it in my daytimer.

Two weeks ago, while discussing the weekend with my editor, I flipped my daytimer to September 19. There in bold printed letters were the words "Judge Miss Acton." I was trapped.

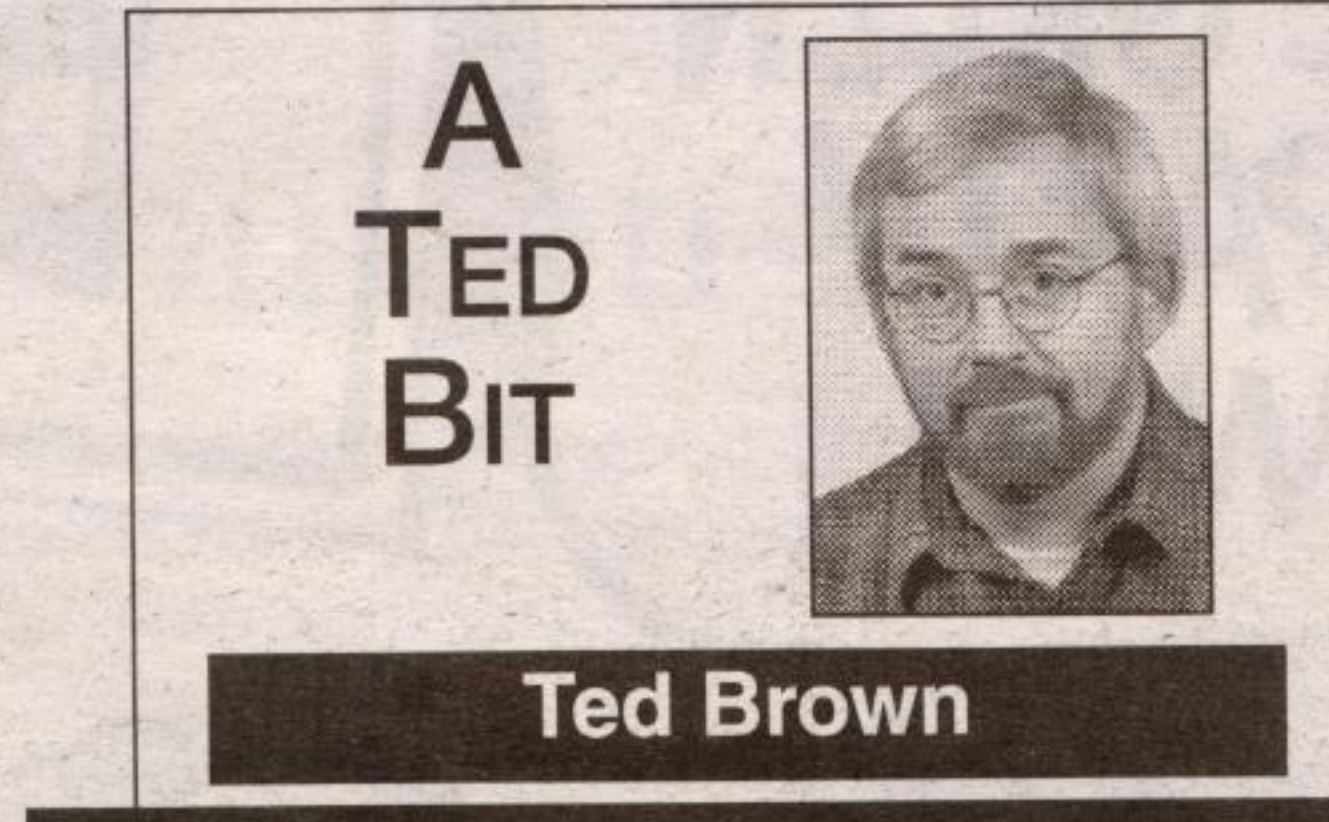
Receiving instructions later that week, I was to be at Knox Church in Acton at 6 p.m. to begin interviewing the contestants—all 16 of them.

Along with two other judges, we had to wade through 16 interviews to score those who could best represent Acton Fair for the coming year.

Being a bit chatty, I did most of the interviewing while my colleagues watched the girls and listened to their answers, scoring their composure, confidence and the content of their answers.

It was a tough task—tougher than I expected. One judge admitted she was glad to be on the judges' side of the table.

"If I were the one being interviewed," she



said, "I'd probably be in tears by now..."

The kids were great, and I was struck by the maturity of their answers to certain questions.

The interview process was by far the most onerous, and after that, we had the opportunity to score the girls on how they presented themselves on stage in front of the audience.

Three-minute speeches followed, followed by the five finalists being required to make an impromptu speech on a subject they randomly drew from an envelope.

At the end of the evening, none of the judges had a clue who'd be the winner. Our tallies were added together and the girl with the most points won. This is no beauty pageant—it's based on poise and thinking on your feet.

We had a gut feeling who might be in the top three or four—but the winner? Notta clue.

When the final tally was announced, 16-year-old Angela Schrempf was named Miss Acton Fair for 2003. Angela had the ability to think on her feet with poise and self-confidence—that's what it takes. We wished her well.

At the same time, there were others who were so close, who I hope enter the competition again next year—they have the goods to do the job.

So now I've experienced the Miss Acton pageant from yet another angle, and, to be honest, it was fun. But would I do it again?

That depends entirely upon whether Leigh can catch me at another equally weak moment.

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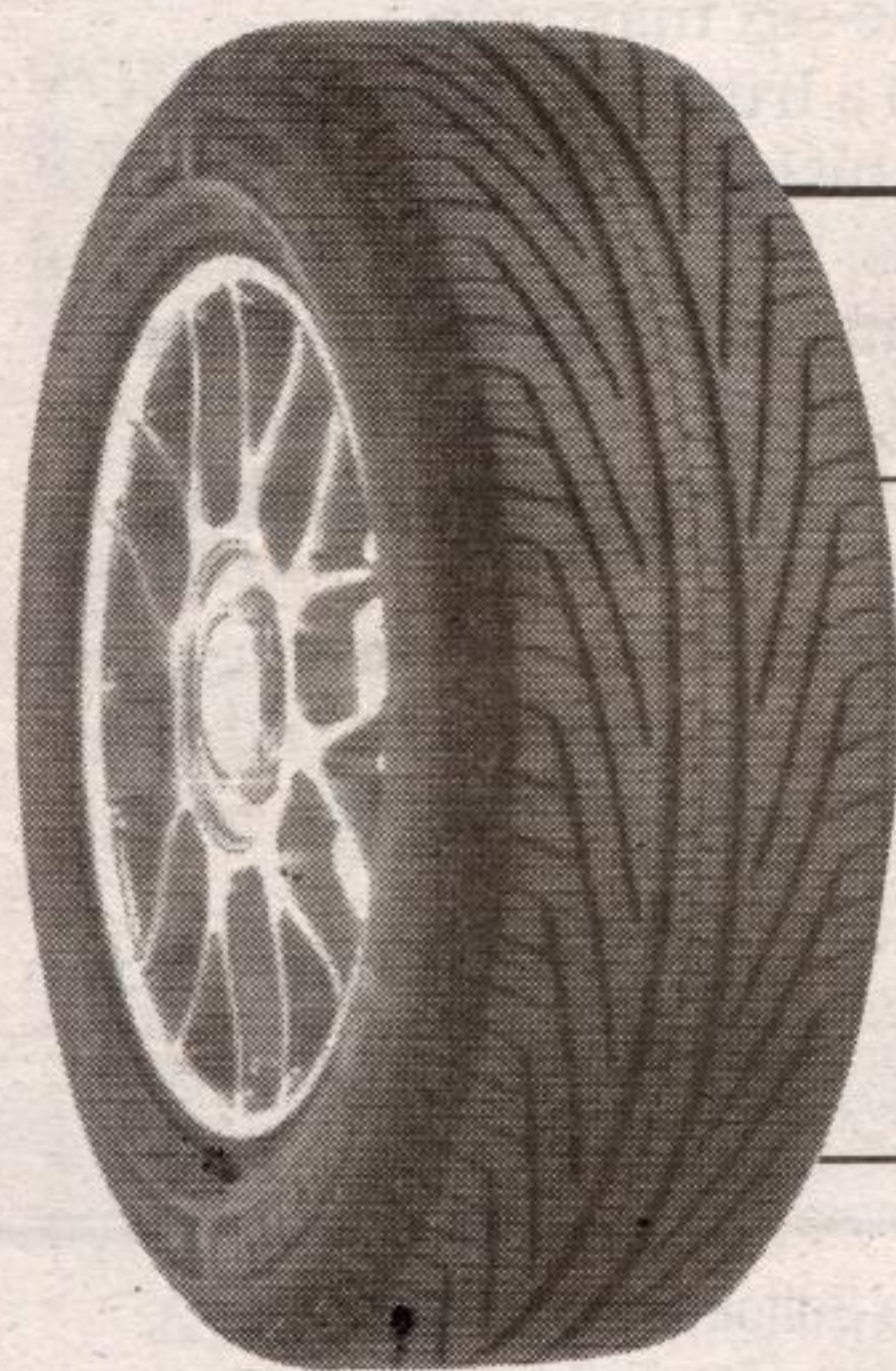
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