

# SORRY, WRONG NUMBER!

**T**HERE has been a spate of advertisements in the Bombay dailies regarding change in telephone numbers consequent on the commissioning of the new telephone exchange at Cooperage on November 11, 1983, affecting subscribers in the business heartland of the metropolis.

One has a running love-hate relationship with this 'terrible' instrument invented by Graham Bell in one of his sweet, vengeful moods. You can't but hate the black, squat tool of modern day communication which goes 'dead' when you need it most and comes screamingly alive in the middle of the night — only to put you on to a "Sorry, Wrong Number!". Of course, you can't help loving it when you get the number and the person you are after without much ado. At any rate one feels cut off from civilisation without it.

Bombay Telephones (hero or villain of the piece?) has come out with an advertisement of sorts — inconspicuous enough in size to get lost and without any visual or bold body types. For all its vagaries the telephone remains the only medium of speedy communication through which one can contact people living in far-flung areas. Surely, Bombay Telephones could have come out with a more attention-getting advertisement (on the front page, why not?) to save subscribers from dialling old numbers and getting frustrated. The plight of



those depending on public call offices can be imagined. What a waste of time, effort and money could have been avoided if Bombay Telephones had been a little more considerate!

How have the business firms taken advantage of the situation by releasing suitable advertisements? Here was an opportunity for them to show their concern for customers and contacts. For firms engaged in public service like banks, hotels and airlines it was not only an opportunity but a duty to announce the change in numbers. A public-relations oriented advertisement giving important information to the people was definitely called for.

What should the ingredients of such an advertisement be? For one thing it should 'boldly' make known the new numbers. The advertisement should stand out among the maze of big-sized advertisements which usually hog all the attention. The advertisement should be visually attractive enough to drag the reader's eyes to itself and convey the message — in straightforward terms,

without frills or too much of sophistication.

In most of the advertisements published (cuts enclosed) there is no visual at all. In a couple of them, illustrations of the telephone have been used, the vintage phone used by Oberoi Towers being particularly attractive. But both Oberoi and Nocil have given their new telephone numbers only and not the old ones.

Indian Airlines is rather business-like. They have merely given the old and the new numbers, that's all. Considering the frequency with which the public uses these numbers (more than in the case of Air-India), Indian Airlines could have come out with a bigger advertisement; less austere too.

Herdillia Chemicals make their point well enough with clever use of the illustration of the telephone cord, but they, too, have chosen not to give the old numbers. This additional information would have helped one to relate the old and the new numbers.

One gets the suspicion that Air-India keeps well thought-out "ready made" advertisements for

every situation. Theirs is easily the best of the lot. The visual of the familiar Maharajah leads the reader gently by the nose to the advertisement which is fair-sized (20 x 3 column inch) for an announcement of this kind. The visual captures the usual mood of the telephone user, and the idle fingers are shown spinning the paper weight on the desk — the done thing when one is conversing over the phone. The other necessary elements like new (big, bold) and old (smaller types) telephone numbers, the outline of the telephone to indicate what the advert is about, and the date from which the change is effective, are all there. You can also see (almost hear!) the royal mascot say: "I've changed my numbers at Nariman Point". The message is loud, clear and complete and goes home effectively. Another clinching plus point — the advertisement was timely and was published on November 11, itself unlike some others who came a couple of days later.

One is sure that Air-India would follow up the advertisement by mailing printed slips or art-pulls of the advertisement to those concerned, to make doubly sure that the change in numbers is made known. One is tempted to give a plebeian pat on the royal back for continuing to show imagination, and more importantly, for getting maximum publicity mileage out of the advertisement.

— V. V. Paarthasarathy