

the old lady with the right-hand halves?

I HAVE a left-hand £10,000 Shell coupon. It is the wrong half, the one everyone gets, I might have known. People who get right-hand £10,000 Shell coupons are six feet tall, eat all they want and never

get fat and get a reply when they ring the box-office of Starlight Express.

Non-motorists and Martians may not know that Shell is giving out these coupons at their petrol stations. They are vouchers for various sums and

appear to have been cut in half. If you get both halves you can cash them in.

It is a spectacularly successful scheme, says it coupons, put end to end, would reach the Falklands though they don't mention the problem of mid-air refuelling. I don't know where BP's coupons would reach.

They really are infuriating, these coupons. So many left-hand £10,000s, so few right-hands, how could Shell do this to us? There must be some right-hand £10,000s but where and how many and who has them?

Such are the questions on the nation's lips in these critical times and the bolder spirits among us do something about it. They buy their petrol little and often, thus getting several coupons a week. They boldly drive into petrol stations and ignore the pumps altogether, demanding a coupon as is their right and driving straight out again.

And they advertise. The sensible ones choose The Standard but we must admit that other papers get their share. Day by day the ads march poignantly down the personal columns with a common, increasingly despairing theme:

Wanted: right-hand £10,000 Shell coupon.

Also the elixir of youth and the golden grail...

Frustration

Bob Walker who is in the car hire business in Lambeth and so does a lot of driving now has six left-hand £10,000s and five right-hand £10,000s, not to mention a pile of £100s, £10s, £1s and 50ps.

He advertised in The Standard and had 47 replies. None of them had a right-hand £10,000 or a left-hand £1000. The frustration!

Meanwhile in a little Huntingdon village called Warboys 31-year-old Bill Hensley saw a

fine way of hitting the jackpot without going near a petrol pump.

He is an insurance broker who works at home, employing his girlfriend, Pam, and an Osborne business computer which, he says, had plenty of spare capacity.

So he advertised too. He said that for a mere £5 he would put your name, address and details of your coupons onto this computer and it would put you in touch with the owners of the other halves.

Computer

People rushed to join Mr Hensley's scheme and pleasing clouds of £5 notes descended on High Street, Warboys. Within days 2000 people had registered their coupons on the computer—so MANY left-hand £10,000s—and new ones are coming in at the rate of 150 a day.

Mr Hensley has had to take on three girls to answer the telephones and bank the cheques and to rope in another computer round the corner. The Post Office has put in two extra lines but even so 0487-822723 is constantly engaged as the girls cope with the flood of hopefuls.

Mr Hensley's success rate is not large so far. No right-hand £10,000s have come in at all. Mr Hensley's theory is that there's an old lady somewhere who gets one every time she buys petrol and then puts it in a drawer. The rest, he says, are probably in Scotland.

He has only found one matching pair of £1000s and they have not yet been confirmed. But, he says, he has successful £10, £1 and 50p match-ups every day and, with only three weeks of the Shell scheme left, things will hot up now he says. After that there will be weeks and weeks

of BP and National and THEY have a top wack of £20,000.

But back to Shell. Has no one found a right-hand £10,000 yet?

Yes they have. Four have turned up so far—in Motherwell, Bradford, Haywards Heath and Oundle. All were instantly turned into cash.

The Oundle Coupon, a fine example of late 20th century voucherwork and very rare, was discovered in this way.

Mr Terry Sharpe has a shop in Oundle—he deals in second-hand furniture, and he fills his Transit van twice a week at Marshall's a small garage in the village.

Six sealed Shell coupons had accumulated on his dashboard before his wife opened them, found a commonplace left-hand £10,000 coupon among them and put it in her purse.

That weekend the Sharpes' 17-year-old son Darren filled up his motorbike at Marshall's and brought back a coupon with the change. His father shoved it in his pocket but opened it next day. Unbelievably it was a right-hand £10,000.

There has been some celebrating at Oundle lately.

There have also been long queues of motorists at Marshall's.



MAUREEN and TERRY SHARPE (above): two halves make £10,000—all done without the help of BILL HENSLEY and his computer (right).