



John Tagiuri Somerville, Massachusetts
Public artist and founder of Earth on Empty, age 47

A Meter Man With a Mission

"My friend Mike, a custom bike maker, was talking one day about how dangerous it is to ride with all those huge sport-utility vehicles on the road. I don't like SUVs myself, for environmental reasons. I think about the air quality my daughter is going to have to live with. We came up with the idea of ticketing SUVs. Three weeks before Bike to Work Week in May of 2001, I asked guests at a dinner party whether anyone had a traffic ticket. We worked from the real ticket to design our own, but ours displayed facts about excessive oil consumption, asked questions like 'Why do you need such a huge car? This is not a militarized zone!', and ended with 'Failure to pay attention to your own behavior is hazardous to everyone.'

"On the first night of Bike to Work Week, about 30 of us met in a park. I handed out maps and everyone was assigned a particular area in Roxbury and Somerville. We were all on bikes. In two and a half hours, without using a drop of gas, we ticketed 10,000 SUVs. The next night we blanketed Boston. There were even more bikers, and more tickets. We did the same thing again last May.

"We got a lot of press, good and bad. One Boston columnist called us pampered ponytailed layabouts, goateed treehuggers, and sanctimonious rich kids. But others liked what we did and began calling us for tickets. We've sent out nearly a million so far. The auto industry spends billions of dollars trying to make SUVs seem cool. They aren't. You can't see over them; they spew greenhouse gases. My mother is 81 years old and she loves ticketing them. We figure we have people ticketing now in 40 cities in 20 states. In 2002, we were nominated by the Environmental Grantmakers Association as Messenger of the Year. Now, that's cool." —*interview by Marilyn Berlin Snell*



THE SKINNY ON SUVs: Sport-utility vehicles put out 47 percent more air pollution than the average car. Raising the fuel-economy standards for SUVs and light trucks to equal that of cars would save 1 million barrels of oil a day.

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