

Desperately seeking yag

Ray writes: August 26

After we purchased our mountain bikes I thought it would be nice to have a small can of oil in order to lubricate them. Besides, we had some squeaky cabinet doors that needed silencing. The appliance shop where we purchased our bikes (they also sell clothes washers) doesn't carry oil. If this store doesn't carry it, surely the hardware store will.

I looked up the word in our dictionary. Yag. It's pronounced "yaaaw." After carefully making a diagram of an oil can in my ever present notebook, pronouncing the word several times using Karen as my critic, and writing the word down in Turkish, I headed confidently to the hardware shop. Greeting the clerk with my best Turkish hello, I looked for yag. Not finding it (maybe it's in the back?) I presented my diagram and boldly said, "yaaaw."

He looked at me with grave skepticism, then looked at my drawing and told me he didn't carry oil, that I should try the oil shop. After receiving his directions I headed down the main street to the square and found the oil shop just behind the butcher shop. I entered and asked the lad if he had oil in a small can.

"Sit down please," he said. "You like something to drink?" His English was little better than my Turkish. Since it was blazing hot outside I asked for *su* (water) and he sent his young apprentice out to get some. I think it would have been better to ask for tea. It's much easier to find.

"Why you want oil for?"

"My bicycle," I answered.

"Where is it?"

I went around the building, got my bicycle, and wheeled it back for him to see.

"Did you rent it?" We keep no secrets here.

"New, doesn't need oil," he said after looking it over. Then for the next hour and a half I watched as he checked and tightened virtually every nut and bolt. It seems that bicycle Inspektor No. 6 must have had a sore wrist the day my bicycle was assembled. I hope the inspektor has recovered.

While he was working on my bicycle and I was drinking my *su*, an old man who spoke no English cajoled me into playing a game of dominos with him. Being the gracious host that Turks are, he lost, calling me "Champion." Then he kindly offered me my own set for a mere TL500,000.

After the bicycle was tightened properly, I learned that the oil store doesn't carry small containers of oil, only big ones for yachts.

After hunting in vain in several other shops, I turned my attention to the open-air market. No oil to be found. After two more weeks of fruitless searching our next-door neighbor alerted me that he had seen oil in the market at a tool vendor's stall. Needless to say I rushed right down, finding the tool vendor but no yag. Imagine how crushed I was. But I decided to ask anyway and he looked in the back of his station wagon and, like a magician, pulled a plastic container from a small white bag.

"This Singer (pronounced sing-grrr) oil, very good quality," and it was priced at only 150,000 TL. So after three weeks of searching, I have my yag. The cabinet doors, which I had temporarily silenced with olive oil, don't squeak anymore, and my bicycle hums like a sewing machine.