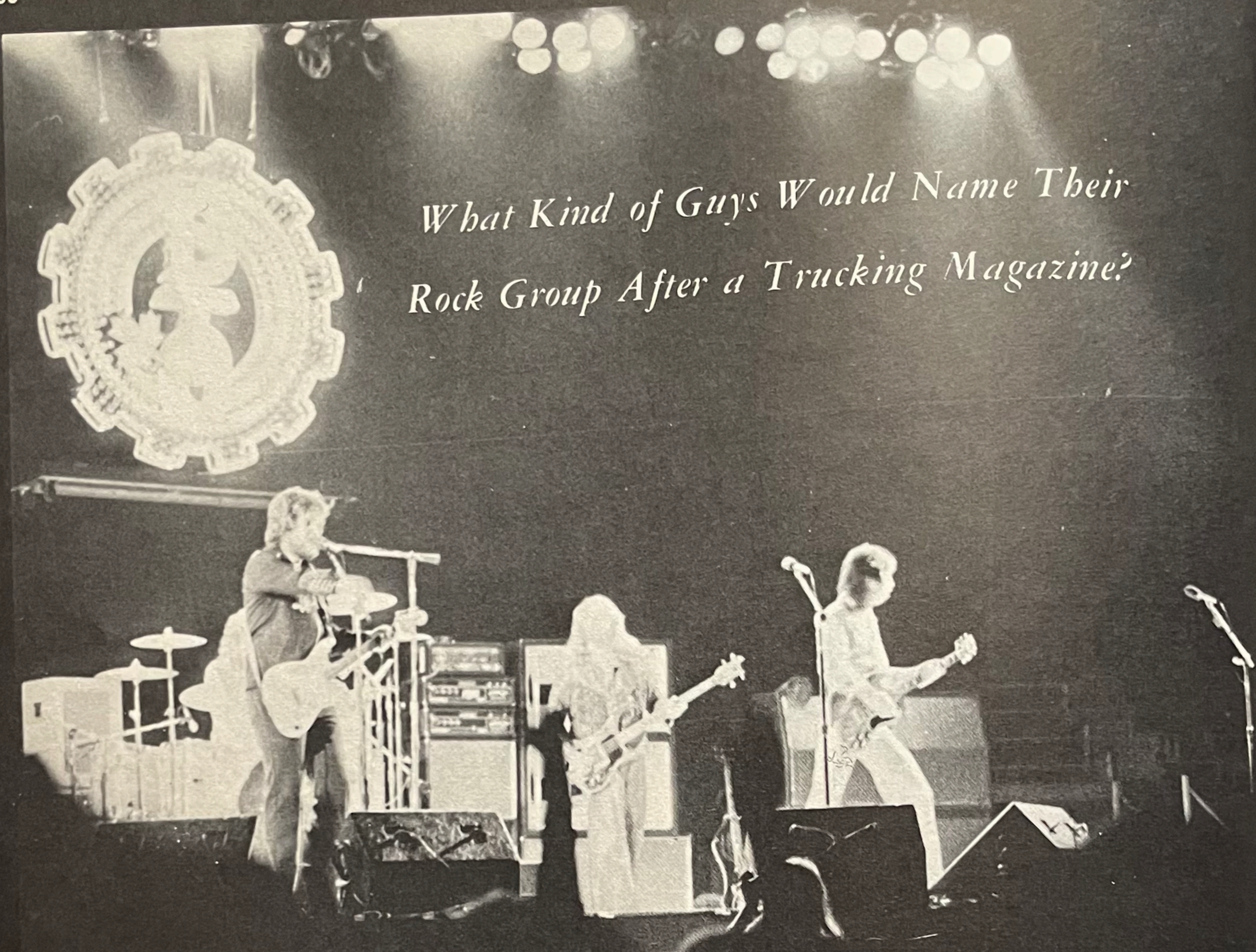


*What Kind of Guys Would Name Their
Rock Group After a Trucking Magazine?*



BACHMAN-TURNER OVERDRIVE

Bachman-Turner Overdrive roll onto the concert stage like gangbusters. They come on strong — no introductions, no props, few stage effects, but a hundred plus decibels of noise blasting out their heavy, no-nonsense rock sounds to a shouting audience attuned and alive to this unusual rock group which took the “Overdrive” part of its name from this magazine.

Three years ago, Bachman-Turner cruised around Canada playing gigs in a variety of obscure places, driving 2,200 miles between engagements, eating in truck stops enroute, and sleeping in their bus because they couldn't spring for the price of a hotel room. Few people had heard of them as a group in America, although Randy Bachman had gained a measure of fame and some notoriety in music circles as the former member of a group called The Guess Who, where he had distinguished himself as a talented songwriter and businessman. After

Randy left The Guess Who, he put together another short-lived group entitled Brave Belt. Brave Belt never caught on either as a name or a group, but Randy Bachman and Fred Turner continued to travel. They trundled their gear and their families from their home town of Winnipeg to Vancouver in a major move that eventually landed them international fame, big money and a hard-hitting, straight but heavy image.

Where and how did Bachman-Turner latch onto the handle of *Overdrive*? In 1973, the then unknown band stopped at the Colonial Steak House at Brown Brothers Truck Stop, a half mile south of the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, on Fred Turner's cliché theory that “If you see six or seven semis parked there, then it's a good place to eat.” They were hungry, tired, battling with a cranky bus and in need of a big meal. Spotting a copy of *Overdrive* for sale, they read it, and immediately

decided that this was the punchy-sound, the authoritative last name to add to Bachman-Turner. Bachman-Turner Overdrive then released their first album under the new handle, complete with a silver-metallic B-T-O logo encompassing the just-acquired name. Encircled by a stylized design of a gear, they were set with the right "package" to go with their music.

As Fred Turner likes to add, "We wanted a heavy, metallic, industrial image" and "we wanted something that would click." *Overdrive* provided just the right sound and image that the group was seeking. And they haven't looked back.

Even now, a twinkling little Robbie Bachman, the youngest member of the group and the drummer kid brother of big Randy Bachman, can't resist teasing a reporter from *Overdrive*: "Hey! That's pretty neat, using our name on your magazine." And offstage, the group as a whole projects this same lively, infectious and extremely unpretentious attitude about life in general and their success in particular.

Onstage, it is a different matter. B-T-O is a well-oiled, professional team, effortlessly blasting out the sounds that they are known for an on-stage cauldron of energy, motion and incessant hard-rock music. One thunderous good sound has followed another, chalking up platinum and gold million record sales. Many of their titles reflect the Bachman-Turner Overdrive sense of motion, of being on the road — the perennial battle of movement and a high moment of exhilaration. "Let It Ride," "Roll On Down the Highway," "Free Wheelin'," "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet" and especially the famous B-T-O "Takin' Care of Business" — all convey a sound that a trucker can grab onto. When B-T-O punches out a concert with some of the words from "Roll on Down the Highway" — we/gotta/keep/movin/if/we're/gonna/make/a/buck — you know what they mean.

Those words, that song, belong to you, if you've ever found yourself at 10 p.m., 400 miles out from a 6 a.m. delivery, maybe westbound out of Casa Grande on I-8, or steeling yourself for that plunge into the stink of northern New Jersey. At that moment the world's perfect: you're coffee-ed up (or otherwise "upped"); your 335 is in 12th over, the tach's warm and happy bumping 2150, and you're supremely confident that any Smokey will read your 74 mph in the spirit, rather than the letter, of the law.

At this same moment, "Roll on Down the Highway" belongs in your life.

Bachman-Turner Overdrive are not on the highway as much as they used to be now that they have attained star status and affluence. They have abandoned those thousand-mile road trips; treks which

would often keep them away from home for thirty or forty days at a stretch. The Canadian group is composed of four men: A massive Randy Bachman, the group's leader and lead guitarist; his brother, Robbie, on drums; another "heavy" and immensely friendly redhead, Fred Turner, on bass; and the newcomer to the group, Blair Thornton on second guitar. They all make their home in Vancouver, and these days they streak from concert to concert by plane, trying to schedule about ten days a month for concerts and the remainder of the time home in Vancouver with their families.

The road crew which accompanies B-T-O and the necessary tons of equipment they need keeps up with them by tractor-trailer and bus. The group leases the rig from an outfit in Philadelphia with the handle of "Ego Trip"

It is a closely-organized, friendly and loyal road crew. The driving team is headed up by Brad Varney, followed by the second driver, John Muller. B-T-O wants those two because they always get there, no matter what the problem. The feeling is mutual: Varney had a chance to haul for the Rolling Stones current tour, but decided that he would rather stick to doing his thing with B-T-O. The drivers are in charge of what equipment to use. They've chosen a single-screw cabover Ford with a double-breasted Yamaha and a 45-foot Dorsey Air Ride.

Coordinating the entire logistics area is John Austin. Keeping even a semblance of order in the frenetic pace of a rock concert seems to be supremely difficult, but Austin is obviously a marvel in that department. His explanation makes it appear so routine: "The light company does their gig, the sound company does their gig, the trucking company does their gig, and I do my gig, I coordinate."

"Coordinate" is an understatement. His gig includes making sure that every single needed piece of equipment is present and in working order, and it even includes concert emergencies. In one recent concert Randy Bachman's electric guitar stopped working. Within thirty seconds Randy's guitar was replaced with a new one by the fast action of one of the crew members, thus averting on-stage embarrassment. The crew worked so quickly that most of the audience missed the fact that anything was amiss.

Recently, B-T-O played to a sold-out crowd in Los Angeles at the Forum. After logging some time with Fred Turner, *Overdrive* accompanied the group to their setting-up, sound test and rehearsal the afternoon of the concert. It was there that the B-T-O-coordinated professionalism came to the fore. The group and their entire crew demonstrated

organized, cooperative teamwork. Despite the easy, casual banter, it was apparent that every member knew his job well. Setting up sound equipment can be a frustrating, tedious job. As one crew member remarked when asked about the acoustics at the Forum: "They're the same everywhere — lousy." Some scenes from the rehearsal:

"After a series of "one, two, one, two, check, plunks," someone spilled a soft drink. "Do we have a mop? Paging a mop." More racket, shuffling, wires tangled and untangled. "Another truck. What is it? Unload it. Test one, two, two."

Even during rehearsal, the group as a whole lacks the general arrogance of many rock groups. On stage, in their everyday, grubby clothes, Randy and Fred could easily pass as truckers after a long, long haul (but both look as if they eat well). They work without props or the usual showy accouterments, relying instead on a steady stream of amplified rock-and-roll highly reminiscent of the fifties.

Recycled Sounds

And it is precisely that era which produced Randy Bachman and Fred Turner. Both are now well into their thirties, obvious products of the '50's, very much into the music that shaped them during their youth in Canada. They worked the same type of sound for sixteen years before becoming an "overnight success."

Much of the credit for their musical success and a very much behind-the-scenes member of B-T-O is Bruce Allen, their manager and friend. Allen met Randy Bachman when he was down on his luck after the split from The Guess Who; he took on the group and nurtured it to fame. B-T-O acknowledge Allen as the "brains" and "businessman" of the outfit in a song entitled "Welcome Home" from the "Bachman-Turner Overdrive II" album, which goes: "We went and got ourselves a manager, we all think he's the most. Silver Vet with gold wheels, we see him cruising 'round the town. No he's never really up. No, he's never really down."

During the sound check, Bruce Allen may not have been either "up" or "down," but he sure as hell was mothering-henning the group: Allen, a lean and youngish thirty, hovered on the edge of the stage, soft drink can in hand. He floated back and forth across the stage, checking with equipment people, chattering with a crew member, poking here and there in an obviously concerned manner. He cared, and it showed. Although not overtly nervous, Allen



was tuned into the whole scene.

Off-stage, Allen speaks softly, and exhibits the same kind of professionalism that B-T-O and the crew show. However, while Randy Bachman and Fred Turner look as if they eat well, Bruce Allen just looks as if he worries a lot and forgets to eat a few meals when the group is on tour.

At the close of the B-T-O concert in L. A., as the huge crowd filtered out of the Forum, Bruce Allen and another crew member were still fiddling with a

piece of equipment which had fouled up during the show. When complimented on the concert, Allen smiled and mumbled, "Headaches."

During the brief rehearsal, B-T-O rumbles into a number while Allen continues to pace, still clutching his drink, eyes peering into every detail. Thin and wiry, Blair Thornton hops up and down, skittering around the stage. Dressed all in white, he actually looks like a rock guitarist in contrast to Randy and Fred, who project a stolid, slow-turning image like the rigs they admire so much. Both powerful, paternal-looking men fit their imagery of heavy sound and mechanical illustration.

Blair, half the size of Randy and Fred, compliments the group. But the eye focus is almost demanded on Randy and Fred because of their bulk and immense stage presence. Bruce, with his nervous energy, resumes pacing as the group cruises right into "Four Wheel Drive." Robbie, the drummer, looks as if he's really enjoying himself, still part little kid.

During a break in songs, someone comes around, handing out freebie orange T-shirts from another rock group. B-T-O, multi-millionaires, every one, all want one. One of the group asks, "Hey, I want one, save one for me."

Riding back to their hotel after the rehearsal, Fred, Robbie and Blair, flip through a recent issue of *Overdrive*. Unaffected, good-natured Robbie stops at Model of the Month. "Can I send a picture of my model. I put one together. Yeah, that's it. I made a Peterbilt. And Bruce, he knows about trucks. He used to put tractors together." Blair piped in: "How come you two have a magazine? Where's mine?" For a group that was about to play to an enormous audience that night, in a town they call one of the toughest to play to, they remain remarkably loose.

That night at the concert, B-T-O enters loud, with an ear-shattering rendering of "Roll On Down the Highway." The noise level escalates from loud, to very loud, to ear-splitting, as the crowd throws itself into the rock and roll spirit of moving to the music. The flashing backdrop of the B-T-O logo hangs behind and above the group, thumping off and on, encircled by the Overdrive gears, a Canadian maple leaf tucked into the corner of it shouts green periodically.

B-T-O, however, rely mostly on their sound for stage effects, leaving the bulk of exhibitionism centers around to the standing, into-it-all audience. It's a stomping, enjoying, participating audience, asking for more when the concert ends. B-T-O returns with the encore they always do, the encore that cries out for and gets the audience hyped into a frenzy as B-T-O closes with "Takin' Care of Business."

Fred Turner - - a few thoughts



Fred Turner (his first initials are C. F., but he prefers Fred), the bass player and heavyweight nice-guy part of Bachman-Turner Overdrive, eased his bulky frame into an arm chair, propped his feet up, and chatted with *Overdrive* during his recent stay in Los Angeles. He was just two hours off the plane from Vancouver, and staying in a comfortable, but very ordinary, hotel room. His well-worn boots were casually dumped on the floor, and some hot rod magazines were strewn on the bed, the latter a reminder of this rock star's long-standing interest in mechanics.

Fred customizes cars for relaxation at a friend's garage, but is in the process of building his own. "I just finished putting together a big block Corvette," he said, "and when I get home, I'm starting on a Firebird Trans Am. I'm putting a Chevy in that, too, because I blew the engine."

Fred is immensely proud of the B-T-O logo, designed by Robbie Bachman. At one point in the interview, he displayed the heavy symbol he wears on a chain around his neck. "We try to keep our image heavy, metallic and industrial," he remarked "Our logo reflects this."

Did he realize that while the group is named after a trucking magazine, most truckers aren't into rock and roll? "Well, that's true," he answered, "They aren't. They're really into the country stuff. I know truckers at George Smith out of Winnipeg. They run up and down the west coast (Canada) and into the States a little. All his guys are into country. Truckers are alike all over, even in Canada. They're beer drinkin', foot stompin' guys and that's what they like. It's just something that goes along with the industry. That doesn't bother us; we still use the name anyway."