

CHAPTER ONE

American Asphalt

"As new and greater road-systems are added year by year they are more splendidly built. I foresee that road will soon be architecture too . . . great architecture."

—Frank Lloyd Wright

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AMERICA'S VEINS AND ARTERIES run black with asphalt. Every hour of each day and every day of each year, asphalt roads are pumping life into cities, out of the extremities of the country's hinterlands, and back again. Life as we know it is largely due to our unmatched road net. In the United States, nearly every mile of our paved roads is surfaced with asphalt.

Our roads have helped make America the most powerful nation on earth. As a world power, the United States has influence and wealth greater than that of the Roman Empire at its height. It's no coincidence that the two share a common physical trait—the greatest road systems of their times. Both Rome and the United States came to power over the road—Rome over its stone roads and America over its asphalt roads.

Americans travel and trade over their roads in a way that the civilized world has never before witnessed. So dependable are the millions of miles of asphalt roads that manufacturers can schedule shipments of materials to arrive within 15 minutes of their being needed for assembly-line production. The process is called just-in-time-inventorying, and it gives the United States a big advantage in competing against low

