## Christmas in Nigeria

The celebration of Christmas in Nigeria is not a religious ceremony as it is in Christian-majority countries. But it is the second largest observance in the country — next to Independence Day. Christmas in this African country marks a decided change from every day living. The celebrations can go on for days.

Many Nigerians do not consider the city their home. Because cities are largely a creation of the colonial authorities and harbor most of the country's employment opportunities, they are regarded as a place to go job-hunting, make money and return to the hometown at retirement to look after or be looked after by relatives and close friends who were left behind when families moved to the city.

Those who fail to make it in the city often feel reluctant to return home for fear of being mocked by those they left behind, neither do they feel particularly enthusiastic to return home at Christmastime when the successful city dwellers take advantage of the national holiday to visit the hometown.

Claus or the birth of Jesus Christ that makes a Nigerian Christmas such an exciting event, perhaps only equalled in extravagance by the jubilee of the West Indian Carnival

Jesus may have been born in November as some religious dissenters convince their followers and try to dissuade others from taking part in Christmas celebrations — once an exclusively Christian event and now Nigeria's second-ranking national celebration after the Independence celebration.

Amidst the hullabaloo of Christians attacking Christmas is the spending spree of families getting ready to return to the hometown.

This begins immediately after the Muslim Id-El-Kabr a few weeks before December when the pastoral northerners drive their cattle to the south in search of pastures as well as to feed the Christmas market.

At this time of year the sub-Saharan North is dried up, but the



Employing an Ekwe, which is an African instrument, Nigerian damsels sing and dance some of their chants and songs. This will be the pattern during the Christmas masquerades in their home village.

ever present conventional rains in the south provide pastures, however scanty. It is the dry season and also the beginning of the harvest season.

Even the Muslims just emerging from their religious feasts look forward to Christmas, at least as an opportunity to make up for business lost during their month-long fasting.

The pickpockets pick their way in and out of the crowd of buyers and sellers, some with scissors or blades, looking for an unwary victim.

Occasionally, a victim would yell, cry and stamp their feet: "My money is gone! My money is gone!" The crowd becomes irate and any pickpocket identified runs the risk of being beaten to death

By Nweze Akpah

A Hausa or Fulani cattle trader would beam with laughter as crowds converge on his livestock. He sells to the highest bidder, more often than not, an oversized woman trader with hundreds of Nigerian naira bills stuffed in her pocketbook.

normally be her houseboy waiting to drag the goat or sheep to the car parked outside the market.

before the police arrive.

Around the major city squares an endless line of streetside traders hawk wide-ranging curios and novelties put out by manufacturers cashing in on the big spending spree.

Some employ such unique sales pitches as to make non-buyers look stupid and being made to appear stupid could have devastating effects on the per-

sonality of a Nigerian.

The bulk of Christmas spending

goes for mostly imported food and clothing. The traditional foods, especially yams, the king of all crops in most Nigerian cultures, are not used for Christmas. Nobody seems to try to explain why.

Nevertheless, Christmas has borrowed extensively from traditional cultures in importance and mode of observance. Apart from the song rehearsals by Christians, native cultures prepare dances, songs and musicals for presentation on Christmas Day.

Gift-giving comes next in importance to homecoming at Christmas, as in traditional cultures. But because indigenous events are not regarded as national holidays because of the multiplicity of cultures in Nigeria, Christmas is the only other time to

give gifts to relatives and the extended family.

Perhaps this works out better for the city dwellers who have to live on meager incomes in the face of skyrocketing inflation.

When all the gifts for the extended family have been bought — these gifts could take precedence over clothes and food

for the family since it improves the giver's image among his people—
the family turns to their own welfare and children's clothes come first.

All the children in a family prefer to wear uniform dothes at Christmas, but the choice of clothes has to be such that the children would stand out in the crowd during the Christmas day outings.

next in importance. She does not make excessive demands, but the man should know how to reward her love and understanding. And lastly, the man turns to himself.

Sometimes he has to go without new clothes, and this does not really matter, for in Nigeria, the man's beauty is derived from the beauty of his family.

great risk that is. Drivers eager to make money often ignore the danger to their lives and those of their passengers.

They just press down the throttle, trying to make the many hundred miles between the cities and most hometowns in a few hours and return to the cities to pick up some more passengers.

In Nigeria, most of the transportation system is operated by individual truck owners doing their own thing.

In the end it proves safer to travel by the institutionalized bus services which because of their scope do not react to the Christmas craze.

On arrival at home, the families who traveled to the hometown are greeted warmly by relatives, some of whom they had not seen since the past year.

Gifts are reserved as surprises and are given on the morning of Christmas.

Country lads hurry the animal that has been brought home by the returning relatives to the pastures to fat-feed it for its eventual fate.

Women and children clean out houses, compounds and roadways and make crosses with palm leaves. Few people in the hometown ever read the Bible, and the name Jesus, traded by local religious people has nothing to do with the crosses being made.

there's nothing significant about

The men take the visiting male relatives on tours of the farms; cousins confide in the homecomer their problems, and nieces tell their female homecomer anything from their husband's misfortunes to the anticipation of a bountiful harvest that year.

Young men meet every other

evening to rehearse songs and musicals; church groups practice choirs; the air is full of excitement.

citement.

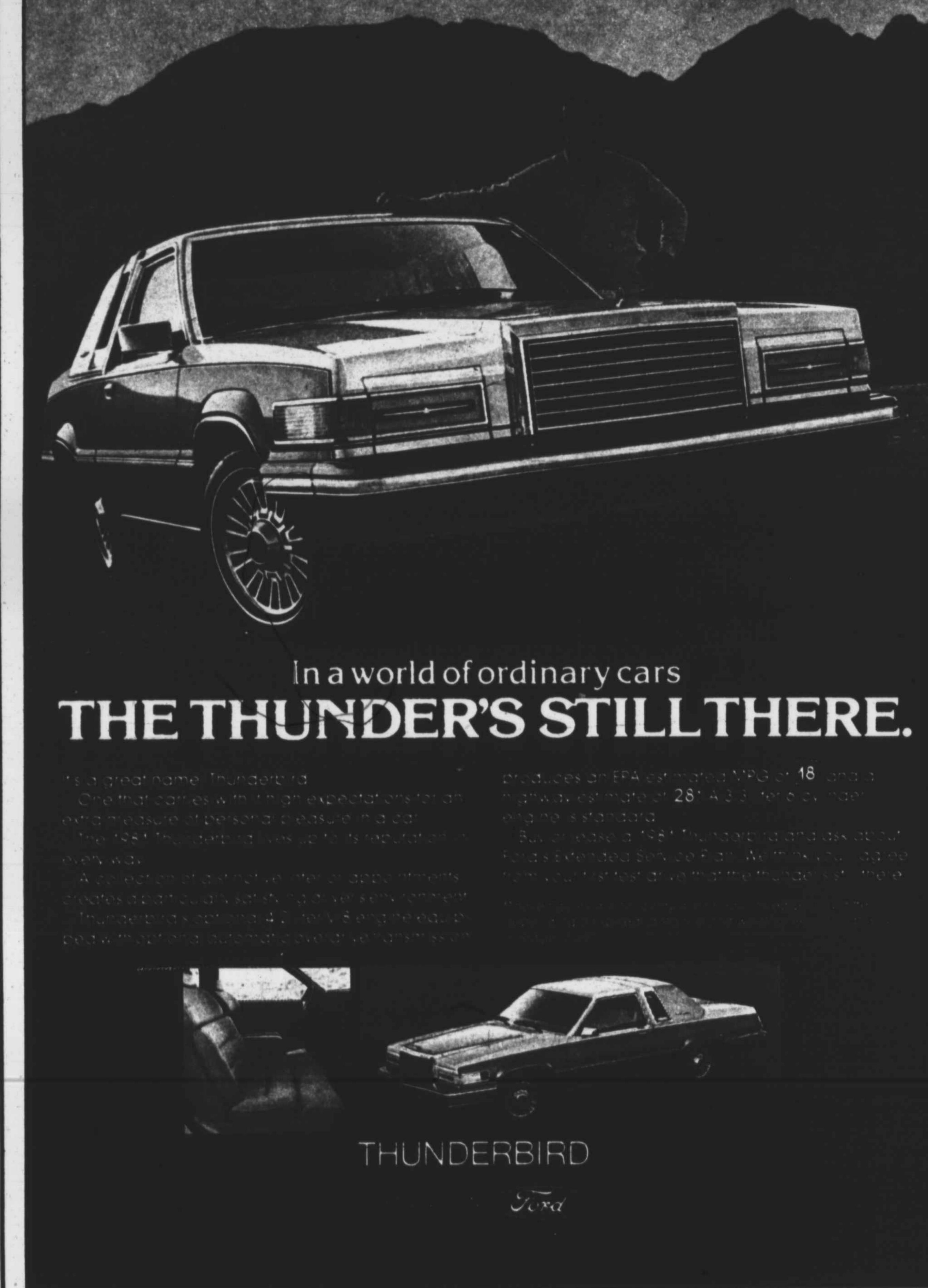
Christmas eve is the noisiest evening in the country.

Everything is now ready for the next day. The foods are not prepared yet, because like most

Nigerian feasts, day-old foods are not ideal. At Christmas rice is the main dish.

When the missionaries were still very much around, they ate mostly rice and fed this to Christians who attended their Christmas parties. So, rice has

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