A NEW USE FOR NITROGEN

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Cold roast duck has been a delicacy to the Chinese for many centuries. However, a duck ready for the oven is as wrinkled as a prune and so limp that it just flops around on a roasting spit. The result is that some parts get overdone and others hardly brown at all. An early marketing expert recognized the product would have greater customer appeal if the cooked birds were an even brown —and every bit of skin done to a nice crispness.

The problem was solved with typical Chinese ingenuity—by blowing up the duck. But this require a changed in the technique normally used to clean out the

duck. Instead of a bold slashing incision, the operator carries out keyhole surgery at a position just below the parson's nose. A tube is then inserted and the duck puffed up by mouth. In this condition the duck is firm and nicely rounded and all parts are exposed for even roasting.

Countless millions of ducks have been treated this way down the ages until in 1968 a local Health Inspector attended a course on Public Health. He returned to his duties full of reforming zeal and was horrified to recognize what disgusting unhygienic things were done with food—like puffing up ducks by mouth. He then set about establishing a thoroughly clean way of duck puffing.

He bought a cylinder of nitrogen, readied himself with a supply of prepared ducks, attached one to the cylinder valve and started inflating. The first duck behaved quite unmanageably with 2000 p.s.i. being applied to its fundamental; but no great harm was done because the nitrogen vented through the beak with the loudest quack ever heard in these parts. The Health Inspector saw at once that the duck had to be made gas-tight. So, assuming the stance of a Scottish pipe major, he tucked the second duck under his left arm and held the neck firmly like a chanter. This achieved gas-tightness but, with all safety valves inoperable, a highly dangerous situation developed. The full cylinder pressure was applied again and this time the duck disintegrated with frightening force, ruining the Health Inspector's uniform, and putting him in dock for a few days with severe bruises. Fragments of the duck were found in many remote parts of the building.

The Health Inspector was of good pioneering stock and therefore his spirit was undaunted, but prudence suggested that he should get someone else to puff up the ducks for him. It was at this point that we learned of his experiments. We soon supplied him with a regulator and began the development of a proper technique.

No duck has yet been bred that has a working pressure of 2000 p.s.i. but we reckoned that 50 p.s.i. might be acceptable. At this pressure the duck did not explode but it did take off across the room powered by its single jet—and making derisory noises to boot. So, by trial and error we found that 5 p.s.i. is the ideal duck-puffing pressure.

Duck puffing is big business in Hong Kong—over 10000 each day and each puffed duck needs $0{\cdot}7ft^3$ of nitrogen—a goose, just over $1ft^3$. The Health Inspector has recommended that oral duck puffing be prohibited and if this is achieved we look forward to a very satisfactory increment to our nitrogen sales.