

What's Your Ambition?

By ERNEST LEOGRANDE

WHAT do you want out of life? It's a wise man who knows. Those vague, shapeless desires that push us along—fame, love, power, security—are the little hidden insects that make Mexican jumping beans of us.

I talked to a taxicab driver the other day and he had it all planned out—his ambition, I mean.

"This is a damp city," he said, "Water all around. Gives you rheumatism. But people keep coming here. Seems like everyone from outside New York wants to come here and everyone born here wants to leave."

The statement was a little over-simplified, I knew, but there was that germ of truth in it, that recognition of one of the drives—this time, wanderlust, a constant hunt for the new.

But wanderlust wasn't my cabbie's drive. His was security.

"I've got it all doped," he said. "You go to Texas, buy a few acres of land. Drill till you hit oil. Then come back and live in some nice air-conditioned apartment. No more money worries. No more rheumatism."

The plan sounded alluring. But I noticed the cabbie was still driving his hack.

Strong for security he may have been, but I suspected he would never get close to that oil well in Texas. And when he got a twinge of rheumatism, he would blame it on fate, that sour mistress of affairs who seems to delight in keeping us from our dreams.

"There's nothing wrong with what you or I or anyone else wants to achieve," a friend of mine said not so long ago. "It's just that we're disorganized." He saw us, like the man in the axiom, astride a horse, riders all arms and legs wondering why our mount refuses to go in a dozen different directions at once.

Ambition is a demanding companion as Julius Caesar found out. She can be enormously productive, extremely satisfying if treated right. Treated wrong, she'll stab you in the back.

In one of her letters recently my sister wrote, "Everyone in this world wants to be something

or someone. Some of us never make it, but other things come along and make up for it."

"Everyone in the world wants to be something or someone." That ambition, unrecognized or unbridled, can be a worrisome pebble in your shoe.

It can be tamed. First is the problem of knowing what you want, no easy job. After that, is the facing up to just how much of the ambition is actually attainable. This is the hurdle I have always found most difficult to get over. Next is putting in the work necessary to get there.

So it's really quite easy. Just like following cook book instructions for boiling an egg.

Meanwhile, anyone want to stake me to a couple acres in Texas?