

As bookstores go, it's best by Half

By Nancy Feigenbaum
Reporter

What book store in town has the best sense of humor?

It must be the one that stocks three copies of "Tibetan Grammar" and uses an orange and white hearse as the company car.

Half Price Books, Records and Magazines is just inside the city limits of Bryan, across from the Taco Bell on Texas Avenue. It's the sort of store that should be tucked away on a back street of a big city, where people wander in and out of shops. Instead, the low brick building sits in a section of town where the only thing to browse for is lumber or accountants.

"It's a good location," says Charles Middleton, a customer just passing through on his way to Victoria.

Middleton says he was looking for "Berlin Game" by Len Deighton, unavailable in Victoria. He found the hardback for \$2.95 in the store's extensively stocked and excessively cluttered mystery collection.

If there's any word to describe the store, it's cluttered. A wooden book shelf packed with 50-cent specials lies propped against the outside window and four or five signs taped to the glass door, promise variety and disorganization.

To even get near the store, cars must traverse Texas Ave-

nue in a quick dash for one of the few front spaces. Just as difficult, is finding the entrance to the back parking lot, the driveway to which is a regular Bryan hazzard, a narrow street in advanced stages of pothole degeneration.

Once safely there you can see the long front window filled with stacks of new books that wouldn't sell and Half Price's own t-shirts hanging from stuffed cardboard busts.

The front record room is a collage of decorating styles. Part of the inventory hangs from the ceiling and the wall behind the cash register is papered with old album covers and fillers.

Customer Tom Kurdyla says he comes here for the old records he can't find anywhere else. The early Jethro Tull album he's buying has been released, he says, and probably doesn't cost that much, but he likes to collect originals.

Although the front room is primarily for music, books line the walls and fill the crevices. Expensive-looking coffee-table books on everything from Faberge eggs to insects compete with comic books and literary series' to capture the eye.

In the rest of the store exposed light bulbs hang from a low ceiling giving the rooms the comfortable, unfinished feel of a basement. Few basements, however, have so many different kinds of books. The store stocks 75 different categories,

says employee Seth Bobey. Even so, he says, the Bryan store is half the size of its Austin counterpart but the selection is just as dizzying.

Categories range from the mundane, "Romance" and "Religion" to the exotic "W.W.II" and "Hispanic Studies," with much in between.

"They've got everything," says patron John Blake, who says he buys books on philosophy, economics, construction, and music, among other subjects.

The motto on the Half Price book mark reads, "We buy and sell anything printed or recorded," which explains how they came to own the Hungarian version of a D.H. Lawrence novel and a collection of music theory books in Russian. Few mall book stores carry copies of "Jane's Dictionary of Naval Arms," or have "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?" in stock as well.

Employee Gene Bryant says the store buys almost all of its used books from local residents, in which case Half Price is more than a book store — it's a testament to the varied tastes of Bryan/College Station's population.

Someone's sold the store "Sintering and Related Phenomena." The question is, who will buy it? And where is the person dying to own "Legal and Administrative Texts of the Reign of Samsu-Iluna," which is written in the uniform symbols of ancient Sumeria?

"They call this a first am-