

Bill Rea ? Driving woes drive me nuts

Among other things, this newspaper job I have, and the Caledon community in which I do it, means I have to do a lot of driving. I put an average of about 50,000 kilometres on my car every year.

That means there's lots of potential for getting into trouble, and that's not counting higher insurance rates. It is a fact that if I never drove, I'd probably never be involved in a collision. So it stands to reason that the more you drive, the greater the chance you will come to some grief.

Despite that, I've done a pretty good job of avoiding problems.

There have been a couple of tickets, and I have been rear-ended a few times (and I don't think I can be held too accountable for those). And my last car was totaled after a heavy object fell off a flatbed trailer right in front of me on Highway 400. At 100 km-h, there are just some things you can't avoid. Even the cop who was on the scene within a minute was exonerating me.

Beyond that, I have kept my nose pretty clean.

Thus I have limited tolerance for drivers who do dumb things, while at the same time, I can admit that I am occasionally the problem.

There was a day, about three weeks ago, when I was driving south on one of the local roads in Caledon. I was travelling at a normal and appropriate speed for the time of day and conditions. Yet within a matter of minutes, I was twice obliged to abruptly put my car onto the shoulder to avoid head-on crashes with northbound dopes who picked bad times to pull out and pass. I should also state that I'm in the habit (when realistic) of backing off on the speed when I see oncoming vehicles passing -? it's just a precaution to add extra confidence that the move can be completed in safety. I did that on both occasions on the day in question, yet I still had to take some extra evasive action to avoid possible disaster.

And it is a fact that when one is trying to keep two-tons of automobile under control on a gravel shoulder, one has better things to do than take note of licence numbers. That means the two knuckleheads who caused me such aggravation probably got away with it. That's not the first time I have been involved in such incidents. There was an evening a couple of years ago (about this time of year) when I was driving north on a local road. I noticed a car roaring through a parking lot on my right, several hundred metres ahead. It went on the road without pausing, turned left and headed south.

That was an act of stupidity, but there was another factor that made things a lot worse, namely the other southbound car which was cut off by the driver leaving the parking lot. That car did a number of things you'd expect to see from a vehicle that had been forced out of control. There were a couple of impromptu lane changes, which one doesn't want to see in an oncoming vehicle, and the car was actually skidding sideways for a while. The effect was enough to force me onto the shoulder.

That was another occasion in which I was too busy trying to prolong my life to worry about licence numbers of other vehicles. The best I could do, after I had brought my car to a stop, was get out and make sure the occupants of the other car were okay after the ordeal (they were). I was complimentary of how calm and collected they were, considering what had just gone on, not to mention the superior driving skills I had just witnessed under adverse circumstances. I think they were appreciative of my concern.

I guess we could have (probably should have) reported the incident to the authorities, but I didn't even get a good look at the offending vehicle.

Besides, it wasn't the first time the world had caused me grief, nor will it be the last.

Despite that, I don't want to sound holier than thou. Being a human being, I confess that I have pulled my share of boners on the road. I have had numerous fingers (you know which one I mean) lifted my way. I have shared heated words with other users of the road. And there have been times when I know I have been wrong.

I do confess, for example, I have a bit of a bad habit when it comes to driving through school zones. I dutifully slow down, as I should. But I am sometimes a little slow when it comes to getting back up to speed when I'm out of the zone, which I guess grinds the proverbial gears of drivers behind me. Who among us are perfect?

There have been other situations in which the people who are in the wrong own up to it.

I was driving past one of the local high schools a couple of years ago, when a young lady (I'm assuming she was a student) abruptly pulled out of the parking lot in front of me. The nice part of all of this is within a couple of seconds, we both came to realize what kind of situation we were in. Since she was moving more slowly, my antagonist was able to bring her car to a halt without too much trouble. Since I was going at a rate of speed that would not permit a bat out of hell to get out of hell (meaning I was some clicks over the posted speed limit, but not enough for a cop to give me a hard time), I was able to bring my car to a halt with only a bit more trouble.

Naturally, I was angry, and I fixed an appropriate glare at the girl with whom I was angry. She replied with what I would call an ?I

have sinned? expression. That sort of settled the issue, didn't it?

?Road rage? has become a commonly used expression over the last several years, as people show excessively aggressive behavior when they are behind the wheel. I admit I have been guilty of the same at times, but I try to keep things under control.

There was a time about 15 years ago, when I was working in Toronto, when I was rear-ended. The car I was driving was one I had bought brand new less than a month before, and at that time, it was the most expensive thing I had ever purchased. The woman who bumped into me had evidently not expected me to stop for the red light before making a right turn.

I don't like being in such situations, but I'm enough of a realist to understand they do occasionally happen.

The first thing I did was make sure the driver of the other car wasn't injured. She was very upset, but unhurt. I had to coach her on producing the paperwork we needed to exchange, as it became more and more obvious this was part of a very bad day for my new acquaintance. I found myself doing everything I could to settle her down, including logic and reason. I even resorted to cracking jokes.

In the end, things seemed to work out.

?Thanks for being so understanding,? were the last words she spoke to me.

No matter what other drivers might do to you, anger may not always be the answer

