

Bill Rea ? Roundabouts are good

I think there is one thing that is universally feared, and that's the unknown.

People hear that there are changes in the works, and they start to worry. I'm part of such a group. There are changes that I frequently have to deal with, and I sit there wondering what's the point of it all. What was wrong with the old way? Will the new way be a benefit? And was it just an oversight that no one thought to ask me?

Welcome to life, folks.

I think fear of the unknown is one of the reasons people are so apprehensive when it comes to roundabouts, which are being promoted a lot these days as an alternative to conventional intersections.

It's a topic that comes up a lot in conversation. Plenty of people I have encountered in my usual rounds have asked me if these things really work. I was at a public meeting a couple of weeks ago, which sort of offered a crash course on how to deal with roundabouts. There were a couple of concerns expressed. One woman who works in Bolton told me she's planning to travel to work by helicopter. What could I have said? I asked her if I could have the occasional ride (actually, I had a ride in a helicopter about 20 years ago ? fun experience).

Like I stated, I get asked about these things a lot. Some people are just trying to make conversation, and others are curious about my opinion (I don't know why either).

For what it's worth, I think they're a great way to handle traffic movements, at least at the right intersection.

There are now two roundabouts in semi-operation around Bolton. One is on Regional Road 50 at the intersection with the not-yet-opened Emil Kolb Parkway, and the other deals with how King Street intersects at the south end of that same unopened Parkway. Since some time is going to pass before any of us get to drive along that Parkway, neither of those roundabouts are in full operation. But their current status gives local motorists the chance to do some rehearsing. And one would hope that practice time would help relieve some of the concerns. Check them out. They're not as bad as you might fear.

And if you want to try out a functional roundabout, drive around the area of Dixie and Olde Base Line Roads. That installation has been operating for a couple of years, and to the best of my knowledge, there have been no problems. I have yet to read a press release from Caledon OPP dealing with any traffic mishap. For those of you who haven't tried it, think of the novelty of it all. In the first couple of weeks it was in operation, I had my wife and mother-in-law in the car, and made a slight diversion to let my passengers get a taste of the experience. Married men know to take advantage of such chances to impress their mothers-in-law, realizing how unimpressed they've always been.

As you have undoubtedly gathered, I am not too fazed by roundabouts, because I was driving through them before most of you had ever heard of them.

It was 30 years ago this month that I took my first vacation from this business, and I elected to spend the time visiting the land of my roots; the land in which my father's parents were born; Ireland.

Ireland is infested with roundabouts, as I learned the hard way.

I rented a car directly at the airport in Dublin (my friend, the late Ralph Ransom of Bolton, was my travel agent and he had already made the necessary arrangements), and there I was, driving a car with a standard transmission (it had been some years since I had used a clutch, but Ralph had told me the cost of renting an automatic would have been considerable ? I have since sort of mastered the art), dealing with jet lag after maybe two crummy hours of sleep on the plane and concentrating on keeping the car on the left side of the road (a lot easier than I thought it would be) and having to deal with these traffic features of which I had never heard. I seemed to spend a lot of time going in circles, yet somehow was able to get where I was going.

Good old Ralph had booked me a hotel room for my first night in Dublin, and I spent a couple of hours driving through the great city, hopelessly lost, before I found the establishment. And during that driving, I picked up lots of experience with roundabouts. I forget my first reaction to them, but do recall realizing fairly early on that they made a certain amount of sense. And it was also clear that getting through them required little more than the use of common sense.

So while I realize there's a lot of apprehension when it comes to facing the reality of roundabouts, I really do believe there is very little to worry about. Use basic common sense, and you'll be alright.

That was essentially the message that was handed out at the recent meeting I attended.

There are certain rules to be followed, but think of them as roundabout etiquette. Or more realistically, treat them as part of the rules of the road, which we were all supposed to demonstrate some understanding of the day we were handed our licences.

The guy who is already in the roundabout has the right of way over people aspiring to get in. Don't try to pass another vehicle in a roundabout. Once you're in it, concentrate on getting out where you want to. And if you happen to be sharing a roundabout with a

huge truck, give it lots of space.

There are lots of advantages to these roundabouts, and there is lots of effort being put forth to get the word out.

For one thing, they are deemed to be safe. It's going to be very difficult to have a head-on crash at an intersection equipped with a roundabout, although there are people out there stupid enough to find a way to go the wrong way. I suspect, however, they are rare. T-bone crashes are not likely either. As near as I can tell, the possibility for accidents will be confined to sideswipes or rear-enders. But the danger of such incidents exist just about anywhere you drive.

Another big advantage, I think, is they are going to improve traffic flow. True, common sense should tell anyone that you have to slow down before entering a roundabout, and if there's someone already in it, you have to yield. That's going to take a bit of time, but I think it's a lot less than the time you would spend at a conventional intersecting waiting for the red light to turn green.

Roundabouts are new to a lot of people, so they will take some getting use to. But I think most people will come along to the view that they are probably a good thing.

We had all better get used to them, because I think more are on the way

