

In honour of feeling that familiar chill of winter breathing down my neck it's time to uncork another bottle of my favorite vintage whines. I'll spare us all the usual subtle digs at my family members, not because of any increased tolerance on my part or improvement on theirs but because there are so many ways to work them into other topics.

1st off, I have the distinct feeling I never got the memo on the rule change for traffic lights, the one that said the yellow (aka amber aka orange) light no longer means "stop safely or clear the intersection". Instead it now means "if this light is yellow/orange/amber, go way faster". Perhaps it is simply an epidemic of colour blindness among the drivers of this town. On several occasions I have narrowly missed intimate relations with chromatically challenged drivers. The circumstances are always the same. I advance into the intersection waiting to turn left. The light turns yellow and the cars keep coming. Eventually the light turns red and at least two more vehicles whizz by giving me a cheery tootle on the horn and friendly salute. Then the people who now have a green light are all saluting me too because my big fat van is still in the middle of their road.

Over all I suspect there are a fair number of folk suffering from a need to be somewhere else: it doesn't matter where, just so long as it isn't

whatever space they currently occupy. Even if it is just to sit at the next traffic light until everyone else catches up and they can floor it again for the block or so to the next stop light.

My personal favourite variety of speeder are those gentle folk who find it necessary to maintain highway speeds at all times – including in parking lots. I'd shout at them but anything I could weave together would be but background melody to the rapper poetry of the profane blasting out their windows.

I know rudeness and inconsiderateness towards pedestrians and other drivers isn't the practice of the majority. Only a few cars have crammed a concert hall sound system into their compact trunk. I sometimes wonder if tying these folk down and forcing them to listen to 3 hours of every version of Stairway to Heaven ever recorded, including William Shatner's and Dolly Parton's, might teach them a lesson about keeping one's taste in music to oneself. A second offence would be punishable by 6 hours of MacArthur Park.

Fortunately, if there is any good fortune to be found in the rising cost of gas, it should have a limiting effect on the lead-foots among us. Unfortunately, these people will switch to becoming a menace on bicycles. There is already an increase in the numbers of cyclists on sidewalks where they

shouldn't ride but do anyway. A few have the courtesy to announce their approach to hapless pedestrians but the majority seem to prefer weaving between fire hydrants, bus stop signs while when approaching me from behind.

It may sound harsh to say this but at least with bikes the principles of natural selection are bound to come into play. There is a certain delicious irony considering the intersection of obnoxious car drivers and obnoxious cyclists. Unfortunately, it is usually the conscientious driver who ends with a lifetime of guilt after hitting an accident-waiting-to-happen cyclist who assumes his moly-chrome bike frame comes complete with a shield of invulnerability and a license to zip through traffic.

Oddly enough those who choose to drive motorcycles are unfairly pegged as demonic or dangerous to everyone on the road. Perhaps it the extra instruction required to qualify for a motorcycle license has that has increased their awareness of just how vulnerable they are on roads filled with less educated automobile drivers. Even those folk who protest current safety regulations by wearing shiny soup bowls with chin straps on their heads have a fairly realistic grasp of the influence a SUV can have on their future as contributing members of their law firm. Yes, I know there are still a few bikers who

choose to drive way too fast and weave between rapidly moving lanes of traffic - please see reference above to Darwin. On the whole, however, a motorcycle-automobile collision will do little more than scratch the paint on anything larger than a Smart Car.

Does this mean I am a perfect driver? Even without seeing my husband wiping tears of laughter from his eyes at the suggestion, anyone could guess the answer. Of course I've run yellow lights, caused the occasional pedestrian to see the preview trailer version of their life flash before their eyes. I have come close to awarding some poor cyclist a "door prize" when I didn't check my rear view mirror before exiting the van. As a pedestrian I have walked blithely into the middle of traffic with nothing more than a nod and a peace sign to keep my lip prints off the windshield of a Saturn with smoking brakes.

I'm only human, after all. We're all basically human and maybe something everyone needs to keep in mind, whether wrapped in 2000 pounds of Japanese steel or getting ready to step out on the asphalt, is an old automotive safety motto: 'the weakest part of any vehicle is the nut holding the wheel'.

