

# Courtesy uncommon

Failure to give other drivers benefit of the doubt is where road rage begins

A week ago, the Ontario Provincial Police Highway Rangers, the squad dedicated to bringing Greater Toronto Region traffic under control, attended a workshop conducted by two Addiction Research Foundation psychologists on the issue of road rage.

Two days later, a horrific crash involving no fewer than three trucks on the 401 was apparently caused by this very affliction.

Cybernetics reported that two transport trucks were colliding on the highway, heading toward each other, presumably over some real or imagined driving injustice.

At a critical moment, the first truck swerved into the second, causing it to crash into a third truck parked on the shoulder. The driver of the second rig was thrown through the windshield (ouch, ouch, people!) but miraculously escaped with serious (a broken pelvis, but not life-threatening) injuries.

The driver of the first truck kept on going.

Is road rage a real and growing phenomenon? Or is it our plague-of-the-week, an imported-from-the-United-States media fabrication, Canada topic today, *forevermore?*

"Well, who among us hasn't had some barely-tolerable, then, flip them the John McEneaney one-half-of-the-victory-sign salute, lean on the horn, or perform some other act of mindless aggression, for no apparent reason?"

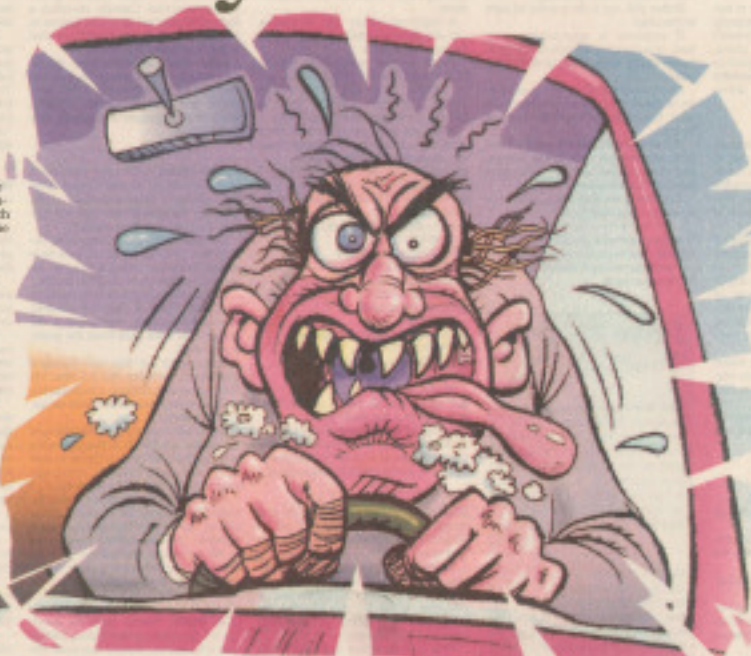
The Highway Rangers see this sort of thing every day.

Dr. Currie is co-chairman of the OPP's Greater Toronto Region and an occasional Ranger himself.

His had a personal road rage experience recently when he stopped a middle-aged businessman driving 150 km/h on the 401.

"The guy exploded out of his car, ran toward me, and began berating me like I couldn't believe," says Currie.

"I tried to calm him down, and within a few minutes, he was crying his eyes out. Turns out his marriage was falling apart — he and his wife had gone to counselling, but she didn't come home afterward. He was also in danger of losing his job. He was taking his frustration out on traffic.



SUDDICK

## Carte Blanche

JIM KENZER

and on me. It took me 30 minutes to get him released enough that I thought he could safely go on his way."

Perhaps more to the point, who among us hasn't at some stage felt like running another driver off the road?

Patrick Smith, director of clinical research for the Addiction Research Foundation, presented the workshop participants — a dozen police officers and cops — with 28 behaviours linked to road rage, and asked each of us to compare those with our own driving actions.

The list started with "intently condemning

other drivers" (oh yeah, run through "bumping or yanking through the window to indicate displeasure" (check), all the way to "shooting at another car" and "killing someone."

"If you checked off one to three behaviours, you're in what we call the 'ambivalently zone,'" says Smith. "Four to seven is the 'visible communication zone, eight to 10 the 'violent zone' — says — 12 to 16 the 'lower mayhem' zone, and 17 to 26 is the 'major mayhem' zone."

Road rage, then, is a continuum. And it usually takes time to fester.

"I've had 'ambivalently zone' incidents," says Smith, "I probably won't escalate. But if you're in an 'ambivalently' and you contact a 'lower may-

hem' guy, you could be tomorrow's headline."

While the majority of road ragers fit the narrow, teen-teen-teen young male-in-a-hot-up-still-car stereotype, the OPP officers see it from everybody, including the proverbial little lady.

Even the lovable Disney character Goofy turned into a scoundrel behind the wheel. The animated short from the '90s — which the collective memory of the workshop remembered as "Mr. Wheeler" — shows that road rage is hardly a new phenomenon.

Or as the all-time greatest American philosopher, Papa Ponzoni, once said, "I have seen the enemy, and he is us."

The second presenter at the workshop was Lorne Korman, a doctoral candidate at York University and an occasional researcher. He presented a little nervous addressing a bunch of uniformed cops, most of whom were wearing their bullet-proof vests (what yesterday nervous already).

Hardly your typical Psychology 101 student, Dr. Korman seemed eager to learn how best to deal with

raging motorists. A few spaced-out glasses over when Korman brought up the academic term "discharge of aggression theory." Upon further explanation, it suggested perhaps the single most important reason why road rage incidents escalate.

"If a cyclist leans against your car at a stoplight," says Korman, "you're likely to get annoyed. But if he leans his balance, and puts his hand out to keep himself from falling, you're less likely to get mad."

"It's the same thing with drivers. To what do you attribute their actions? We need to understand the context of a behaviour, because he's driving aggressively because he's trying to get

MP Photo on 104, 102

## A prima ballerina's automotive pas de deux



FEELING FREE: A driver for only five years, Karen Kain thrives on the sense of independence her 130 gives her.

Karen Kain loves her Infiniti's handling, comforts

By KRISTYNA LAGOWSKI

Orange and red, Cadillac prices ballerina Karen Kain in fiery league of grace and sophistication — and that includes her car.

Kain drives an elegant, black 1997 Infiniti I30. Her previous car was also an Infiniti, the I20.

"This car handles beautifully in all kinds of weather," Kain says of the I30. "I can't sit for long periods of time and have to adjust my seat a lot. The Infiniti is as comfortable as a car can be."

"She adds: "It has heated seats — that's my favourite part."  
 Cried in black from head to toe and wearing a wide belt that sports a silver Mickey Mouse face, Kain laughs easily. She has been driving for only five years and confesses that it wasn't easy to learn.

"You didn't have all those street in-

structive reactions that are practically second nature when you start driving a car."

Until a few years ago, the desert was a distant, if dimentional, where cars are plentiful. Then she moved to North York and had to commute every day to the National Ballet office on Queen's Quay W, or the Huntington Centre at Front and Yonge St. She learned to drive.

She praises Young Drivers of Canada, where she took driving lessons. "I was in a class with a whole bunch of teenage boys," Kain explains. "I had to sit at a desk. It was like school for two days. Although it was a little tedious, it was worth it."  
 Now she enjoys driving. "I love the independence. I like being able to go whenever I want, and not having to wait for a cab or a ride."

"The parking part... I'm not so into that," she admits with a very smile.

Kain describes herself as a careful driver. She even lays her dry cleaning on the back seat instead of hanging it up on a hook, so as to have full

MP Photo on 104, 101

## Inside



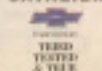
ACHTUNG: Audi sees fast times ahead, as its slick A4 (shown) joins the hot A4 / PAGE 68

VENERABLE VARDON: The little Mini and the massive Bentley have this in common — they're a British blast to drive / PAGE 612

PARIS PARADISE: Ford of cartilage-edge accessories? Then the world's biggest accessories show is the place for you / PAGE 604

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# Kain uses hands-free cell phone when driving

Continued from G1

visibility.

She likes the soothing strains of classical music in her Infiniti, but also enjoys the news. "It's one of the few times I can catch up on what's going on. I'm quite happy to just listen to Sheila Rogers (on CBC Radio Two)."

A busy person with a full schedule, Kain takes advantage of her car cell phone, a hands-free model.

"I have a headset that plugs right into the phone, and it's so handy. I don't know how other drivers can fiddle with the steering wheel and talk and drive at the same time. And with my little earplug, I can hear so much more clearly."

Station wagons figure prominently in her memories of family cars from her childhood. She recalls long, summer road trips.

"We went across Canada, because my parents wanted us to see the country," she remembers. "One summer

we went one way, and the next summer we went the other way."

While her parents drove at night, Kain would curl up in the back seat to sleep, as her three siblings shared the back of the wagon. In the morning, her mother would cook breakfast on a Coleman stove atop the tailgate.

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I wouldn't be quick to judge someone by the car they drive

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"It was fun, but there were a lot of fights. Just like a normal family."

As fond as she is of her car, Kain doesn't think it's an extension of her personality. "I didn't want to drive something that was flashy and ostentatious. I wanted good quality.

"In that way, I suppose a car can reflect your taste and your values. All the same, I wouldn't be quick to judge

someone by the car they drive."

But if she spots a middle-aged man driving a red sports car, she quips, "I can't help but conclude it's a case of male menopause."

Kain sees herself as a pragmatic person and says she could be happy in any safe, reliable car.

However, she admires the lines of the Infiniti.

"My J30 was a beautiful car, very elongated and very pretty. But this one is more compact and easier to park."

Like so many of us, Kain doesn't care for individuals racing through red lights when she is waiting in the intersection to make a left turn. "I think that's rude. What does it save, a minute? It's dangerous, too."

She laughs when asked if her Infiniti has any bumper stickers. "No, not even one that says 'I'd rather be dancing.' I like a clean, nice, tidy car."

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*Krystyna Lagowski is a Toronto-based freelance writer.*