

The Thinking Man's Guide To PLAYING IN TRAFFIC

Unless you're a total couch spud or have a serious exercise addiction, sooner or later you are going to decide that you can get your weekend jollies more efficiently by driving somewhere in an automobile. Trouble is, everybody else is using the same strategy. This can be a hassle, especially with all the recent restrictions on methods of reducing crowding and general overpopulation (the AK-47 assault rifle as an excellent example).

So you could sit in the gridlock, cursing and stewing. You could do what an increasing number of right-thinking young Americans do--drive like a methedrine-crazed maniac. Or you could center yourself, relax, and consider the ancient wisdom that holds the journey as important as the destination. Especially if you know a few little games designed especially by The Weekend Warrior to alleviate those tiresome moments spent stalled in a bumper crop of bumpers.

"Urchin Gooning" is a swell game; educational, action-packed, and involving a lot of audience participation. Play is simplicity itself. When logjammed at stoplights, search out cars full of kids and start making faces at the little trolls. This is fairly jolly in itself. I usually start off with elementary ploys like oscillating my tongue and Grouchoing my eyebrows, then move on to intermediate, hand-assisted gestures, such as pulling my eyes and mouth into grotesque and loathsome shapes. By now the kids are raptly attentive, seldom exposed to such behavior from the nominally adult.

When the little gargoyles start responding with faces and gestures of their own, I move into advanced moves like picking my nose and flipping imaginary boogers in their direction. The intervention of windows, you see, preventing the launching of real boogers. This generally activates a primal trigger that pushes them past some obscurely defined juvenile limit and they start responding noticeably enough to attract their parents' attention. The parents respond by battering them senseless, right in front of my gleeful eyes.

But the best is yet to come, because the little ankle-biters, not yet realizing the full enormity of their seemingly innocent playmate's scheme, invariably try to weasel out by

claiming that I started it. If you can imagine anyone lodging such allegations against a respected journalist and pillar of the community. Certainly their parents can't, especially when I fix the lot of them with a steely stare that clearly implies, "Who has abdicated control of those nasty little ragamuffins?"

That usually settles their hash until late in the (dinnerless) evening. I especially relish the imploring, spaniel-eyed gazes they throw me as they are driven off into the sunset, unable to accept the fact that an elder of their own species would set them up so coldbloodedly under the guise of friendly fun. As I mentioned, the game is quite educational.

I have also found it worthwhile to keep a few props around, especially a pair of white plastic vampire teeth. This can produce spectacular results with very young kids in very close cars. The hat trick of this sport is to cause a tyke to wet his pants and therefore the upholstery. Double points for evidence of seatcover wetting. I buy the teeth cheap right after Halloween, of course, the same way I stock up on those little candy hearts with nitwit sayings on them after Valentines day.

Which you do, too, right? Come on, admit it. Just like you also wait until right after Easter to close out on a few of those ghastly candy chicks and bunnies, mostly for the atavistic joy of biting their adorable little heads off. Wow, real mature, man. Ozzy Osborne on a glucose jag, hey. You go for cheap thrills, you get what you pay for.

Another little goody picked up most easily at Halloween time (a fantastic holiday for jacking little kids around, by the way, but more on that in it's own season) is a rubber face mask. Preferably the almost realistic humanoid kind that gives you that queasy look of borrowed flesh, sort of like Roy Rogers right after a facelift. Some sort of hat, even cheap sunglasses, aid the disguise, which could do double duty for bank robberies, but is all you need to play "Defensive Pass Interference". This is a high-speed, fast lane game. Rather, a next-to-the-fast-lane game. Start by putting the mask on the back of your head. Add hat, glasses, costume jewelry, a touch of make-up and spritz of cologne, whatever you think best...and I'd be the last to condemn your taste in such matters, believe me.

You are now equipped, so just toad along, waiting for some hot shot, preferably in a Porsche or Samurai or some other intrinsically hypercompetitive car to get behind you. Slow him

down, mousetrap him, get him impatient. Then, when he gets a chance to pass, reach around to your left ear with your spread right hand, stick your head out the window right in front of him and waggle your fingers. I wouldn't be above a little friendly weaving and yawning at this point, myself. You have to put yourself in the passers place to appreciate this one (not generally a good thing to do in these little pastimes, unless you are a pretty hard core rotten egg). He merely sees the head of a blithering idiot pop out the window of the car he's passing, evidently looking back and therefore more oblivious than most folks to the prevailing road conditions. This can be disconcerting. You can, in fact, disconcert some impatient hotshot's ass right off the road. If that is indeed what happens, you score double.

One other little seasonal purchase can add some fun to waits in the gridlock. Every Fourth of July, squirrel away a little stash of fireworks. Some of these, like Roman candles and bottle rockets, need no explanation when it comes to creating havoc, mayhem, and frivolity on the freeway. But also try to have a handful of cherry bombs and Saturn Missile Batteries in the glovebox for staving off boredom. The name of the game is "Sun Roof Bombing". You can romanticize it as much as you want...be a Beirut Druze terrorist, an IRA nationalist, or an Iraqi chortling, "This SCUD's for you." All it takes is an M-80, a lighter, and proximity to a car with a sun roof.

First of all, note the driver of the sun-roofed vehicle-- the smug complacency with which he faces life (Or she, I hasten to add; there is nothing sexist about arriviste smugness. But then Sun Roof Bombing is also strictly equal opportunity calamity). Sunroofs tend to go with certain vehicles, and certain lifestyles. Surely you will be dealing here with a full-bore Yuppie; a tanning booth customer, a drinker, perhaps, of Diet Perrier, the kind of person who works it into conversations that they actually read "Satanic Verses"--in short, a schmuck. Hopefully even an attorney. Sitting there on his sheepskin seatcovers, listening to a Windham Hill CD, thinking about convertible debentures, when a sputtering little bundle of bang arcs in through the factory sun roof and propounds an opposing point of view. This is what aficionados term the Moment of Truth.

Even more ruthless truth comes out of the multiple maw of the Saturn Missile Battery. A small paper box with 25 pencil-sized

plastic rockets ready to launch sequentially, this is the MIRV, the Star Wars, of Sun Roof Bombing. The Smart Bomb for Dumb Detonation Tricks. The effect upon the recipient is hellish in the extreme, probably even somewhat deleterious. Especially if he (or she, let's not forget) has the gears engaged and is holding in the clutch. But tell me, what did your Driver's Education teacher specifically say about that practice? It's certainly a lesson worth mulling over while sitting in a once-luxurious automobile surrounded by two dozen rockets behaving like killer bees in a feeding frenzy. And, podnuh, the smell of gunsmoke. You, on the other hand, drive off chuckling, secure in the probability that your playmate momentarily has a priority of thoughts that puts a very low emphasis on memorizing license plate numbers...and richly ready to try more of the Weekend Warrior's gridlock grins.