

**SIMCOE-YORK
PRINTING &
PUBLISHING
LIMITED**

**Publisher of the
King Township Sentinel**

Business Office

25 Queen St. N.
Bolton ON L7E 1C1
(shared with Caledon Citizen)
Toll Free 1-888-557-6626
905-857-6626
Fax: 905-857-6363
admin@kingsentinel.com
www.kingsentinel.com

Head Office

34 Main St. W.
Beeton ON L0G 1A0
905-729-2287
Fax: 905-729-2541

Publishers:

BRUCE HAIRE
JOHN ARCHIBALD

Editorial

Managing Editor

BILL REA

editor@kingsentinel.com

Reporter

Anneleen Naudts
Jon Yanoff

Advertising

**Director of Sales
JOHN ARCHIBALD**

Sales Reps

Nancy Stenhouse
Beth Wilson
Annette Derraugh
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Composing

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Penny Gilbertson
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Business

Jacque Archibald
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Subscription rates:

Within 65 km except towns with letter carriers – \$37.50 + G.S.T.
Beyond 65 km and towns with letter carriers – \$54.00 + G.S.T.
Single copies 94¢ + G.S.T. or \$1.00 (includes G.S.T.)
Published every Wednesday
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**Bill's
Bulletin
Board**

By Bill Rea

Road rage is stupid, wasteful, potentially dangerous and something most of us have resorted to at some time.

It is, alas, an inevitable reality that goes along with frequent use of the public road network. If you're going to share roads with all the other people licensed to drive on them, there is going to be a certain amount of friction.

Now I have never done any kind of statistical analysis on this (I wouldn't know how to go about doing it anyway), but it's been my experience that motorists tend to behave better on the more heavily traveled roads. If there's less traffic, I've noticed there's more stupidity.

I spent five and a half years working in and around the east end of Toronto, and among other things, that meant spending about 20 fun-filled minutes every morning on the 401, and even more time in the evenings (getting home always seemed to be a tougher order, for some reason). Yet in all that time, I have no lasting memories of any acts of driver stupidity. You do see a lot, if you spend enough time on a highway like that. I saw everything from burning cars to police conducting a man to their cruiser in handcuffs. But the people I

would share the road with seemed basically like me; people charged with getting from point A to point B as efficiently and with as little fuss as possible.

I was driving in Muskoka early one recent Saturday morning. This was a bit before 7 a.m., and the sun, my wife and myself were about the only things we up at that hour. As I pulled onto a certain country road, I noticed a car coming up from behind. I quickly got up to speed, and was soon contently cruising at about 90 km-h in an 80 zone. Granted, I was not obeying the letter of the law, but who does in situations such as that? The speed at which I was driving was appropriate for the time, place and road conditions, so no apologies are owing or offered from this quarter.

However, the fellow driving the car behind me was evidently of a different mind. I glanced in the mirror at one point and noticed he was right up on my tail. We were on a curving portion of the road at that point, and there was a bit of on-coming traffic too. But I knew the road was going to straighten out very soon, so this fellow would be able to get by me in a matter of moments. I was even planning to move a side a bit to make things easier for him.

As things turned out, this man was in a major hurry. As soon as he had a clear passing corridor, he moved into it. I can deal with that. I have a harder time coming to terms with the angry honk on the horn I heard as he was whipping by, and what appeared to be an obscene gesture he seemed to be making in my direction.

Here I was, going 10 clicks over the posted speed limit and this joker was angry because I was apparently holding him up.

"What's his problem?" Beth asked me, with a touch of indignation in her voice, for which I didn't blame her.

I responded with a few pithy observations about this chap, using language that is probably not fit for the pages of a community newspaper. And he kept right on going, and after a couple of minutes, he was out of sight. He sped out of my life forever, and Good riddance.

But I let it go at that, when a lot of people might have responded a little more forcefully.

Had my late father, for example, been the target of such attention, he would have responded. He was not a man who took kindly to being pushed around, either physically, verbally or through gestures. He could have flipped the proverbial bird with the best of them, with appropriate cussing to boot. I saw him do it dozens of times when I was a kid. It greatly amused my brother and I, and usually mortified my mother. She once admonished him that a driver he was giving the finger to could have been the president of the company he for which worked.

With language that could best be described as "colourful," he told her that made no difference to him.

But apart from entertaining his children, I have to wonder what my dad really accomplished on that occasion.

There was a time when I probably would have done something similar, but I guess I have mellowed a bit in my old age. What I try to do in such situations is ignore it, at least at times when I let a cooler head prevail (which is not always). I reason that responding in kind to such an attack is not going to accomplish a whole lot. In this particular case, I would have just lowered myself to his level. I usually find the higher road a bit more attractive.

Besides, why try to escalate what is already a bad situation? A guy makes an obscene and uncalled-for gesture at me, so I return the favour. What if he were to decide he had to trump me again? How far am I supposed to let this develop?

As well, I have no way of knowing what kind of lunatic I might be dealing with. What starts with a couple of fingers being exchanged could eventually lead to blows, or something even worse. There are some unstable people out there, you know. We've all read enough stories about people who actively involved themselves in road-rage incidents, who ended up in cemeteries for their troubles. And in this particular case, I had my wife with me. No, the sooner this fellow was out of my hair and life, the better.

One should also take into account of what might

have been on his mind at the moment. He had a passenger in the car with him, and I think it was a woman (I was looking at him, not her). For all I know, she could have been his wife and she could have been in labour. In such a case, I think most men would have been inclined to put etiquette on the back burner.

Another reason for not responding to such garbage is I've pulled a few boners while driving over the years, to the consternation, if not annoyance, if not absolute fury of other users of the road (I sure hope representatives of my insurance company aren't reading this). Although I don't think I did anything wrong in this case, I am not perfect and I have no business acting holier than thou.

As I stated before, there have been times when I've let my temper get the better of me while driving. I recall one time when I was a little late for work in Toronto, and moved over to the curb lane because it was clear. But it didn't stay clear for long, because another car pulled into the lane ahead of me and slowed. Not surprisingly, I found this both frustrating and annoying, and I used my horn to express my displeasure, as I returned to the lane from whence I came. A bit further down the road, I looked in my mirror, and saw the other car was stopped, with the hood up and the driver who I had just bawled out with my horn looking inside. I realized that my anger had got the better of me for a moment, and the result was I helped make a bad day for this fellow a little bit worse.

Like I stated at the start, it was stupid and wasteful.

Editorial

**When it comes to budgets,
It's all a matter of perception**

Government budgets, like the one brought down last week by Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, can be confusing documents, even for people who understand finances and are into number crunching.

These are massive documents, spelling out how billions of dollars are going to be spent, and where the billions are going to come from to cover that outlay.

So unless you have a mind that can be amused by these massive amounts of huge figures being thrown at you, budgets aren't fun.

What is fun is the reac-

tion from people, especially politicians, to these documents.

Mayor Margaret Black was, of course, over the moon last week, after the province announced it would be providing \$10.2 million toward fixing the Holland Marsh Drainage System. While that really wasn't part of the budget announcement, it did involve a lot of money for which local municipalities have been asking for years. So it's not surprising that King's mayor was happy with what the government is doing.

But if you look at the

comments of other provincial politicians, and their federal cousins, it's pretty easy to tell that party affiliations are going to govern what they say.

If the political party you belong to is in opposition in the legislature, then the budget will generally stink. If pushed, you might be able to find a few positives, although one will get the feeling such praise is being voiced through gritted teeth while holding your nose. The job of opposition, after all, is to oppose.

And if your party is in government, well you can't say enough positive things.

And if you're pushed to criticize it, you might have to resort to scanning the documents in search of typographic errors. The job of government, after all, is to make the government look good.

And as one local politico observed when asked to comment on the budget, it all comes down to philosophy.

No government can hope to benefit by bringing down a budget that it thinks will be bad for the people, so we have to assume that Duncan and company had the best interests of Ontario in mind when they drafted their doc-

uments.

True, federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty had some problems with it, and he made his feelings publicly known, to the indignation of Duncan and Premier Dalton McGuinty. But the fact is Flaherty is not only an informed and seasoned politician, who drafted a couple of provincial budgets in his day, but he is also a resident of Ontario and an elected representative of thousands of other residents of Ontario. He has every right to comment.

And if people disagree, as we were told last week, it's a matter of philosophy.