

Welcome to The Jungle - How to Tell if You're a Road Warrior

by Julie VEINOT

The stereotypical Canadian is nice, polite, and always ready to help.

Except for when they've got 3,000-pounds of steel at their beck-and-call.

Recent polls suggest road rage isn't limited to other provinces; Maritimers are just as apt to engage in territorial acts on the road as someone from bigger provinces and cities, making University Avenue (or the parking lots at UPEI) a likely place to witness or deliver some form of road rage.

Not everyone can dismiss road rage as being something that only happens to other people; 84 per cent admitted to one act of aggressive driving in the year before a Canada Safety Council survey in the summer of 1999 of 1,022 drivers. Another poll, this time by Leger Marketing, found one in five Canadian adults have been on the receiving side of road rage.

There are 20 million licensed drivers in the country.

And they share 900,000 kilometres of roadway.

"The costs of aggressive driving are staggering," says the Canadian Health Network. "Transport Canada reports that 227,000 people were injured in collisions and 2,900 were killed in 2002. Road collisions account for more than 90 per cent of all transportation-related deaths."

The release says there are three stages of road rage.

Quiet road rage involves racing, competing, following too close, unsafe lane changes and muttering to yourself.

Verbal road rage includes yelling insults, swearing, rude gesturing, fist shaking, horn honking and light flashing.

Epic road rage is comprised of verbal confrontations that can lead to assault, use of weapons and bodily harm or death. This, says the network, is uncommon on Canadian roads, but is most often a resort of young males and Type A personalities.

A typical road warrior feels territorial and competitive, rationalizes their own aggressive behaviour, and has self-righteous indignation for being wronged.

Are you likely to be a road rager? Answer yes or no to the following 20 questions from the Transportation Health and Safety Association of Ontario. The more yes answers you rack up, the more potential you have of getting into a fight on the road. Do you:

1. Mentally condemn other drivers?
2. Verbally abuse other drivers to another passenger in your vehicle?
3. Close ranks on a highway to deny another driver access to your lane?
4. Give another driver non-verbal signals (i.e. glare at them) to show them how upset you are?

5. Speed past another car or rev your engine as a sign of frustration?

6. Prevent another driver from passing you because you're mad?

7. Tailgate a driver to pressure him/her to go faster or get out of the way?

8. Imagine physical violence against another driver?

9. Honk or yell at someone through the window to indicate displeasure?

10. Make an obscene gesture at another driver?

11. Use your vehicle to retaliate by making sudden, threatening manoeuvre?

12. Pursue another car by chasing it because of a perceived provocation or insult?

13. Get out of your vehicle and engage in a verbal dispute?

14. Carry a weapon in the vehicle in case you decide to use it in a driving altercation?

15. Deliberately bump or ram another vehicle in anger?

16. Try to run another car off the road to punish them?

17. Get out of the car and assault someone as a result of a driving incident?

18. Try to run down someone whose actions angered you?

19. Shooting at another car?

20. Kill someone?

If any of these apply to you - especially those from numbers 17 and up - you

should seek professional help and/or consider using one or more of the following tips the Canadian Health Network suggests.

- Plan your driving route in advance of hitting the road; poor driving can occur among lost motorists.

- Keep personal or work-related problems out of the car.

- Drive with your windows up and play relaxing music in the background.

(Think Solitudes over Born to be Wild unless you can control yourself.)

- Make your vehicle as comfortable as possible.

- Avoid eye contact with out drivers.

- If steam begins escaping from your ears, get fresh air and breath slowly.

- Keep a safe space around your vehicle.

- Don't tail-gate, cut people off or compete with them for the road.

- Give angry drivers lots of room.

- Drive in a courteous manner: yield the right of way and give the benefit of the doubt.

- Don't take bad driving behaviour personally.

- Avoid honking your horn unless necessary and then, only tap it lightly - no laying on it for two minutes. Ditto for the middle finger.

- If you are being threatened, don't drive home but to a public place or police station. If you have a cell phone, call for help.

