

Situational awareness

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The town Facebook page where I live routinely has complaints about bad drivers on local streets.

There are a few people with a lead foot driving around, but I find, for the most part, people here are courteous drivers. If you're trying to make a left turn through a line of traffic, someone always stops and lets you through.

A 'thank you' wave is usually acknowledged with a return wave.

Everyone thinks they are the best driver on the road. You have probably never heard anyone, ever, admit they are not a very good driver, or that they routinely drive recklessly and dangerously.

Even with only these terrific drivers on the road, sooner or later, everyone makes a mistake.

I drive a lot ? I'm always on the road going somewhere.

I've had a few experiences where someone made a move that caused me to swerve, or to lay on the horn to avoid being hit.

However, that was the end of it. I figure most of these occurrences are simple driver errors, and that most likely the person who was driving realized their mistake and didn't feel too good about it.

Why make a big deal out of it and get into some kind of road rage incident?

The worst is grown adults who like to flip the finger. Grow up. That gesture should be left to 12-year-old boys in the schoolyard.

Several years ago I went to a community meeting about road safety in a small town. Many residents said they were fed up with fast driving on their idyllic country roads, and that it was dangerous for children, people out walking, and for pets. They decided to hold this meeting with the town to see what could be done about it.

I went a little early and parked down the road from the meeting hall on the route I knew from where most of the residents would be arriving.

There is an intersection and a stop sign. Of all the cars I saw arrive at the meeting, less than half came to a full stop at the stop sign. A 'Hollywood stop' on a rural road isn't that big of a deal, but they were still committing an offence.

I also watched the speed of the cars. More than half of those vehicles came down that road faster than the posted speed limit.

To be fair, it is one of those roads where the limit is probably lower than it should be, but they were still speeding.

My plan was to get up and speak to the group when the time came to receive input from the audience. I was going to casually mention that most of the people there had themselves committed driving offences while driving to a meeting to complain about bad drivers.

However, once the meeting was underway, I looked around the room and saw everyone had genuine intentions. I figured it would be better to stay quiet and let them sort it out themselves.

Situational awareness is a big part of being on a road or street.

Listening to the daily news, it seems bowling for people is a sport in Toronto where someone gets hit by a car almost every day.

I would bet that a majority of those accidents could have been prevented by the people who were hit if they were aware of their surroundings.

One of the best lessons I was given when learning to drive, was don't start driving just because the light is green. Just because you have the right of way, doesn't mean the guy coming the other way is going to stop.

You should always look first, before proceeding.

I see this all the time at intersections. Pedestrians are waiting for the light to change, then start walking when it turns green without looking for on-coming traffic.

They are oblivious to their surroundings.

This happens all the time at the end of my street by parents pushing baby strollers. Yes, they have the right of way, but they don't look for oncoming traffic.

If most of those people on Toronto streets had bothered to look for oncoming traffic, they probably wouldn't have been hit.

Yes, you can blame the driver for blowing a red light, but you can avoid the pain, or worse, just by taking a second to be aware of where you are and what is going on around you.

The two seconds it takes to look for traffic won't slow you down, but it might save your life.