

Testing the Limits of Appropriate Behavior

One day last week I was standing naked in my kitchen while drinking Suntory Japanese whisky directly from the bottle, when for some reason I started wondering about what constitutes “appropriate” behavior.

LuAnn walked in, surveyed the situation and said, “Don’t stand in front of the window, the neighbors can see you.” It didn’t occur to me until later that I should have wondered why she was more concerned about the public relations aspect of that scene than anything else.

“First,” I replied, “I’m pretty sure they can only see me from the waist up. Second, if they’re going to be peeping in our windows they have only themselves to blame for any resulting psychological or emotional trauma.”

Notably, this episode was one of the few times when my behavior has been called into question that I haven’t been tempted to say, “In my own defense, I was pretty drunk at the time.”

For the record, our back door enters directly into the kitchen and the top of the basement stairs. I had just finished mowing the lawn and I’m required to immediately throw my stinky clothes into the basement when I re-enter the house, so I did. Mowing triggers my hay fever, so while I was standing naked in the kitchen I took an antihistamine pill and washed it down with the closest liquid at hand.

The fact that it was a random bottle of esoteric whiskey wasn’t too surprising, because a several months ago we learned about a country club in Illinois that was closing its bar. We handpicked about 40 bottles of various wines, gins, tequilas, scotches, bourbons, liqueurs and other spirits they needed to get rid of. I’ve worked my way through around eight bottles so far, without much help from LuAnn or anyone else.

Anyway, I was driving naked in my car recently, drinking 12-year-old Glenlivet scotch directly from the bottle (no, not really) when I began to wonder about what constitutes appropriate behavior while driving.

I'm already on record as being a big fan of roundabouts, and I'd like to add zipper merging to this short list. That's when two lanes of vehicles going the same direction stay in their own lanes until the last possible minute before merging. You know, alternately, like teeth on a closing zipper.

For as long as I can remember, American drivers have always ducked into the next lane the instant they become aware of an impending merge. On the Interstate, this can be as many as five miles before it's really necessary, and woe be unto any unwitting motorists who pass any cars queued up in the preferred lane before attempting to merge themselves. This is more of a problem in town, where one lane of crawling vehicles can extend back through two stoplights.

The flashing electronic signs on First Avenue in Coralville say ZIPPER MERGE AHEAD - USE BOTH LANES - MERGE AFTER 5TH STREET - TAKE TURNS - BE NICE. That seems pretty clear, although I'm conflicted about the City of Coralville attempting to dictate my attitude. Going north in the left of two lanes I obediently and slowly pass two blocks of vehicles until I reach the MERGE HERE sign, then turn on my right blinker and - so far - someone always lets me in right away.

We have lots of opportunities to merge these days, since some so-called "planners" somewhere managed to simultaneously schedule construction on almost every major entryway to Iowa City and Coralville from the north. I suppose the upside of this may be that it probably discourages visits from snooty Minnesotans, who I hear believe IOWA stands for Idiots Out Wandering Around.

If zipper merging was the way of the world, nobody would ever get mad about cars cutting in who haven't "waited their turn" because everyone merges evenly. It's fair and efficient. I recently made this case to LuAnn, who despite my persuasive arguments still insists that passing queued cars before a zipper merge - even when commanded to do so by mindless electronic signs - is "bad form."

Please do me a favor, keep an open mind and try the zipper merge - you might like it. You might also like Jim Beam Bonded Straight Kentucky Bourbon as well.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons drinks regularly and drives erratically, not that those two things are related.