

## Tortoises Compare Favorably to the U.S. Post Office

Last week I had some international travel forms filled out by my primary care physician at the UI Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC), and they notified me that I could come and pick them up. I asked if they could mail them to me.

The next day I was notified that they had done so, and to allow *7 to 10 days for delivery*. I responded that the UIHC is 2.2 miles from my house, and that a mail truck leaving right now from the hospital on its way to me and arriving 10 days from now by my calculations will have averaged .009 miles per hour on that trip. That's one slow mail truck.

According to my Wikipedia research, they could have attached the paperwork to the back of a giant tortoise (average speed on dry land .17 m.p.h.) and gotten the documents to me 18.9 times faster. That's assuming the tortoise didn't get lost along the way. And avoided being squashed by a University of Iowa Cambus.

Tortoises aren't the smartest or most reliable of the reptiles, so as insurance the hospital probably should have sent a duplicate set of documents via a pygmy three-toed sloth, the worlds slowest mammal at .15 m.p.h. But sloths seldom range more than 100 feet per day, which could be problematic.

Even so, a sloth is a much better choice than a snail (.03 m.p.h.), especially considering a snail tasked with dragging an envelope behind it would probably not be able to achieve top speed. And I hear they tend to deliver slimy documents.

In case you were wondering, all the above options are far faster than the banana slug (.006 m.p.h.) which itself is Usain Bolt compared to coral, which is technically an animal that never moves at all. Never hand anything to a coral and expect timely delivery.

As long as we're vetting animal couriers, we should consider the other end of the spectrum. For example, if an unusually nimble hospital clerk could attach my letter to a peregrine falcon already in full flight (maximum speed 242 m.p.h.) it could be delivered to my house in a presumably jarring manner in just under one second. Now we're talking.

Of course, the U.S. Mail is not coming to me directly from UIHC. It would need to go to the Iowa City Post office first, then to the Cedar Rapids Post Office for sorting, back to the same I.C. Post office for staging (!) and finally delivered to my house by a postal worker.

In this scenario, the Post Office is looking pretty good. The total distance traveled now becomes 64 miles, which over the same 10 days averages out to .27 m.p.h. which now makes it a faster-moving option than the tortoise. Although you never know when a tortoise might have a great day.

I should mention that before I agreed to the U.S. Mail option, I requested that the hospital scan the documents and send them to me via that newfangled Internet thingy. I was told they didn't have ready access to a scanner, so here we are.

I'm still working on the alternatives. The price for a first-class stamp is only 47 cents, and I'm pretty sure there's no way we can house and train tortoises, snails or sloths, provide them with GPS-equipped cell phones and still be cost-competitive.

That is, unless I'm allowed to lose over 5 billion taxpayer dollars in one year like the U.S. Postal Service in 2014 and 2015; that opens up a lot of possibilities.

*The U.S. Mail delivery ended up taking only three days (.89 m.p.h.), but next time Writers Group member Dave Parsons will pick up the forms himself.*