

THE OUTSIDE EDGE

By: George Tranos



EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Comedian George Carlin once said that there are two types of drivers - idiots and maniacs. The "idiots" are the ones going slower than you are and making dangerous moves, oblivious to others around them. The "maniacs" are the drivers going faster than you, weaving in and out of traffic. Of course, in Mr. Carlin's version, "we" are the safe ones - not going too slow or too fast - but driving just right. Now that the riding season in this area is in full swing, there are more motorcycles on the road than at any other time of year. You would think that this fact would have the motoring public take better notice of motorcyclists. So why does it appear that more drivers are "idiots and maniacs," performing unsafe, illegal and just plain bone-headed moves than ever before?

Most drivers think they are good drivers, but it is obvious that there are many "bad" drivers out on the roads. What makes a "good" driver and how does someone become one?

First, let's describe some of the poor driving maneuvers that you might have seen. Think of the last time you drove (or rode) and what you encountered. What things that other drivers did stood out to you as dangerous, illegal or dumb? Perhaps you saw drivers running red lights or stop signs, making U-turns on busy streets, crossing over three lanes of traffic to exit, yelling at their children in the backseat while not looking at the road or texting on their portable devices and talking on their cellphones.

What are some of the things that make a good driver? Think of that same drive. What did a driver do that was notably well thought out and executed? For most of us, this is a much harder task than noticing the bad driving behavior. Maybe good driving is like good news - most people are more interested in the bad things that happen!

Cars today are more insulating - isolating the driver from the outside world. Our cars are personal enclaves with climate control and sound deadening insulation, audio and video systems for entertainment and tinted windows for privacy. Many drivers will expect the car to protect them with its enhanced safety systems like airbags, seat belts, anti-lock brakes, traction and stability control, tire pressure monitoring systems, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning systems and automated braking control.

Technology has enabled some people to participate less in the act of driving. All of these features may provide additional safety should something go wrong but avoiding crashes should be the goal of all drivers. There is no substitute for the awareness and involvement of an active driver.

Driving should be the primary task - everything else should be secondary. If more drivers adhered to this philosophy there would be many less crashes. Distractions should be minimized while driving. Every driver should be aware of what is going on around them. Poor situational awareness leads to many avoidable crashes.

As a motorcyclist, try to identify those vehicles that appear to be unaware of your presence. Assume the other driver does not see you! Try to look far ahead and recognize potential hazards. Expect the unexpected! Once you are mindful of the possible threats, presume they will happen and decide what you would do. Then, once the sequence begins all you have to do is execute your plan!

For many people, driving is a task to be dreaded. "Getting through" and "getting by" are sufficient. As a motorcyclist, we encounter all that a car driver does and more. To deal with the variety of driving behavior we see every day, we need to be even more aware of erratic activity. Motorcyclists should strive to be better than average to get the big picture of all that is around us. Riders need to be as proficient in their scanning and identifying abilities as they are in their crash avoidance skills.

Ask any professional driver how they survive and you will likely be told that the two most important things they need are a driving strategy and a good attitude. As a rider, these are key for your survival. Expect the unexpected and you will never be surprised.



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