

Boulevard of Bad Drivers

Written by Olga L. Figueroa, Special to the BT
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ou got to go through hell to get to heaven -- at least according to the lyrics of the Steve Miller Band's "Jetliner." Those words often ring true on the drive home from work, from the mall, downtown, the beach.

The increasingly popular Biscayne Corridor and other major thoroughfares can be nothing short of a parking lot during peak hours, not only because of the area's growth, but because drivers don't seem to follow rules of the road or exercise common courtesy.

The northbound turning lane at the intersection of NE 123rd Street and Biscayne Boulevard seldom seems to clear because some drivers in the lane opt to sleep through the turn signal. It's bad enough it's a single lane; some drivers are distracted with their cell phones, mirrors, or

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coffee mugs when the green arrow turns on, leaving those behind them stranded.

NE 2nd Avenue is not much different. Recently, while heading north, several cars were dragging along behind a Yellow cab doing about 20 mph through Miami, El Portal, and into Miami Shores. When the opportunity arose, one by one they went around the cabbie, who wasn't on the phone but was devouring some fried chicken and licking his fingers.

It's those drivers, who don't know basic driving etiquette -- such as slower traffic using the right lane and pulling over to eat lunch -- who can make traffic a nightmare for others. Perhaps it's time to review the rules of the road as listed in the driving handbook (downloadable at DMVFlorida.org).

When approaching red lights, many drivers fail to slow down so others waiting to exit parking lots can do so. Some drivers block the entrances and exits to businesses for no other reason than wanting to get to the red light first.

A few weeks ago, while a right northbound lane was blocked off, a driver behind the wheel of a BMW was puffing away on his electronic cigarette and checking his hairline in the mirror as he proceeded to block an entrance to the RK Plaza on 123rd Street while at a red right during the lunch rush. When he looked up and saw drivers aiming for a small opening, he crept up to block it completely. Apparently, he seemed to think it was his right to inconvenience other drivers.

Some drivers, realizing they're about to miss their turn, slow down drastically in the middle lane to jump into the turning lane at the last minute, endangering themselves and the drivers around them.

It's that mentality, along with growth and construction, that's turning the area into a traffic nightmare. Miami Country Day School hires off-duty cops to keep things running smoothly in the morning and afternoons. If it weren't for that, I'd still be honking at the soccer mom who blocked NE 6th Avenue through two green lights during rush hour while trying to turn into the gridlocked school entrance, instead of waiting in the turning lane.

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Bright delineators were recently installed just south of NE 36th Street and Biscayne Boulevard to prevent drivers from making illegal left turns across double yellow lines and four northbound lanes. That was a routine move for those wanting to make a U-turn to get onto the eastbound Julia Tuttle Causeway or into fast-food restaurants on the east side of the Boulevard during rush hour.

While traffic congestion itself causes some drivers to become irate, some individuals are angry drivers most of the time.

Early one Sunday morning as we drove through Bay Harbor Islands, a Mercedes in the right lane intentionally got dangerously close to two cyclists for no reason. The cyclists, who managed to maintain their balance and not collide into parked cars, yelled out as the driver sped by, only to be caught at the light. Behind his designer sunglasses, he apparently thought it was his privilege to intimidate the cyclists.

Crossing Miami-Dade streets is also dangerous, regardless of marked crosswalks and flashing yellow lights. While some drivers stop to allow pedestrians to cross, others often barrel through the crosswalk, leaving pedestrians gasping. On Biscayne Boulevard, south of NE 86th Street, two crosswalk signs were crashed into and destroyed in recent months, sending a clear warning that this is still not a pedestrian-friendly city.

South Florida traffic brings together locals, transplants, truckers, cyclists, and tourists of all nationalities and ages, with cell phones and other distractions, onto crowded roads. Distracted drivers on crowded roads that are often gridlocked, under construction, or flooded from heavy rains can create traffic hell.

Focusing on driving, using turn signals, allowing others to merge, tapping the horn instead of leaning on it, keeping a safe distance from other vehicles, not blocking intersections, and moving to the right when driving slower are not just rules of the road. They're common courtesies that will make traffic more bearable.

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