

## Driving in Friendly Manitoba

by  
Brian Campbell



I've always believed that anyone who can call us Friendly Manitoba has never driven in Winnipeg. There is nothing so stimulating as being cut off in traffic and seeing "Friendly Manitoba" gracing the jackass's license plate.

That is not to say that there aren't courteous drivers around, they are just rare enough to be a pleasant surprise when you meet one. Those rare moments when someone flags me to pull in front of them when I expect to be stuck on the side of the road for the remainder of rush hour, I almost feel like stopping them and giving them a hug, offering to buy them a coffee, possibly be their slave for life.

But that is the exception, not the rule. The norm, from where I sit in traffic, is driving along in the right lane with your left turn signal on, seeing your turn off getting closer and closer, then, just as the vehicle who has been doggedly sticking right beside you like you were glued together finally pulls ahead, having the vehicle behind him gun the engine to take up the space. That is my reality. Am I the only one who thinks that our license plate logo should be an upraised middle finger?

More often than not, I have noticed that the worst offenders for cutting you off, tailgating, shining their brights in your eyes and exhibiting all around aggressive behavior, are drivers of trucks. Now I'm not talking about people like farmers, construction workers, delivery drivers or others who actually make their living driving a truck. I'm talking about those people who bought a truck for no other purpose than to compensate for something lacking in their lives. This comment is directed at both the male and female of the species, I've seen both. Put these people in a truck, 4 x 4, SUV, etc. and watch them go from zero to jackass in seconds. I'm sure there are exceptions to this rule too. But keep your eyes open as you drive our city streets and see if I'm right.

Beyond aggressiveness, there are some driving habits in this city that drive me absolutely bonkers. For instance, traffic circles, or roundabouts, as they are known in Europe, are a reality here. Get used to them. Really, they are not that hard. It is simply a four way intersection using a circle and yield signs instead of stop signs. That means if nobody is imminently going to run into you, you can drive through without stopping. In fact, if planned properly, by watching the traffic ahead and speeding up or slowing down as needed, there are many occasions where you don't need to stop at all. Also, and let me be quite clear about this, once you are already in the traffic circle, unless a child or animal runs across your path, you should have no reason to stop until you leave, so PLEASE, PLEASE DON'T!

On the subject of yield signs, please learn to understand what they mean. They are not stop signs. Now I understand that there are some yield signs that connect you directly to a main, and

sometimes very busy, road or highway where you have no choice but to stop and wait your turn. But there are also a number of yield signs leading onto merging lanes intended to get you up to the speed of the traffic flow. There is no need to stop at these yield signs. In fact, you really should not, as it disrupts traffic and irritates the hell out of me. Yes, that's right. I take it personally when you stop at a yield sign for no reason. Oh yeah, for those of you who are already on the main roadway, please curb your aggressive tendencies and either adjust your speed or change lanes to allow those merging properly to do so. Contrary to what appears to be common belief, Winnipeg streets are actually not part of a NASCAR track, so act accordingly.

Now, in at least one case, I am as guilty as any of you, and that is the zipper merge. In my logical mind I understand how it works. When one lane is cut off due to construction or some other reason, traffic should flow in both lanes right up to the place where the lane ends, at which point everyone takes turns going through the single remaining lane. Logically I understand this. But somewhere in my Winnipeg driver mentality, it grates on me to see people passing in another lane when I know I am already in the good lane and I don't seem to be getting anywhere. This is what I refer to as Winnipeg driver syndrome and I am attempting to overcome it. I am currently in a ten step program.

One thing about Winnipeg drivers these days, and yes, I know it isn't just Winnipeg, but I see it here every day, and that is the amount of people on our roads who can't take time away from their phones while they are driving. I nearly blow a gasket every time I see someone driving behind me, head bobbing up and down like some demented bobble head. Who told you that you could type and drive at the same time? If you really are permanently attached to your phones, get off the road! I can think of only one exception to this rule. If you are stuck on Waverley, Watt Street, Archibald, or a few other streets in this city while a very long, slow moving train is passing in front of you, by all means, put your vehicle in park, turn off the engine, take out your phone and knock yourself out. Power to you. You can read a novel waiting for some of those trains. But that is the only exception. Be warned. If you are checking your Facebook profile while waiting at a red light, one of these days there will be a knock on your window and it will be me, telling you to put the damn thing away. You have been warned.



As I said at the beginning of this article, I honestly don't believe that everyone driving on Winnipeg streets is a jerk. But there are so many out there, and they stand out so much simply by their actions, they make the whole city look bad. So my advice is to chill out, pay attention to your driving habits, and try to make everyone's time on the road more pleasant. As for you smart phone fanatics, trust me, answering that email/text message/or whatever can wait until you get to where you are going. Whenever my phone announces an incoming message when I am behind the wheel, I always think that if it really was a smart phone, it would know that I was driving. For those of you who drive trucks, I challenge you to prove my theory wrong. I will thank you if you do.