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Something to ponder:

Does the anonymity of our vehicles give us license to be rude?

Howard Traffic Talk

The Baltimore Sun

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Courtesy seems to have yielded to "me-firstism" on Maryland's highways and byways, if the responses to last week's column are any indication. In fact, courtesy seems to be the only thing yielding.

Barb Reinhardt complained about unyielding drivers leaving U.S. 29 northbound to go to U.S. 40 eastbound.

"If I'm heading east on 40 and need to get into the right lane to turn right on Rogers Avenue, it's nearly impossible during rush hour. It's as though the people on the ramp [from U.S. 29] think they have the right of way," she said.

And if you don't believe that roads go in both directions, she added, "This is also the case from 29 southbound to 40 westbound when I'm heading west and want to turn right onto St. Johns Lane."

But Ms. Reinhardt also wondered who has the right of way at the merges from U.S. 29 southbound to Route 32 eastbound—those who are leaving Route 32 westbound and heading southbound on U.S. 29 or those who are trying to exit U.S. 29?

"I have problems at these ramps nearly every day. It's as though the people merging onto the main route think they have the right of way when I believe it's the people exiting the main route. Who is right?" she asked.

You are correct. The drivers who have the right of way are the ones leaving the highway (U.S. 29) who intend to go to the ramp to Route 32. Drivers entering the highway have yield signs.

That said, however, there needs to be a certain give and take that is often dangerously lacking: drivers already on the highway should

slightly vary their speeds to try to enable incoming motorists to integrate smoothly into the flow of traffic.

I have noticed the same lack of courtesy—if that’s what it is—or possibly ignorance of how merge areas work. Or maybe it is a matter of perception: What one motorist might perceive as failure to yield could be another driver's attempt to accelerate to smoothly integrate into traffic.

But sometimes I agree with Bob Dettner, who commented on drivers’ chronic inability to properly yield the right of way.

“I see on a regular basis how some people do not know how to deal with this merge situation. I don’t think it’s so much a matter of ignorance. I think there are lots of drivers out there who simply believe they are better than everyone else,” he said.

The funny thing about all this lack of yielding on our roads is that people don’t walk on sidewalks the way they drive. How embarrassing it would be to suddenly cut in front of someone on the sidewalk and run into him. Or walk so closely behind people that you step on their heels. So I wonder, **does the anonymity of our automobiles give us license to be rude?**

A limerick

Unlike some adult drivers on the road, **Zac Cornell of River Hill High School** advocates courtesy and safe driving in this road-related limerick he submitted to the **Courtesy on the Road** contest this past fall:

*If driving at too fast a pace
You'll cause problems you won't want to face
So do everyone a favor
Have appropriate behavior
So the road can be a safe place*

I couldn't have expressed it better myself.

Speaking of students who know their road safety tips, **Traffic Talk congratulates the following county high school students for having been "caught" driving courteously** since mid-November

by **Courtesy on the Road**, an organization promoting courteous driving: **Kevin Bean, Long Reach; Jennifer Hood, Oakland Mills; Christine Lee, Howard; Robert Sagmiller, Glenelg; Emily Schwartz, Centennial; and Laura Swann, Atholton.**

And for those following the high school courtesy competition sponsored by **Courtesy on the Road, Glenelg** continues to hold the lead among the other high schools in the number of students participating in the safe-driving initiative. **Mount Hebron** is second, followed by **River Hill** and **Howard**, said **Courtesy on the Road** President Lisa Morrow said.

What is your driving dilemma? Contact Jody K. Vilschick at TrafficTalk@comcast.net, send faxes to 410-715-2816 or mail letters to Traffic Talk, The Sun in Howard County, 30 Corporate Center, 10440 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 820, Columbia, 21044. Include your full name and contact information, or your comments will not be published or receive a response.

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