

Transportation related Watershed Ways Articles in this document include:

Country travel
Me and my bumper sticker...
The Friendly Art of Driving "Gently"
Driving the speed limit
Please don't idle your engine

Country travel

12 Mar 2005

The painting was actually done by the murderer, who imitated the style of the victim and created the scene the next morning to simulate an accident.

Six artists have motives for the crime. One has an alibi for the morning, having left early by train to visit an art show in the city. None has an ironclad alibi for the previous night. All claim to have been on the move: sailing the coast, walking the countryside, going fishing, motoring, and so forth. There is puzzling evidence concerning a stolen bicycle that turns up at a train station the day of the crime.

Sayers' detective hero solves the mystery by painstakingly studying rural train schedules. The murderer - the artist who went to the city - had dumped the body, dashed off the painting, fled on the bicycle, caught a train, and forged cancellation marks on his ticket to make it appear he caught an earlier train. The author stresses that the places and train schedules used in the novel were all factual, while the characters were strictly fictional.

In Sayers' novel, the trains are full of salesmen, shoppers, tourists, and people visiting friends. Even the police sometimes take the train rather than a car.

In Canada today, rural public transportation itself has become fictional. Canadians have fewer transport options today than early last century. Trains are gone, bus routes eliminated, and remaining bus schedules cut back.

Rural Canadians are losing the dignity and freedom that comes with mobility, especially if they are unable or choose not to drive.

This creates a growing feeling of isolation and alienation, of being cut off from the cities where decisions that affect rural peoples' lives are made. Unless you have a car, or you are a particularly ambitious bicyclist, you can't get there from here.

As Canada's cities continue to swell, rural Canada stagnates or declines. Vast areas of the prairies are depopulated. Governments seem incapable of dealing with rural areas hammered by BSE, doctor shortages, fish plant closures, and so forth. There is a vast gulf, a continental schism, between urban and rural areas.

Public transport is an essential bridge between urban and rural Canada. It brings urban people with money into the countryside, and provides rural Canadians with access to things found only in cities - like certain types of medical care.

Ottawa Valley residents are a bit schizophrenic about this. We're self-reliant and we like things the way they are. We're not anxious to be flooded with city tourists, but we ourselves go to the city to spend money on certain things and wouldn't mind seeing a return flow of cash.

Gas isn't get any cheaper. If automobile travel gradually becomes prohibitively expensive, what options remain? Will we let the economies of rural areas collapse through neglect of transportation systems, when Canadians depend on them for a host of goods and services, including food, timber, and recreation?

This is an issue of fairness and equity. Governments are spending billions of dollars on urban public transport. Surely some thought can be spared for creating transportation systems that benefit all Canadians.

Ole Hendrickson is a founding member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Me and my bumper sticker...

27 May 2004 Janet McNeill

Everyone notices it - occasionally, I even get some pretty interesting comments on it from folks I don't know.

I think we all know that our cars are guilty of the things the bumper sticker mentions; we just don't want to think much about it. So I suspect seeing the bumper sticker makes people a little uncomfortable.

We know our cars are guilty of pollution - but we are very addicted to them all the same, aren't we? I actually know a few people who've consciously chosen not to own cars - they are at the top of my list of environmental heroes.

What about the rest of us? We average folks, who are car owners?

Are there things we can do - choices we can make - to acknowledge that car use is a very serious problem, and that we want to make at least some efforts toward solutions? Indeed there are. Here are some suggestions.

- When buying a vehicle, don't choose a gas guzzler; do your best to buy one that boasts reasonable gas mileage. Take a pass on a larger, more wasteful one that you don't really need. Good information on fuel economy of all vehicles sold in Canada is available on the Natural Resources Canada website. Fuel consumption ranges from 4 litres per 100 kilometers for a Toyota Prius to 27 litres per 100 km for a Dodge Ram 4x4.
- Aim to use your vehicle less than you currently do. Walk more - use a bicycle - carpool - and take public transportation whenever feasible.
- Set up some family rules about car use. When my children were young, we had a rule that they walked to school and to their friends' houses in town. I'm not saying they always appreciated this,

but I was pretty firm about it. In the long run, it isn't just better for environmental health, but for personal health too. Our legs were meant for walking, after all - let's use them more!

- Slow down on the highways. Your gas mileage will be better, you'll create less pollution, and, in all likelihood, you'll learn to enjoy the scenery more and even calm down a bit! As an added bonus, you'll help make the roads safer.
- Check your tire pressure often, and ensure that the tires are properly balanced. Regular tune-ups also help to ensure that your car is less of a pollution machine.
- Don't idle your car, and don't warm it up for inordinate lengths of time in the winter - both of which are hard on your engine and contribute to needless air pollution and climate change. According to Natural Resources Canada, if you're stopped for 10 seconds or more, you should turn off your engine.
- Do your errands in batches and plan your route to minimize the distance you travel.
- Have a car free day once a week.

Cars contribute to a large number of serious, stubborn environmental problems that I haven't even attempted to enumerate here.

Driving less is a challenge, but a worthy one that stands to make a major contribution to a cleaner environment and cleaner air.

Janet McNeill is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

The Friendly Art of Driving “Gently”

01 Apr 2003 Lynn Jones

Peter had made the point on an email listserve to which I belong, that hybrid gas-electric vehicles are not much more fuel efficient than his Volkswagon diesel cars, while costing significantly more. Having just spent the past month driving a new hybrid Honda Civic, I rose to its defense, suggesting that my husband Ole and I had been able to get the fuel consumption as low as 4.1 litres per 100 kilometers (in summer) driving our hybrid quite "carefully". Peter conceded that if driven "gently" the hybrids were capable of excellent fuel efficiency.

One of the best features of the new hybrid vehicles is an on-board fuel consumption display that tells you from moment to moment how much fuel you are consuming. The display provides a visual picture of fuel consumption. As you press the accelerator, you see the bar representing fuel consumption grow rapidly. You also see the fuel consumption shoot up sky-high when you start to move the vehicle from a dead stop. Conversely, as you coast down hills, you see the fuel consumption shrink to almost nothing. Sometimes it actually does shrink to nothing and the extra energy is channeled into charging the battery, which is also shown visually on the display. This kind of moment to moment feedback is great for changing one's driving habits.

Some older vehicles are equipped with similar devices as for example, is a 1995 Plymouth Voyager that we acquired second-hand and began driving several years ago. Driving that vehicle definitely changed my driving habits. Fuel consumption in the Voyager when driven the way most people drive is about 13 litres per 100 km. Driving "gently" you can get the consumption down to 11 litres per 100 km or less, which amounts to saving 400 litres of fuel each year with corresponding savings to the pocketbook, and reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and toxic air pollutants.

"Gently" is a very good word to describe the ways you start to drive when you have moment to moment feedback about fuel consumption. Generally you drive more slowly because every extra kilometer per hour increases the fuel you burn. This is a friendlier way to drive, as it turns out. You are more inclined to give way to pedestrians and other motorists when you are traveling more slowly.

Driving "gently" also means you accelerate gradually from a stopped position such as at an intersection. Far less fuel is consumed this way and as a result, pedestrians standing or walking nearby are subjected to much smaller quantities of toxic exhaust fumes from your tailpipe.

Ideally you avoid stopping at intersections as much as possible, by choosing your route to avoid stoplights and stop signs, and slowing down in advance of red lights so they will turn green by the time you get there.

It would be a good thing if fuel efficiency meters were made standard equipment on all vehicles. Failing that, it would be great if students who are learning to drive could have access to such equipment and instruction in energy efficient driving. There is a free teaching resource available from Natural Resources Canada's Office of Energy Efficiency for driving instructors. The Auto\$mart Student Driving contains a 40-minute video, an interactive CD-ROM and handouts that demonstrate how fuel-efficient driving is safe driving - and how saving fuel saves money and helps protect the environment by reducing vehicle emissions.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, driving a car is the most polluting thing most of us do on a daily basis. Learning to drive "gently" helps us pollute a little less while respecting pedestrians more, both key ingredients in the move to sustainable communities.

Lynn Jones is a founding member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Driving the speed limit

01 Mar 2003 Lynn Jones

Interestingly, Mr. Sullivan didn't mention the environment-friendly reasons for slowing down although there are lots of those which I'll get to in a minute. What he did talk about was decreased stress, increased enjoyment and increased safety - *just from driving the speed limit*. Here are a few of his comments:

"The first thing I noticed was the sunlight. Instead of squinting anxiously into the reflection of the sun on the car I was tailgating, I found myself cruising the open road, bathed in warm, restorative sunlight. So I

rolled down the window and stuck out my nose. Above the hydrocarbons rose the distinctly West Coast cachet of cedar and surf. Birds sang. I could hear them.

I realized I was finally "here", not in a perpetual lather to "get there" . . . "Here" is a great place to be. For one thing, it's not crowded. The space in front of you magically opens up; lights are synchronized for your smooth passage; curves are engineered to facilitate your turn . . .

Not only is it more fun to drive the speed limit, it's safer. Much safer. In the past two weeks, the quick stops and swerves I dismissed as routine just don't happen any more. I now stop for orange lights and pedestrians. Don't ask what I did before."

That should be plenty to convince us all to slow down, but needless to say there are environmental benefits as well.

Motor vehicle exhaust contains a long list of toxic chemicals including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, formaldehyde and polyaromatic hydrocarbons. Nitrogen oxide combines with other substances from exhaust to form ground level ozone, the major component of smog. Cancer, immune suppression, hypersensitivity, and respiratory problems including asthma are among the known human health effects of exposure to components of auto exhaust.

Nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide from exhaust are also converted to acids in the atmosphere. Diluted forms of these acids fall to earth in precipitation causing damage to lakes, rivers, forests, other vegetation, buildings, bridges and roads.

Driving the speed limit results in lower emissions. In fact, exhaust emissions decrease proportionally with fuel consumption. When you travel the speed limit instead of 10 or 20 kilometers above it as most people do, you reduce your vehicle's toxic emissions by 10 or 20 per cent.

Last but not least, motor vehicles are a major source of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas thought by many experts to be a major cause of global warming and climate change. Reducing your driving speed reduces your carbon dioxide emissions. A 20 per cent reduction in your speed will produce 20 per cent less carbon dioxide. Consider that the average Canadian car releases close to 5 tonnes of CO₂ each year. And that the average Canadian is being asked to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 1 tonne to help Canada meet its Kyoto commitments. If you regularly drive 20 kilometers above the posted limit, you can reduce your personal greenhouse gas emissions by close to one tonne, just by slowing down (with all the additional side-benefits noted by Mr. Sullivan)!

Please don't idle your engine

21 Sep 2002 Lynn Jones

But maybe it is time to give it some thought and even try to break the habit. Consider the following facts:

Idling wastes fuel and money

Canadian motorists idle their vehicles an average of five to 10 minutes per day. In the peak of winter, Canadians voluntarily idle their vehicles for a combined total of more than 75 million minutes a day. We idle about 40 percent less in summer, but it still amounts to an enormous waste of fuel and money.

Idling is bad for your engine

An idling engine is not operating at its peak temperature, which means that fuel combustion is incomplete. This leaves fuel residues that can condense on cylinder walls, where they can contaminate oil and damage engine components. For example, fuel residues tend to deposit on spark plugs. As the amount of engine idling increases, the average plug temperature drops and plug fouling is accelerated. This, in turn, can increase fuel consumption by 4 to 5 percent. Excessive idling can also allow water to condense in the vehicle's exhaust, which can lead to corrosion and reduce the life of the exhaust system.

Idling contributes to climate change

In Canada, the transportation sector is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Emissions from idling vehicles are *completely unnecessary and can be easily prevented - with the turn of a key.*

Idling pollutes the air

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, driving a car is the single most polluting thing that most of us do. Motor vehicles emit pollutants that cause a host of human health problems from minor eye irritation, to respiratory problems, lung damage, impaired immune function and cancer. Catalytic converters are designed to remove some of the pollutants from car exhaust, but they function less efficiently or not at all when the car is idling. Therefore, greater amounts of toxins are released during idling than when the car is moving.

Natural Resources Canada is taking the idling issue seriously. Its Office of Energy Efficiency maintains a website - "The Idle-free Zone" - that provides a great deal of information on the hazards of idling and the benefits of kicking the habit. It also provides an Anti-Idling Tool Kit for Communities and a calculator to help communities determine what the results of reduced idling would be in their town or city. I typed in Renfrew, Ontario and here's what it told me:

"If every driver of a light-duty vehicle in the Town of Renfrew avoided idling for 5 minutes a day, the Town could prevent 3 tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each day. That's 843 tonnes per year. Renfrew can also avoid wasting 979 litres of fuel at a cost of \$744.64 per day. Yearly this would save 357,155 litres of fuel at a cost of \$271,794."

According to the Natural Resources Canada, the rule of thumb for idling is "**If you're going to be stopped for more than 10 seconds (except in traffic) Turn Your Engine OFF!**"

It would be nice to think we could cut down our idling just by spreading the word. It's a great place to start, that's for sure.