

Driving in LA, From Bentleys to Shopping Carts

by Tom Peters

Driving in LA. You can love it, hate it or just tolerant it? Correct? Well, thanks to Uber and Lyft you could get some else to drive. Mass transit alternative? I've used the bus and light-rail system long enough to, well, hardly use it much anymore. I love LA traffic sometimes and tolerant it other times. If I was going to hate driving in the LA it would've probably have started on a drive from Santa Monica to Santa Barbara...THAT TOOK FIVE HOURS! This is typically a 2-hour drive. A double tanker had flipped over and closed the 101 between the Ojai Route 150 exit and Santa Barbra, forcing ALL traffic to channel around Hwy 150, which just a two-lane winding road. Mostly stand still mania. My wife, Jo An, suggested pulling over to park in downtown Ojai. We spent a splendid hour at a little piano bar for lunch finished off with a perfect martini. Jo An volunteered the drive into Santa Barbara, bless her heart. We laugh about it today.

I fell in love with LA traffic initially in the 70s. On a vacation from the steel mill in back home in Detroit, a dear friend in Orange County loaned me his old Mercedes to drive from Anaheim to Woodland Hills to see a friend's son play at the club. Mock orange in one section of the 5 freeway early in the trip, then the sweet,

strong scent of Jasmine on the 101 thru Studio City. Driving a nice, solid, old well-crafted Mercedes with the windows cracked and Steel Dan on the radio and these amazing smells drifting thru the vehicle. "I will live here one day", I thought.

I commented to a friend not too long after I arrived in LA that people tend to use their horns a bit aggressively and that on certain freeways in certain areas of Detroit, you may get your ass shot at. He said it's ok here to use your horn, just keep it short. That Tesla in front of you probably has a sophomore engineering major helping out Dad a little too much on the gigantic display scene. A tiny beep and the embarrassed father finally eases from the left-turn green arrow just as the two cars behind you lay the horn on you. But take a vehicle driven by someone who wants everyone to hear their music at a ridiculous volume may not be a good candidate to even use the tiny beep. The driver may not hear you and you'd be tempted to lay on the horn. Don't do it, not worth it. The psychic makeup of such a driver is way too complex to decipher, and let's face it, he may not give a rat's ass about you. The main thing is to live to survive the LA driving experience.

From the time I arrived here to stay in the late 90s, I studied the odd movement of traffic in order to somehow fit in. From Thomas guide to Google Maps to just kind of knowing where I'm going. When I'm out there, I like to feel I'm running

with the dogs. An endless variety of breeds, running in packs, showing off their magnificent speed, but we usually end up sniffing each other rear end. A study in contrast from timid to bold, serious to fun-loving, cooperative to just plain mean. It's a place we all meet, where 'running in to each other' is NOT a good thing.

In the neighborhood I live in, it's not unusual to see a Lamborghini or Porsche parked on the street with a 1999 Toyota Corolla sandwiched in between with a huge steering wheel lock visible through the dirty windows. Likewise, on the freeway, loaded with spotless Teslas, Bentleys, Jaguars and you name it, the car swerving thru traffic at a noticeable high speed is that 99 Corolla or Ford Focus with one taillight covered in duct tape. If you get off the freeway, pay attention at all intersections. Our homeless neighbors will test your patience when it comes to who has the 'right-of-way'. For a reality check perspective imagine moving all your worldly possessions in a shopping cart from where you slept last night to the non-profit or church near the beach for a free breakfast and surviving another day in LA.