

Baby you can drive my car.
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Robert John Andrews
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"The Art of Merging"
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Our son is considering buying a used car. He often bicycles to work. Given Colorado weather, bicycling can be a nuisance. He uses public transportation frequently (God bless public transportation) but he must adjust to the Fort Collins' Max Bus Rapid Transit schedule. That isn't always convenient.

The first car we helped him buy was a second hand black Corolla with a loose gear box. Two of our kids learnt to drive standard before I did. Fewer new drivers wanted stick shift cars, making them more affordable given our budget. I didn't grow up driving a stick, never did learn until I bought my first Miata. My buddies laughed at me for I'm far from a natural stick shift driver. We grew up in metropolitan New Jersey where stick shifts cause headaches. Example? The day after I earned my driver's permit, dad took me out for a test drive. Head this way, turn left, come to a full stop. Speed up. Let's try parallel parking. Turn right here. Go straight through the green light. Turn right onto the entrance ramp. I found myself merging at rush hour onto the congested Garden State Parkway in Clark heading toward Rahway. Dad laughed: "Get used to it."

I did. Despite living in Pennsylvania since 1978, I still switch from defensive driving into offensive driving whenever crossing the Delaware eastbound. Which brings me to offer comments about Pennsylvania drivers. Did the DMV teach you how to merge? Let review the art of merging. The yield sign applies to those merging, not to those traveling in the traffic lane. There basically are two bad types of merging drivers. First, there's the pushy, insistent ones who demand I pull over into the passing lane, which can be unnerving when a tractor trailer truck is barreling along. Watch out also when the car merging is battered and dented, driven breakneck by an old lady wearing a baseball cap, the bumper decorated with faded Sunoco stickers.

Then there's the timid driver who panics at the last minute and brakes abruptly, full stop. Slam, goes the car behind them. You too hit your brakes, distrusting their timing. Brake merging only works outside Philadelphia when traffic signals regulate those entering Route 476. The art of merging is simple: those merging adjust their speed to accommodate a safe entry. Get that? You adjust to me. Repeat after me: The yield sign applies to those merging.

Let this Jersey driver weaned on merging into the Lincoln Tunnel and highways funneling you into one lane due to construction add an additional comment. Learn how to zipper. Proceed as far as you can in your lane until you must merge together. Then alternate. It's that simple. Zipper. Jams occur when obnoxious drivers refuse to take turns. The cool, seasoned, mature driver also gives a nod or a nice version of the Jersey salute to the other driver. Courtesy, cooperation, works.

"Baby you can drive my car. Beep-beep, beep-beep, yeah!"

Our son has boiled his choice down to two options. The first choice isn't terribly glamorous. It has some mileage on it, older than he'd prefer. It's not as if he can afford a BMW. Still, this car has its merits. Not only is it comfortable, it's been maintained professionally. It's a good performance car. It has passed every inspection. The motor is sound. The wheels sport good tread. The ignition works. The battery

stays charged, no acid leakage. Best, it runs on 32 miles per gallon. It's not fancy but it's a reliable, safe, and sound vehicle, sure to get him where he wants or needs to go.

The other choice in the lot has missing lug nuts. The bald tires are over-inflated. Its warranty has expired. There is, however, a hand written note in the glove compartment declaring this beautiful car is exempt from all future inspections. The check engine light remains lit. It leaks oil. The driver's side mirror is secured by duct tape. The starter groans and grinds. It lacks air bags. The battery needs frequent jumping. The muffler hangs by a wire, coughing out toxic exhaust clouds. One headlight is broken. There are no seat belts. There are stains in the back seat. It gets 12 miles per gallon of gas. With a bent alignment, it tends to veer right all the time. Its transmission slips into reverse unpredictably.

"Dead Man's Curve, it's no place to play. Dead Man's Curve, you best keep away..."

Which car should our son buy?