

Sex? It's the wheel thing

By Ruth Ostrow

THERE'S an adage about cars that often does the New Age rounds.

It goes like this: You can tell what a person is like in bed by how they drive. Do they tend to be fast and furious, impatient? Are they control freaks? Are they goal-orientated or do they amble along enjoying the journey? Do they tail-gate? Do they lose concentration easily?

I think about this often as I drive along, noting my speed and agility. Today I'm fast and desperate. But then again I'm late for an appointment and in dire need of a "quickie".

All jokes aside, how we drive may or may not indicate how we are as lovers but it probably is a very accurate metaphor for how we live our lives. Because every nanosecond is a microcosm of the grand macrocosm. In other words, everything we do is a reflection of how we tend to be in the world at large. And driving is a perfect snapshot of a moment in time when we are being our true selves.

For instance, I know drivers who always get lost. Others who try to control the whole road. Or turn into do-gooders. I had a driver follow me the other day for 10 minutes. He jumped out of the car, when I stopped, in order to inform me that I'd been driving recklessly in a bicycle zone. He looked like the sort of person who chased cars as a matter of pride to inform errant drivers of their ways, and probably personally saved countless cyclists from extinction.

There are people I know who actually yell at traffic lights, pray to them, or have personal relationships with them. Some victim-types feel persecuted when they miss the green. One guy I know used to react to "red" like a bull with a matador, charging through the light with rebellious glee.

There are drivers like my husband who shrug when other cars cut in front of them. "Toot him ... the bastard!" I yell, trying to grab the horn. "What's the point?" he says. "Do you think you can change people? Do you think tooting will do any good?"

I sit flummoxed, trying to explain that expressions of road-rage are not there to do "good".

I know drivers who become enraged by other cars. People who call themselves humanists can exhibit total prejudice towards older cars because they cruise at a slower speed. Fancy cars often become objects of pure hatred for drivers with money issues, even though they may just be company cars on loan to some poor employee.

Then there's me: Driving along, hopelessly distracted by my fantasy world, fiddling with the cassette player, eyes off the road as I fossick in my little, coloured box for the exact, right piece of music. Trying to create the perfect car ambience, the sensual car experience, while people honk me in fury.

"This cassette? Ahhhhh, no. Not romantic enough. Not the right mood. This one? Yes, gorgeous but I hate the second song." Rewind... "Oops too far." Fast-forward... "Oops, where has that right song gone?"

"Oops," I said, a few years ago, as I drove straight into the back of another car.

Which is the driving personality I want to discuss here. Most of us share this one - however it manifests itself. We become distracted. We don't focus on what we are doing. We're not present for the driving, chatting instead, singing along to the radio, talking on mobiles, worrying about our destination, or lost in some story inside our heads.

And this wanting to be somewhere else, or to be doing something else, is probably the cause of most accidents on the road, and most unhappiness in life. My mother, who practises yoga, once said: "Be aware of your body when you are driving. Notice if your brows are knitted tight and your face is scrunched up. Look at your shoulders and how you are breathing."

This, she told me, is the way of suddenly bringing attention back to where you really are, and who you are really being on the road. And if driving is an indication of who we are in life, then checking tension in the body is a great snapshot of how we operate when talking to friends, when ordering at a restaurant, or working.

Mostly we are unconscious, stressed, distracted. Which means we miss the nuances. A girlfriend told me her engine blew up recently because she was not checking the temperature gauge, which had slowly risen to boiling point. This woman had just come out of a relationship which had the same problem. We laughed at the metaphor. But we both understood the lesson: The only way to drive is mindfully. Being aware of the surrounds, but not distracted by them. Being mindful of arriving, but enjoying the journey. Observing the sign-posts along the way, but not taking the messages too personally.

And if you're a day-dreamer like me, the lesson is this: Keep your mind and wandering hands off those musical knobs. Mmmmmm. Maybe driving is a metaphor for sex after all!

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