

Road Musings (or Cars vs non-Cars) By Nick Jilek

Spring is here (well, some days, anyway), and with it come the pleasant days and warm evenings we enjoy spending outside. In our rural township, our cars, SUVs, and pickups will be sharing the roads with couples and families out for walks, joggers, bicyclists, folks on horseback, motorcyclists, and farm vehicles. In all cases these present challenges for drivers – there is never a time to drive while distracted (honest, officer, I wasn't texting ... I was reading my email!) – but it can be especially dangerous during our warm months.

Many of the roads in our township are posted at **45 mph**, with good reason. We live in an area of gentle (and some not so gentle) rolling hills, resulting in road and driveway entrances that cannot be seen until we are almost upon them. Add to this mix a pedestrian or a bicyclist or two, a swerve to the center of the road, and oncoming traffic coming over the hill ... and you get the idea.

Bicyclists, horseback riders, and motorized vehicles use the *right* side of the road. Pedestrians should walk on the *left* side of the road *facing* traffic. Additionally, it might be a lot safer if dog walkers have their dog on a lead. Wisconsin State Statute 346.21 states that “The operator of a motor vehicle shall yield the right of way to livestock being driven over or along any highway but any person in charge of such livestock shall use reasonable care and diligence to open the roadway for vehicular traffic.”

With spring planting, farm equipment on our roadways deserves our special attention also. Remember that farmers are on the job and have to get equipment from one location to another. Wisconsin law was changed in 2014 making it illegal to pass farm equipment in no passing zones! Be cautious and be courteous.

Ah, yes, ... motorcycles. As a rider myself, I am well aware many drivers simply do not see motorcycles. I'm still amazed when my three headlights aren't adequate and someone pulls out right in front of me, but I'm not surprised - as it happens so often. About four years back I

had to take the ditch when the driver of an oncoming SUV took my lane while swerving around a jogger. I'm still convinced the driver never saw me. Drivers PLEASE be aware of and on the lookout for motorcyclists. And motorcyclists, remember many drivers will never see you.

One needs to be especially careful when the sun is low in the sky (mornings / evenings). This could have happened to anyone, but it happened to me two summers ago while I was a passenger in a vehicle. We were heading west on Evergreen late in the day, and were about 1/2 mile east of JJ heading into bright sun, which was just above the hills to the west. The sunlight was blinding where we were, but the intersection of Evergreen and JJ and several hundred feet of Evergreen prior to that intersection were shaded by the hills (the sun had already set there). The driver was doing less than 35 mph due to the blinding sun, and we were already slowing for the stop sign ahead when we crossed the threshold into the shade ... and almost immediately saw three folks on horseback less than fifty feet ahead. To the driver's credit, the brakes were applied before I completed shouting HORSES!, and a tragedy was averted. When 'blinded by the light', drivers need to slow and be extremely cautious. Folks need to be aware when they are in a shaded area and a vehicle is coming towards them out of full sun, there is an excellent chance that driver will be unable to see them and unaware of their presence in the roadway.

There are lessons here for all ... for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and horse aficionados. All y'all be careful out there, and enjoy the outdoors!

Nick Jilek has lived on Evergreen Drive since 1993, when he and his family moved west from way out east in Pleasant Valley township.