

Between the intersections

By Wes Fleming, BTS Editor

Two recent traffic incidents while I was riding a motorcycle have made me wonder just exactly what the hell people are thinking when they're out driving on our nation's roads.

In early June, I was piloting my sidecar rig – with my daughter in the tub – west on I-70, outside the city limits of St. Louis but still in the sphere of influence of that city's suburbs. I don't recall exactly what the speed limit was, but I know I was moving at about 65 mph. In my right-side mirror, I could see a Mer-

area during the night on Friday, 29 June. The result of that storm was just utter devastation to our electrical grid. As I'm writing this in early July, both PepCo and Dominion are "hoping" to have power restored to everybody by "Thursday or Friday," as an interviewee said on the radio this morning. The power at my house was out for about 36 hours, requiring us to sacrifice most of what was in our refrigerator, but otherwise causing us no harm.

However, the behavior of

as well as the city of Fredericksburg. Many traffic lights were out in the US 1 corridor, but more so in the downtown areas.

I remember quite clearly learning three things about disabled traffic lights. If the light is blinking red, treat it as a stop sign. If the light is blinking yellow, approach the intersection with caution and proceed carefully, but stopping is not required. Lastly – and apparently least in the minds of my fellow drivers – if the light is out completely,



Do you know what to do?

cedes a ways back weaving through traffic as it gained on me. Suddenly, the car was behind me, beside me and then in front of me so close that I had to give my brakes a good squeeze to be sure I didn't tap its rear bumper. Imagine my surprise to see the car was sporting Maryland plates, reminding me that home is never far away.

The second incident was actually a series of incidents. No doubt you remember the massive storm that ripped through the Washington, DC

Virginia drivers while the power was out was absolutely, utterly appalling. Due to some family obligations, I was at my mother's house near Lake Anna when the storm came through – the power there was out less than 12 hours, something I'm sure correlates to their proximity to a nuclear power plant. To get to my home in northern Virginia, I had to ride through the back roads of Louisa and Spotsylvania Counties, then up the I-95/US 1 corridor in Spotsylvania, Stafford, Prince William and Fairfax Counties

treat that intersection as if EVERYBODY HAS A STOP SIGN. That means come to a complete stop, yield to somebody on the right that's entering the intersection, then proceed with caution.

By the time I'd reached Prince William County, more drivers than I could keep track of had honked at me as I came to a stop at a dead light. Luckily, I'd just gotten a Stebel Nautilus horn installed on my R1200GS, so I gave back better honks than I got. Still, I witnessed dozens – scores! – of violations of the

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law about treating a dead light like a stop sign. It got to the point where I was afraid to even slow down at these intersections, let alone stop, for fear of being rear-ended by a driver that was not aware of this law. It made for a very tense ride home.

I wish I could say the more urbane citizens of Fairfax County were hip to the dead light law, but unfortunately, travelling the Braddock Road corridor was probably more dangerous than being on US 1 because the shoulders are quite inadequate for a quick escape should a car approach too rapidly from behind. Once I reached home, and after I cleared the fallen tree debris from my driveway, I put the bike in the garage and switched over to my four-wheeled vehicle, a Honda Element. At least that way, I figured, I'd have some crush space and the benefits of the airbags. Still, I thought about wearing my helmet as I drove across town to get a shower and find a friend's house with cable, internet access and air conditioning.

I'm certainly no legal expert, but I think it pays to review the driving laws of your locale. For instance, I've recently learned about Virginia's "move over" law – the requirement that you change lanes away from an emergency vehicle, such as a police car, fire engine or ambulance, which is stopped on the side of the road. I've always done this – or at least tried to – out of courtesy and concern for safety of the officer, fireman or paramedic working on the shoulder. I had no idea that not only is it a law, but failing to obey this law is a criminal offense – not a traffic violation. You can go to jail for 12 months if convicted of failing to move over.

Many of us were excited last year when Virginia passed the law allowing motorcycles to proceed through a red light that doesn't change, but do you know the specific provisions of that law? You must wait through two complete cycles of the light or two minutes (whichever is longer) and still yield the right of way to any oncoming vehicle. Failing to do so

can see you charged with reckless driving – as can passing a stopped (with lights flashing) school bus, overtaking an emergency vehicle in traffic, overtaking any vehicle at the crest of a hill or at a railroad crossing or driving 80 mph or faster anywhere in Virginia. Reckless driving, like failing to move over, is a criminal offense that can result in jail time.

No matter how long you've had your driver's license, I encourage you to find a website, book or DMV manual that goes over the specifics of the driving laws in the state you live in and the states you ride in. I live in Virginia, but I only just found out that if I drive in Maryland, I fall under their "implied consent" laws that require me to submit to a chemical test to determine if I'm driving under the influence of alcohol. Failing to do so will get my license suspended for six months.

Obeying the laws of the road is critically important, but you can't obey them if you don't know them. Ride safe!



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