

DUCKING THE APPLE

Fock 1: Taconic Tirade

So, state #2 of RR2K was rung up, *ka-ching, ka-ching*, and it was ... uh ... back to ... uh ... State #1, New York. Hmmmm. I ask you, your honor, is this progress??

Well, yes it is, sud-breath. Unless you soar upon silvery wings, or float upon the frothy sea, or go international through the Great White North, you just do not leave New England without passing through New York. It's another thing that eats at us Red Sox fans: bad enough that we get perennially shit on by the Yankees, and that even the spazzo Mets can laugh and say "Buckner in '86" at us, but we also have to put up some cash to cross either the George Washington Bridge or the Tappan Zee Bridge when we want to go for a drive around the USA. But, with typical nor'eastern pluck, we just shrug, flip NY a perfunctory bird, and smugly roll on through.

Now, what or who the hell is or was a Tappan Zee, you ask?? Good thing I'm here for ya: *an Act approved by the [NY State] Legislature and signed by the Governor [of NY] on February 28, 1956, officially named the structure the "Tappan Zee Bridge." In pre-colonial days, this area was the home of the Tappan tribe of Indians; "zee" (sea) is the Dutch name for open expanse of water.* [<http://www.tzbsite.com/history/present/index.html>] So there ya go, wiggo.

Blue Man seemed to want to stay off the Interstate system for the night (probably knowing how many I-miles he would be logging in the next month), so we opted for one of the jewels of the New York State Parkway network, and headed south down the Taconic Parkway towards New York City.

Is it *toward* or *towards*? I never know. The dictionary doesn't either, foisting some bushwa on us that either one is acceptable. In reality, I bet there are savage arguments in top offices of dictionaries across the nation over the validity of that "s". Grown men have probably come to blows at Happy Hour over that either-or letter. Women in smart business suits have probably cat-fought on the elevator after yet another high level "s-or-no-s" meeting. Meanwhile, Merriam-Webster still vacillates...

So, if you ever take the Taconic, take the Taconic by day. By night is just too damn fast. I'm sure it's even faster by day, but at least then you can see various turns and rolls better. At night, it can be downright harrowing.

Like its cousin, the nearby Saw Mill Parkway, it appears to have been created as a divided scenic stroll-in-the-park kind of road that the well-to-do's (as opposed to the ne'er-do-well's) who lived north of NYC could unwind on in their big Packards and Cords. It's a succession of gentle rolls and swerves and curves, designed for a gentle pace.

But population and progress brought higher volume and higher velocity to the Taconic, and the two-lane road on the one-lane roadbed and the accompanying aggressive goddammit-I'm-taking-this-goddamn-road-to-save-goddamn-time traffic leaves precious little room for error. You're constantly hugging one curb or the other, with eyes leaping from road to mirrors.

Blue Man, like Max before him, is a marvelous open road vehicle: smooth ride, strong heart, comfy chair (*the comfy chair? the comfy chair?*) to sink back into and enjoy the flow of the highway as it whirrrrs by beneath you. Parkways are a delight too, in normal parkway circumstances.

But it never fails on a road like this: you weary of trying to zoom along and keep pace with these Lexuses (Lexi??) and Camaros and other such cats that thrive on low-to-the-ground maneuvering, and seem to think the parkway is the fruggin' Autobahn. So you give up and say, "Screw it! To the slow lane, Blue Man, where we can chill and ponder life's imponderables in peace!" You slide over, nestle in at the speed limit, set cruise control, and let the zoomers zoom, wondering why you so often tend to be a zoomer yourself.

The speed limit seems delightfully easy. Your stress levels drop right off the charts. Blue Man seems content. And you realize just how far forward in your chair you were sitting. Settling back into the cushions, and shifting into one-finger mode on the steering wheel, you get that life-is-good-again feeling.

But then – of course – some douchebag has to ruin it.

At peace with 55, you suddenly find yourself rolling up much too quickly behind somebody. This jamoke is campaigning very hard to keep the word S-L-O-W in the phrase "slow lane," and it is just too slow to tolerate.

It's odd how there is a zone there, right between "well, I don't need to go *this* damn fast," and "hey, I don't want to go *this* frikkin' slow!" The road allows you, by posted decree, 55 miles per hour, and 39 just *won't do*. You know you have the skills -- when properly focused and motivated by whatever untold urgencies -- to navigate this serpentine route at 70, and that the 55 mph "limit" is really just a "least common denominator" kind of thing, like the fastest speed that the lamest driver could be expected to handle.

But even when there is no press of time, or no rush to a goal, there is still a bare minimum to hit. I mean, if you drive *this* slowly, then something in the world is passing you by. At the very least, you don't want the other motorists eying *you* with disdain for being the dam in the river of progress.

So you see a good opening in the fast lane, illuminate your left flasher, and pull out to pass Mr. (or Ms.) Snail's Pace. Then, of course, the next thing you know, you have high beams flashing in your rear-view mirror, and some meathead is on your ass, all pissed off that you had the unmitigated gall to pull into his open lane. To protest your violation, he has accelerated to force his bad karma up your tailpipe.

Well, chill, Mr. Beams, I'll be past this guy in a Sacramento Second.

But, by now, Snail has either been jarred from reveries unknown, or has hung up his freaking phone, or has just plain been shamed into finding his gas pedal. At any rate, he chooses this moment to boost his speed, and decides that letting you pass him would just be too much of an emasculating concession. And the Sacramento Second becomes a protracted road rally.

All you wanted was a casual speed limit cruise, and now you're locked in a Stupidity Stampede. Fine, you decide, and squeeze the gas, eventually overpowering Snail's resistance. His resistance is pretty weak, of course -- more show than go; he didn't really want to go that fast -- but it made him feel like less of a wuss that you had to work harder to get by him.

You hit your right turn signal with a screw-the-snail attitude, and pull in right in front of the bastard. Beams harrumphs his way by you ... and then, satisfied at having regained the lead, pulls over into your lane in front of you! Snail dude, all flustered and insulted, pulls out with an audacious zoom, passes you both, feels manly as all get-out for a Sacramento Second, and then gradually pulls back over, in front of Beams!

But his ire quickly expires -- he is a spineless son of a bitch, after all -- and you soon feel your speed dropping again. You wait for Mr. Beams to pass him and be on his sneering way, but he has become preoccupied with a CD, or a beer, or his crotch or something. So, with a here-we-go-again sigh, you pull out to pass. And, sure enough, the oh-no-you-don't antics recur.

At that point, you say fuck 'em all, and announce out loud that the *only* one on the whole damn highway system who is NOT a goddamn motherfucker is *YOU*. You sit upright in your seat, and grip the wheel with resolve. You settle neatly into Snailshit's blind spot, edge to the left of the lane so Beamer Boy can't see around you, and dedicate the next several minutes of your life to antagonizing the living shit out of these hosers. You cackle with glee, turn up the tunes, adjust your mirrors so they reflect directly *backwards*, leave your turn signal on -- it doesn't matter which one -- and marvel at how easily you can be shifted from serene to sadistic. Must be the Boston upbringing.

You match Snailsnot's pace, no matter how much he slows or fasts. Beambag gives up and jumps in behind Snail, figuring he can shove the little puissant ahead of you. You take your cue and begin to slowly edge ahead of Snaily Waily. Beams vaults back behind you, so you let Snailguy catch up, and gently lag back into his blind spot.

This diabolical dance can go on for miles. You know you have them both totally enraged, and you snicker with satisfaction.

Then, way up ahead, you spy a traffic light. It's glowing green, but, as a road vet, you know that it is the light that controls crossing traffic that really matters. You see a few cars waiting on each side of the road, so you know the light is due to change. You also know that Beamboy can't see around you, and that Snailslug will slow down if you do.

So you ease off an MPH or two, and, sure enough, Snailsnot does too. Beamboy, obviously foaming at the mouth by now, cuts hard right and falls in behind Senor Snail.

At that point, the light turns yellow. But you wait, make no change in speed, no telling variation that could give away your position of advantage. Snailshit -- balls-less sucker that you knew he was -- relents, and slows for the red. You maintain position and begin to slow, trapping and blinding Beambaby, and forcing him onto his hated brake pedal.

Experience has taught you that the yellow signal on a major thoroughfare lasts a bit longer than the standard 4-5 seconds of the average road, so you hold all the way through the five count, and then punch the gas. You soar, alone, through the intersection. Two exasperated motorists lie in your triumphant wake. You hit the emergency flashers a couple of times as a taunting farewell gesture, and are soon gone into the night.

But, by now having given yourself over to Spirits of Nasty Driving, you concoct one more taunt, one more dash of salt in the wound for your tormentors turned tormentees.

With clear sailing ahead and behind, you pull the van over and get out to take a leisurely roadside leak. When Beambitch and Snailscrotum come along, you stand there with one hand servicing your Walt Whitman, and give them a friendly "Hey, how ya doin'?" See ya on down the road, good buddy" wave over your shoulder as they barrelass on by.

And if you catch up with either of them later on, you just ignore 'em. You riled 'em once already. You won. If they are damn fool enough to mess with your road savvy again, then you'll just find another way to tool on 'em.

Anyway, like I said, the Taconic Parkway is nice, but, like most roads, it is far, far better when it's empty. I'll bet it was truly top-notch back in the day.

Night #1 of Roadrage2002 was spent in a highway Cervix Area. They work OK. In a couple of decades of roadtrippin', I've never been asked to leave one, despite the always-posted "No Overnight Parking" signs.

The up sides are significant, with any-hour rest room availability being paramount. This ain't all that critical when the P demon nudges you awake; opening the side doors of the van, and using the sheer bulk of the vehicle as a screen will usually suffice.

Always plan ahead when pulling in for the night: scope out where vegetative screens are, where east is, which end and side provides the best slope angle for sleeping, etc. That last one (no, not the "etc.") is pretty flexible; Blue Man can sleep me at any angle. Being taller than the bed is long, I always sleep diagonally, so, depending on the pitch of the parking spot, the head can be either corner right behind the seats, or either corner by the back doors. The head must always be above the feet, of course, or else you wake up schizo.

And even though BM's curtains are dark and thick, there are slim gaps, and though the streetlights, headlights, and building lights seem insignificant when you first pull in and hunker down, they can all be every invasive little buggers in the wee hours of the morning. So, pointing away from them requires some forethought also.

You didn't think that you just pulled in and parked anywhere, did you??

For instance, always pick a spot at either end of the parking area, rather than in the middle. The volume of vehicular traffic is the same everywhere, when you do the math, but motor noise from maneuvering and restarting cars, foot traffic, annoying voices, and nosey eyes (that's a cool little phrase, huh?) are way too abundant near the shithouse.

That's all it is to me: a shithouse. Vending machines, telephones, maps, coupons, coffee, and whatever else might be banging around in there, serve no purpose to a well-stocked and fully-equipped roadtripper. Even the urinals are extraneous to me. [Funny how "telephone" became "phone," while "television" became "TV"; I guess "TP" was already taken by something more fundamental.]

On nights when rain pours, or flurries fly, or temperatures wax arctic, or winds whip, the walk to and from the shitter just to take a leak is counterproductive: foot travel time round trip through those unpleasant elements easily exceeds the 37 seconds necessary for an average drain. Plus, once properly located, with anticipation of such needs pre-considered (i.e., parking with the side doors facing a bush) all that is usually needed is to open one of those side doors halfway, kneel on the van floor and lean out just a little bit. Walt might get a tad wet or chilled, but he's a trooper, and the rest of me stays sheltered.

And while we're on the subject of shithouses – let's hope we don't revisit this topic a whole lot – here's a little memo to all shithouse designers and engineers: *don't build noiseless shithouses!!* You gotta have some fan running non-stop, or pipe in some godawful elevator music, or have a mechanical something whirring and thrumming. A silent shithouse is *horrible!* Whether it's your own noises, or the grunts, spurts, and splashes reverberating from the next stall, it just ain't conducive to good comfortable crappery.

Single sheets gotta go too. Be serious!

And those voyeur-friendly wide cracks in the stall doorways. What's up with those?? One crap castle somewhere in New Jersey had the tiniest damn doors I've ever seen! They were like old-time saloon doors, size-wise, and about as concealing as if you duct-taped a towel horizontally across the doorway. Definitely not good for the shy and modest. I guess it's good if you want to compare elbow angle or back posture within the wipe technique, but I have no desire to share that with the world, or to have it shared with me.