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## Traffic Lights Turn Me Red

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## Traffic Lights Turn Me Red

By Mark Routhier

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, February 26, 2014

OK, I admit it: I have road rage, just not the kind that makes me drive four feet behind someone who has made me angry, or leads me to any other kind of exacting vengeance on other drivers.

Other drivers rarely do anything that makes me insane. Yes, there are people who cut me off, or people who drive 20 mph in a 35 mph zone. That does make me a little crazy, but I don't flip anyone off or pass them with a disgusted look, or in any way endanger myself or another driver because I think they're driving stupid. I *have* flipped off someone who has flipped me off, but I prefer responding with a peace sign. That really gets under their skin.

No, my road rage is comical. I yell obscenities at the top of my lungs. I won't go into specifics because the things I yell are unprintable. But if I were to set up a camera and then forget it's there, I'm sure the resulting video would go viral and people would laugh heartily about what an idiot I am. And I do my best to spare people driving with me, although sometimes I am told to calm down.

I have a transponder in my car so I can stay in the through lanes at tollbooths and so I can actually get off the Florida's Turnpike at my mom's exit, where you cannot exit unless you have one. (Umm, why?)

I am convinced that someone, perhaps the Department of Transportation, or SunPass, or maybe even a mischievous friend who knows I have this problem, has added a special feature to my transponder that *makes traffic lights change to red* as I pull up to them. Nothing drives me more insane than watching a light turn yellow at the distance where it is unsafe to accelerate through it, because in Orlando, the lights stay red *forever*. If you

get stopped at a traffic light just as it turns, you might as well have a kitchen in your car because there's enough time to make dinner before it turns green again.

In order to not die of an aneurysm, a self-inflicted rupture of an innocent blood vessel from screaming, I check my emails while I wait. Or distract myself with Facebook. Or play Scrabble. Might as well get some work done, because this light will never change back to green.

I should just keep my computer out or have a pad handy to see if I can write a play when I'm stuck at lights. I will only write at stoplights and it'll probably take less than a month to write a full-length play. But here's the problem with that. You become focused and then someone else is going to get road rage because they have to honk to get you to go.

Here are some specific places in Central Florida where it's particularly maddening. If you are driving north on Mills Avenue, say 4 to 6 p.m.(ish), and you come to Colonial Drive, the light lasts about three full minutes (an eternity in idle time), and then the green lasts less than a minute. Many drivers seem to not have any urgency when the light turns green, so if you are far back, you might have to wait through three lights. That's about 11 minutes to get through an intersection.

My brother lives at the end of Sand Lake Road near Apopka-Vineland Road and, because of the traffic and lights, it has taken me 18 minutes to go from I-4 to his house about 1½ miles away. I can walk it faster.

And while driving on University Boulevard between Semoran Boulevard and the campus at UCF, the lights seem to be timed so you actually never see two greens in a row. I commute between Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Loch Haven Park and UCF, and I prefer to take the surface streets because getting trapped in traffic on the highways is even more miserable than getting trapped in traffic on the surface streets, where you can perhaps be wily and find a way around it.

This is the commute where my play will be written: from Mills Avenue going north to Orange Avenue, to Aloma Avenue, to Semoran Boulevard, to University Boulevard, and then six miles on University. Or it is where I will spontaneously combust. I will be driving from my office hours at UCF to a production meeting at Orlando Shakespeare Theater at 3:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon (the reverse of the commute I just described), and as my evil transponder makes the seventh light I've pulled up to turn red, I will start screaming obscenities at the top of my lungs and I will just disappear.

I will spontaneously combust like the drummer in Spinal Tap, and I will be sent to an endless sprawl where I always have to be in my car pulling up to traffic lights—that are turning red. And Cerberus will be my co-pilot.

*Mark Routhier is an assistant professor of directing and acting at the University of Central Florida and director of new play development at Orlando Shakespeare Theater, a partnership with the university. He can be reached at [markr@orlandoshakes.org](mailto:markr@orlandoshakes.org).*