

Truck drivers more than earn their fair share of the road

Editor's note: It seems truckers, engaged in all sorts of short-haul and long-haul jobs are increasingly coming under flack from both car drivers and the general public. We sent intrepid HHTW reporter Oksana Buhel on an overnight trek to Toledo with Georgetown trucker Dale Holman and she filed this report.

By Oksana Buhel

Listening to Dale Holman criticize "those cowboys," you would never guess he shares his profession with the same "cowboys" who are racing down highways, passing without signaling and driving in the passing lane.

Holman, of Georgetown and in his early 30s, is indeed a truck driver and proud of his profession, but would also be the first to denounce such drivers, and he assured me he is only

one of a growing number of truckers who feel this way.

He listed all his grievances while we bounced along to Toledo, Ohio (I don't care if those seats have air cushions - I felt like I was bustin' a bronco at the local rodeo), to drop off one load and pick up another. Holman drives down to Toledo five times a week - an 11-hour run, assuming, of course, a friendly customs officer does not want to chat for an extended period of time.

Holman has been driving for 16 years. During this time, he says he's seen a lot, heard a lot and learned a lot. "Everyday on the road, I learn something new," Holman said. "Not like those cowboys who think they know everything."

Holman's beef with the cowboys ranged from speeding to driving through residential areas with their "jake brake" on.

Holman showed me how a "jake brake" - an exhaust brake which takes wear off brake pads, creates a considerable amount of noise. "Sure it has its benefits," Holman admitted, "but it's pretty hard to fall asleep to. I always turn mine off when I drive through a residential area."

He acknowledged concerns of speeding, and said truck drivers should use common sense to interpret speed limits. "Just because a speed limit says 50," Holman said, "doesn't mean you have to go 50 - you can go 40. You can't just stop on a dime in one of these things."

For those truck drivers who are reluctant to use their common sense, the Department of

Transportation (DOT) will impress its common sense on the drivers.

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"Things have really changed over the last three years," Holman explained. Drivers are now required to fill out a log book of daily hours worked, and be able to present it on request. A driver is not allowed to be in the vicinity of his truck more than 15 hours a day, which includes 13 hours driving time and two hours warming up the truck, doing repairs or having anything to do with the vehicle. After that time, it's eight hours sleep - like it or not, tired or not.

Late night 401 drivers may see tractor trailers pulled off on the shoulder of the highway with brake lights on, but no driver in

sight. These drivers are more than likely curled up in their beds in the back of the cab, catching enough winks to enable them to safely continue on their journey. (And don't be fooled - those beds are pretty darned cozy as I learned during our trip when my eyelids somehow became magnetically attracted to one another.)

"It (the DOT) is cleaning up the industry and forcing us to improve," Holman pointed out. "We must get everybody on a level set of rules, not a different set for the cowboys."

Holman is aware that cowboys or not, truckers are not regarded highly by the average automobile driver. "Some people say we just whip along, tearing up the road, but it's not true," he said. "We pay our fair share of road tax (included in

the price of gasoline) to maintain the highways - just like salespersons who drive a lot."

Holman admitted that to drive such a large vehicle, you must be in good physical shape and know the rules of the road. As part of the DOT's more rigid enforcement of safe truck driving, drivers are expected to have a medical examination every two years and a written test every three years. "For anyone, it's a privilege to drive - not a right," Holman said. "But for truckers, we have to earn it and keep earning it."

Although Holman is adamantly against the "cowboys," he admitted not all accidents occur because of them. "You'd be surprised what I've seen car drivers do on the road," he told me, as a female driver passed on

my side, painting her nails.

Holman listed various activities he had seen drivers perform while driving: coffee drinking, cellular phoning, lap-top computer typing, newspaper reading (he pointed out these activities were often done simultaneously), pantyhose changing, and "romantic adventuring." "For some reason, people are most frisky around Baltimore," he claimed. For us less frisky Canadians, Holman blames technology as the greatest diversion.

Holman assumes most conflicts of interest between truck drivers, automobile drivers and residents can be solved through mutual

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respect. Regarding the local problem of trucks on Maple Ave. in Georgetown which residents are trying to ban, Holman believes drivers should slow down and turn off their "jake brake." Residents, on the other hand, should realize that as long as businesses are located in the downtown area, trucks will have to come into town. "It's almost impossible to find a route which does not go by a school or a residential area," Holman added.

At the end of our 14-hour trip, our friendly customs officer did want to chat for an extended period of time, I got out of the truck (my bottom was still vibrating) "tired," but wiser.

First thing I learned was that some drivers (both of trucks and cars) do, in fact, get their license out of a Cracker Jack box. Second thing - next time I change my pantyhose in the car, I'll make sure I'm not driving beside a truck.

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