

Champion reporter Melanie Hennessey got a crash course on what it's like to be a Town of Milton snowplow driver — including all the demands that go with it — during a ride-along with Chris Tonner last Tuesday afternoon.

Photo by
GRAHAM
PAINE



S'no'w easy job

Avoiding parked cars on road often like "dodging a minefield," says Town snowplow driver

It would appear that old man winter's intent on keeping Milton's snowplow drivers busy right up until spring this year. Last Tuesday Champion reporter Melanie Hennessey spent the afternoon with Town plow driver Chris Tonner to get an inside look at the challenges behind this demanding seasonal work.

It's been said that walking a mile in someone else's shoes can make you better understand where they come from.

This saying rang true last Tuesday afternoon when I took to the roads of Milton with Town plow driver Chris Tonner, giving me a new-found appreciation for those who work behind the scenes all winter keeping the streets clear.

Pulling out of the operations yard on Nipissing Road, Mr. Tonner, a Milton native who's in his third winter plowing the Town's streets, opened up about his job, its ups and downs and what makes him love it. Although he's been on the job since 7:30 in the morning, he's still raring to go.

"It's (snowplowing) something I've wanted to do since I was a kid," he said, turning in to the Hawthorne Village subdivision. "I just really enjoy it. When I see a snowstorm coming, I get kind of excited. It's excitement on a different level."

Adjusting a few levers, he lowered the plow and the wing — the plow on the side of the truck — and started clearing the snow away from the storm that started the night before. "Every year since I started, we've acquired more and more roads," he said. "These small streets have made our job more difficult."

In addition to the narrow streets, another challenge local snowplow operators face presented itself on the road ahead — parked cars.

Approaching the vehicle, Mr. Tonner expertly raised the wing, leaving just enough space to make it by, then lowered it again.

"That's the biggest pet peeve for a snowplow operator — cars on the road," he said. "It can be like dodging a minefield. We're just out there to serve the public, but when the public hinders you, you can't do your job."

Mixed reactions

Touring through the new subdivision, several people shovelling their driveways stopped to watch the plow go by, some looking unimpressed while others stood back and smiled politely.

"The reaction you'll get is half, 'Thank God you're here' and half 'Omigod, you're here,'" he said with a laugh. "It's sort of a catch 22."

And, there are many people out there not so happy to see a snowplow coming by, and some who aren't afraid to voice their displeasure, like an angry resident Mr. Tonner encountered just before Christmas.

"He ran up to my truck because he thought I was putting more snow on his side of the road. He was just screaming at me, but I just leaned out the window and wished him a merry Christmas," Mr. Tonner said, smiling.

Rounding the corner, he pressed a few buttons and turned the spreader on to lay some sand, which he noted has a bit of salt in it to keep it from freezing. "Salt works a lot quicker than sand does, but it's more expensive," he explained.

Navigating by another parked car and oncoming traffic, Mr. Tonner said he prefers to be assigned to the residential streets, noting some of the most challenging areas to plow are the rural roads, like Appleby Line, Bell School Line and Twiss Road.

"But, I haven't hit any mailboxes," he said proudly. "I've just claimed one hydro pole on the Sixth Line. There was a car coming up a hill, and I had to decide between hitting the pole or the car. I thought the pole was the best choice."

Despite these kinds of challenges, Mr. Tonner said he doesn't find the job stressful.

"I think it's only stressful if you let it get stressful. I just don't let it get to me."

After touring the same residential roads a few times, since it can take three or four passes to clear the streets properly, Mr. Tonner noted his co-workers make his job just that much more enjoyable.

"I couldn't ask for a better bunch of guys to work with," he said. "Everybody really works together. We're always willing to help each other out."

But, the main reason he loves his job is knowing he's making a difference in the community.

"It's just nice to see your work left behind — you go onto a street and it's covered in snow and you leave and it's plowed," he said. "I just like feeling that I'm helping the public."

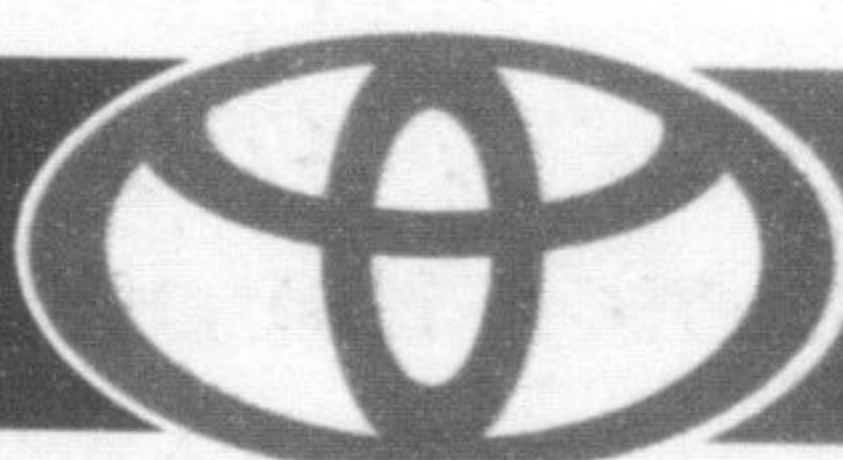
Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com.

Toyota's Biggest Sales Event of the Year.

It's Big. It's Red.




And It's back!

MILTON  TOYOTA

400 Steeles Avenue 905 875-1700
www.miltontoyota.com



 National Car Rental
Services on-site

