

FITNESS: Popular activity runs into risks on roads

Runners head up Baker Hill Boulevard in west-end Stouffville last year. York Regional Police have tips for runners and motorists sharing our roads.



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Motorists, runners continue to battle

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Sometimes, it's a horn honk, other times it is a rude hand gesture.

Often, there are unkind words exchanged.

It's the war over York Region's streets between drivers and runners.

The divide between the two groups who grudgingly share the road, hit a fever pitch in Toronto this year after angry drivers complained of too many road closures with two marathons running in the city three weeks apart.

The battle between drivers and runners is not new.

It is waged on streets every day.

Considering eliminating races in Toronto runs counter to the explosion in popularity of running.

That popularity has, in turn, shown an increase in events north of the city.

Five of the nine municipalities in the region host running events.

But, with the growth in population, there are more cars and runners than ever before.

Who has the right of way?

It is not illegal to run on the road, but the safety of runners heavily relies on the runners themselves, according to York Regional Police Staff Sgt. Bradley Bulmer who heads up the region's traffic bureau. The Highway Traffic Act states runners are well within their rights to run on the road as long as they face traffic.

"Common sense prevails. A big problem is how conspicuous you are for a motorist. Dark colours are very fashionable, but they are brutal when it comes to being visible by a driver," Sgt. Bulmer said. "You need something that contrasts with your surroundings."

Being visible isn't the only thing Sgt. Bulmer pleads with runners to do.

He wants them to obey road signals, which seems like a simple task, but he stresses that might mean waiting a little longer to cross at intersections.

"Joggers don't like to wait for pedestrian signals. They want to keep moving. They jog around the intersection and they'll go up a few metres and cross away from the intersection because they feel they are defeating the need to stop for a pedestrian signal," Sgt. Bulmer said.

The only time a car has to yield to runners is when runners are legally crossing a road, which means the walk signal is on, he said.

If a light is green, but the hand is up, the runner does not have the right of way, Sgt. Bulmer said.

For Markham resident and marathon instructor John Lang, safety is paramount when taking his groups out for a run.

Instead of lecturing his groups on safety, he makes the message

hit home.

"I talk about their families at home waiting for that phone call from the hospital, about how their kids and loved ones would react to the news of them being struck in a totally avoidable accident," Mr. Lang said.

"I ask them to imagine if their children did what we did — playing in the road when cars came."

For runner Dan Martin, it comes down to runners and drivers being conscientious.

"I sometimes can appreciate a driver's annoyance at a pack of runners on the road. What I don't appreciate as a runner are people in cars who feel the need to be overly aggressive, be it loud horn honking, name calling or speeding up and swerving in to 'play chicken' until you end up in a snowbank or ditch," Mr. Martin said, adding running on sidewalks for 26 miles takes a harder toll on a runner's joints than running on the road.

STAY SAFE

Runners:

- ▶ Be conspicuous - avoid dark colours;
- ▶ Obey traffic rules - only cross at major intersections;
- ▶ If you are running on the road run in single file;
- ▶ Use sidewalks if you run on major thoroughfares;
- ▶ Avoid any type of device that impairs your hearing, such as an iPod;
- ▶ Keep an eye on your surroundings, particularly in winter; and
- ▶ Avoid hoods.

Drivers

- ▶ Expect the unexpected. When you pass a jogger or someone walking on the road, you really need to move over and allow as much room as possible, because you don't know if they know you are there.

- Source Sgt. Bradley Bulmer, York Regional Police

EVENTS

There is no shortage of races to participate in and around York Region no matter your running level:

- ▶ **April 11:** Angus Glen 10-miler, Markham
- ▶ **April 25:** Markham Stouffville Hospital Legacy 5K Run/Walk, Markham
- ▶ **April 25:** Run for the Diamond, Uxbridge
- ▶ **April 25:** Run for Southlake 10k run/walk, 5k run/walk, Half marathon run/walk, Aurora
- ▶ **May 9:** Markham Women's 5k
- ▶ **July 1:** Angus Glen Canada Day 5-miler, Markham



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