

Don't judge drivers on paper

It's in the book. The book I'm currently "beating" is called *Senior Driver - Group Education*.

The reason? I'm preparing myself for another written test, my third in five years.

It doesn't become any easier. But I'm not alone. Wife Jean's beating the same book as well. Being a few years younger, it's her first go-around.

And she's every bit as nervous as I. We're both tossing and turning nightly as our double date with destiny draws near.

While I'm not about to debate the current process with Ontario's Ministry of Transportation, I feel it unfair to base one's right to drive on a two-hour written test when it's one's ability behind the wheel that should indicate whether this privilege should be approved or withdrawn.

Let's face it, some of the same folks who are able to maneuver an automobile through rush-hour traffic will fold under the pressure of directing a stubby pencil across a piece of paper.

Why? Because driving for most seniors is automatic. They, meaning me, respond routinely to rules of the road, usually without thinking. But ask us, meaning me, to place an "x" within a circle and our brains, meaning mine, can turn to mush.

Fortunately, the questions are all multiple choice. If one's able to maintain his power of concentration, the answers to most are obvious.

However, there are always trick queries that can throw one for a loop. This happened during my last two tests. I made changes. But not for the better.

"Always go with your initial



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

instincts," the examiner told me later.

While I can't speak for assessors at other check stations, the young woman at Unionville where I attended, was extremely fair. She left the impression she wanted everyone to pass, even to the point of divulging answers to a couple of expected questions during pre-test discussions. Mighty obliging I thought.

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The occurrences that bothered me most were the half-dozen applicants who breezed through the test in no time flat. Before I was comfortably seated

on my stool, they were up and out the door.

"That was simple," one guy whispered, "a test any kindergarten kid could do."

I wanted to stick out my foot and send him on his sneezer.

Completing the first test took two hours. I was 15 minutes faster the second time around. Those questions prompting doubts I left until last.

While the saying "three times and out" could apply, I won't be hung out to dry should I lose my licence. I can still walk to work and Jean's ready, willing and able to chauffeur me to and from Tim Hortons. Also, my two-wheeler's available when the weather's right.

However, my ego will be hurt, perhaps beyond repair. To be forced to admit to friends that my wife's a better driver, (at least on paper), will be more than I can stand. A total embarrassment.

To avoid this, I've read the ministry's seniors' handbook several times.

And I appreciate its emphasis on positives like judgment, experience, vitality and responsibility.

At the same time, it balances these with several negatives, including reduced vision, loss of hearing, movement restrictions, inadequate co-ordination and slower responses.

So where do I fit?

Come May, if you see me riding my age-old CCM up and down Rupert Avenue, you'll be right to conclude I "crashed".

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

Backing the home team about more than just sport

Im a homer. Growing up outside of Quebec when there were only six teams in the NHL - yes, I'm also ancient - it was hard not to be a Toronto Maple Leafs' fan in this country.

But when the league expanded to Minnesota and then Winnipeg, a kid in northwestern Ontario had choices.

The slickest uniforms and the finest players didn't sway me. Geography did.

It was all about the "home" squad or the closest available.

Flash forward to today in the CJA and the two largest home teams are suddenly contenders for the first time in a long time.

The Blue Jays launched their season this week with arguably the strongest lineup in Major League Baseball. They're favourites to at least make the playoffs for the first time since those glory days and championships of 1992 and '93.

All but a late-season collapse will see those Leafs make their first post-season appearance in nine years at the end of next month. (Please tell me why did they ever get rid of Pat Quinn?)

So, what's this have to do with life in a commuter town, a 45-minute drive from the scalpers and high-priced parking at the Air Canada and Rogers centres?

Plenty.

If a Toronto team challenges for a big-league championship, it won't solve our traffic troubles or single-handedly kickstart our still sluggish economy.

It won't do anything for gun control or guarantee the end of Rob Ford's scandals.

It will sell fast food and beverages on game nights.

And those who can't find those



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

moth-balled blue and white car flags will have to pony up again.

More importantly, it will bring people together again.

You saw it years ago when folks with GILMOUR and CLARK on their backs packed tables at the old Royal Canadian Legion on the Ninth Line.

When limos picked up Jays' fans from Fullerton's (now the site of the Pastaggio Italian Eatery) for the ride down the 404 to SkyDome.

When we gathered around the big screen in the basement for the big game then broke down its nuances the next day at Tim's or around the company photocopier.

It's no different than feeling the buzz after the Stouffville Spirit won its first Ontario Junior Hockey League championship a year ago.

It's not a game-changer, just a diversion.

A chance to gather and celebrate.

A rare opportunity indeed.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune

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