

HANNAH IS... OUTSPOKEN

“The road is no place for machismo”

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On a typically 'exciting' drive to work this morning, I found myself congratulating

such attractions as Skydive Dubai. They've done very well to stay in business considering they have such fierce competition in Sheikh Zayed Road. Why fork out for a spin on the world's fastest rollercoaster at Ferrari World when, for the price of a taxi ride, you can get all the adrenaline-spiking kicks you want?

Personally, I find nothing sets me up for a day in the office like a few near-death experiences on my commute. And if I'm feeling particularly bored, ditching my car for the back of my partner's motorbike really makes me take a moment to appreciate my life. Riding the motorbike has an added bonus in that you get to meet some of the charming characters who inhabit our roads – like the gentleman who recently cut in on a roundabout, clipped my leg and then, when we stopped to inspect the damage, told us we were wasting his time. Which really put things in perspective – there was I, worrying about my pesky femur, when he had a Very Important Day to get on with.

I still vividly remember the first time I ever tried driving on Sheikh Zayed Road – in fact, I think it's the longest panic attack recorded in medical history. It's why I decided to buy the biggest car I could possibly afford. Back in London, I was happy to own a vehicle that was less a car and more a Playmobil picnic basket on wheels. In Dubai, I drive several tonnes of gas-guzzling American steel, affectionately nicknamed Nicki Minaj due to the

room for ample junk in its trunk. Because when you're going into battle every day, you need a tank.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Dubai's roads are weirdly terrifying. I say weirdly because there's really no reason they should be such a white-knuckle ride – the roads themselves are some of the best made and maintained I've ever driven on, and they're thoroughly policed. But as the saying (sort of) goes, hell is other drivers.

And a survey conducted earlier this month may have found the cause behind some of my fellow drivers' most unnerving behaviour: while 90% of UAE residents polled said using indicators improves road safety, 25% said indicating is seen as a sign of inexperience or weakness.

These numbers only confirmed what I've long hypothesised – it's not that the UAE's roads are filled with people who don't know how to drive safely; it's that they choose not to, for fear of appearing 'weak' or, I suspect, unmanly. (I'm sure it's not entirely coincidental that similar surveys have found that men are more likely than women to get speeding tickets or be involved in collisions.) Silly me, thinking I was just trying to get to work with all of my limbs present and correct; in fact, I've unwittingly signed up to take part in a daily, testosterone-fuelled drag race.

You can see this kind of machismo everywhere on the roads. The drivers who are far too important to wait in a queue with the rest of us plebs when they can use the unofficial VIP Lane (aka cutting in on the junction corner). The ones who want to move into your lane, conveniently

– or so you thought – just as you want to move into theirs, but must still overtake you first, in case you were in any doubt as to how fast and impressive their car is. At home in England, where the majority of the population is so cripplingly polite that if you punched us in the face, we'd apologise for letting our heads get in the way of your fist, a flash of the headlights usually means, 'no, kind sir, I insist you go ahead of me.' Here, it's Morse code for, 'I AM THE LORD OF THE LANE! HOW DARE YOU OBSTRUCT MY PATH, PEASANT.'

All of which is why I applaud the news that Abu Dhabi Police have invented the world's first noise-measuring radar to catch 'abnormally loud vehicles' (a boy racer staple). These radars will join those nifty new cameras that can detect not only speeding but tailgating, lane swerving, driving while on your phone, and all manner of other offences. But why stop there? How about cameras that can detect driving with a cigarette in one hand, a sandwich in the other, and seven seatbelt-less kids jumping around in the back, or the use of hazard lights to mean anything from, 'ooh look, it's raining!' to, 'this road is now my parking spot'.

Failing that, what about mandatory counselling for those drivers in possession of a dangerously fragile ego?"



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