



By Invitation

The seven habits of the S'pore driver



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One of the advantages of having lived abroad is that you are able to compare the behaviour of Singaporeans with that of people in other cities and countries.

Singaporeans behave very well in many areas of life. However, when it comes to driving, our behaviour is quite atrocious. I describe below the seven bad habits of the Singapore driver.

1. SPEEDING

Singapore is full of Lewis Hamilton-wannabes. The Singapore driver loves speed. He ignores the speed limit and races from traffic light to traffic light. He will accelerate his car even when he can see that the traffic light ahead is red.

The Singapore driver has an addiction to speed. The situation has got worse since the arrival of Formula One!

2. OVERTAKING

The second bad habit of the Singapore driver is the impulse to overtake the car in front of him. This could be due to our *kiasu*

mindset. We must always stay ahead of the competition.

In Singapore, you have to watch out for cars overtaking you from the right, which is legal, as well as cars overtaking you from the left, which is not lawful.

The Singapore driver will overtake you even when it makes no sense to do so. I have often encountered a situation in which I am approaching a traffic intersection and I intend to go straight. The driver behind me intends to make a left turn. He will overtake me and force me to slow down so that he can make that left turn. In such a situation, it makes no sense for him to overtake me.

3. BEATING THE RED LIGHT

As we approach an intersection, we are supposed to slow down and stop when the traffic light changes from green to amber, and then to red.

Most Singapore drivers tend to accelerate as they approach a traffic light, and beating the red light without being caught seems to be a national sport.

The danger is that when a driver proceeds too soon after the traffic light has turned green, he may have a collision with a car that is speeding through a red light.

I know of one case when such a collision resulted in a fatality. An innocent child, sitting in the front passenger's seat, was killed when a car, speeding through a red light, hit the car driven by the child's father which was proceeding lawfully through a green light.

4. NEVER GIVE WAY

Sometimes, through no fault of your own, you find yourself in a lane which is blocked by an obstacle.

You put on your indicator that you wish to turn right into the next lane.

In many cities, the driver in the next lane will slow down and give you a break. In Singapore, instead of giving you a break, the drivers in the next lane will accelerate in order to prevent you from filtering into the next lane.

Is this also a part of our *kiasu* syndrome? The mindset seems to be that we live in a highly competitive world and there is no place for kindness or courtesy. It is every man for himself.

5. POTONG JALAN

Potong jalan, in Malay, means "to cut queue", in colloquial terms. In colonial Singapore, the practice of *potong jalan* was common because there were many gangsters, thugs and members of secret societies, and the police were weak.

Post-1959, the norm is everyone queues up and no one is allowed to jump the queue. The exception is on our roads. It is very annoying to wait patiently to make a turn and to be confronted by cars which have cut in line and insist on inserting themselves into your lane.

The police should stamp out this bad practice which violates our sense of fair play and the rule of law.

6. POOR PARKING

Some Singapore drivers have developed some bad habits when

parking their cars. I have seen a car parked in the middle of two spaces.

One day, at a carpark near a market, I saw a well-dressed lady, driving an expensive car, parking her car in a handicap space. I went over to her and politely told her to park her car at one of the other empty spaces. She told me to mind my own business. I should have taken a photo of her car and put it on my Facebook page.

On another occasion, I had parked my car in the middle space at a public carpark. When I returned, I found that another car was parked so close to my car that I couldn't open my door. This is a classic example of selfish behaviour. The driver of the neighbouring car had given himself too much room to open his door and given me no room to open mine.

After waiting fruitlessly for some time for the other driver to return, I decided to enter my car by the passenger's door and managed, with some difficulty, to get into the driver's seat. The lesson learnt is that we should always park our cars in the middle of the space.

7. USING THE INDICATOR

The seventh bad habit of the Singapore driver is his reluctance to use his indicator.

Very often, I am faced with the choice of joining a lane which is for cars turning right as well as for cars going straight, or a lane for cars going straight only. There is a car at the head of the lane which could go both ways. Since he has not

switched on his indicator to make a right turn, I assume that he is going straight. However, when the traffic light turns green, he turns on his indicator to make a right turn.

You feel frustrated as you could have joined the next lane and wish that he had put on his indicator earlier.

My plea to our drivers is to turn on their indicators early if they intend to make a right turn or a left turn. It is an act of courtesy to other drivers.

CONCLUSION

There are, of course, many good, considerate drivers on our roads. The above seven bad habits, however, are traits easily seen on our roads every day. I write this in the hope that we can all reflect on our bad habits and correct them.

The Singapore driver is a speed fiend now, but he can learn to drive appropriately. He may be selfish and lack courtesy, kindness and civic-mindedness today.

But I hope he, or she, learns to give way to others stuck in lanes, makes a conscious effort to park considerately, signals early, and avoids cutting in.

Our driving manners reflect who we are as a people. Surely we can improve on the bad habits and, in so doing, help create a more pleasant driving environment for all.

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