

Paul Summers Planning Strategies: Paul's Planning Proclamations

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A Dose of Ireland Needed in Australia

Well I seem to have trouble keeping this page up to date. On returning from our visit to Ireland last year, the intention was to write about the traffic circumstances found there immediately. Now whilst I haven't found the time to do this until now, I was prompted by a road rage incident that I witnessed in Noosaville this week.

Irish traffic circumstances are quite amazing. You see, the Irish generally do not let the car dominate decision-making. Instead of changing the built form and the agricultural landscape to suit a seeming desire for ever-wider roads and new motorways, the Irish seem to respect the fact that their country's character is defined by these elements. As a consequence, the narrow streets, the older and usually quaint building stock, the stone fences, the remaining vegetation, the waterways etc. are simply all left in place. Cars must work around them. So in the fields there are lay-bys every few hundred metres on these narrow roads that are edged by 1-2 metre high dry-stone walls generally covered with fuchsia or blackberry giving barely a car's width. An Australian confronted with a car coming in the opposite direction usually reacts by speeding up so that the oncoming vehicle is forced to the lay-by. Not so in Ireland, here there is plenty of time and it is more a race to get into the closest lay-by so as you can flash the oncoming drive through. A cheery wave and you are on your way again.

In the towns and villages, the extremely narrow streets causes traffic to slow and sometimes choke. Bottlenecks occur but to fix these means dramatically altering the character of the towns and villages, so generally they simply don't. Semi-trailer drivers with amazing skills manoeuvre their vehicles through the narrow lanes and their twists and turns. When two of these meet in such circumstances, one performs an amazing feat of reversing to allow the other through or around. Car drivers wait patiently while this entertainment occurs!

So while on an afternoon stroll along the Noosaville foreshore, we and various other onlookers watched again with amazement as an aggressive Ozzie male overtook on double white lines, jammed brakes on in front of the other vehicle coming to a stop and leapt out of his vehicle to abuse the other driver. The only crime this poor soul, who was probably a visitor to our fair Shire, seemed to be committing was that he was observing the 40kph speed limit!

When we returned from Ireland, the rudeness, impatience and aggressiveness of Australian drivers was the thing that stood out most. Ozzie drivers need a good dose of Irish traffic, I know it altered my attitude and driving!



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