



Summer's over, schools are back in session and football season is upon us. The pennant race is in full swing, the World Series is right around the corner and I, for one, am ecstatic that neither the Mets or the Yanks are in the fray. Now, it's not what you think. I like baseball as much as the next guy but I deal with baseball about the same way I deal with football or hockey or anything that attracts large numbers of people who behave like the subject of the Scopes Trial. My appreciation of it is directly proportional to the amount of traffic (read traffic jams) the contest generates.

Negotiating Long Island has become a problem of gigantic proportions. While I would love to plop all the blame right in the lap of those who have and continue to design and build our highways and byways, it's not really all their fault. The simple truth is that this tight little Island has become everything the sanctimonious planners decided it should be back when sanctimonious planning was called for. What they never counted on was that everyone took them very seriously and even embellished on the plan.

Long Island has got something for everyone. It has beautiful residential tracts, it has not so spacious sub-divisions, it has ghettos. We've got acres upon acres of parks, miles of beaches, enough variety of commerce and industry to keep anyone employed who so wishes. We've also got a nuclear power plant that produces no power and will end up costing us both arms, both legs and a good portion of our torso, garbage enough to fill the moon (and every barge ever built), our fair share of toxic waste, crime and drugs, a partially violated water system and more shopping centers per square mile than anywhere else in the galaxy.

But the one thing that Long Island has more of than any comparably sized land mass in said galaxy is traffic and it never, ever stops flowing (except during the morning and evening rush). Where did the term "rush hour" come from anyway? It's anything but a rush. In the morning it starts at 5:30 and begins to wind down at 9:30. The evening marathon begins at precisely 3:47 p.m. (I know this because I've been there) and, depending on the weather, ends somewhere between 7:30 and 8:15 p.m. I would really appreciate it if whoever is in charge of naming things would come up with something a bit more precise for this twice daily ordeal.

Now I don't want you to think that I think that the only place with traffic jams is Long Island, for goodness sake. Queens has dandy

traffic jams, the George Washington Bridge, Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and the Verrazano are a veritable wealth of traffic jams, Brooklyn is probably the granddaddy, Guinness Book of World Record traffic jam of all time. It just seems to me that people in those place have some very reasonable alternatives to their cars. On Long Island we have an almost non-existent bus network and the Long Island Rail Road. The dilemma is obvious.

Chateau Walrich sits right on a "major" bus route that bisects the Island and it is not at all uncommon for the user to wait 30 to 45 minutes for a bus. If there is a schedule it is patently ignored by the drivers. Of course, the busses are in the same fix as the rest of us, they have to travel on the same clogged arteries as everyone else.

The Long Island Rail Road is a mystery unto itself and since I haven't patronized that service with any regularity in the past eight years it would be unfair of me to lambaste it too severely. I'll leave the horror stories to the POST, NEWSDAY and the DAILY NEWS and take them at their word. I will say, however, that the cost of using that service on a regular basis is as outrageous as the traffic jams the rest of us are sitting in.

The hapless commuter on Long Island uses every trick in the book to outwit traffic snags and there is no end to the research one must do to be successful at that pursuit. The newspaper provides a daily summary of the road work in progress on all major thoroughfares into and off the Island. Radio stations offer a relentless string of up to the minute reports that are more or less accurate and utilize everything from helicopters to mobile (or not so mobile) units to cooperative listeners who feel compelled to call the station to report an accident. I, for one am eternally grateful for this information.

You see, what it all boils down to is one fact: it's one thing to be in the middle of a six mile back up on the Grand Central Parkway, creeping along at 7 mph and listening to Tito Puente tapes blasting out of the low rider that is creeping along at the same cadence one lane over. It is a far different thing to know why!

You don't believe me? Think about the last

time you were heading in one direction on the highway and traveling at pretty darn near the posted speed limit (you will remember this because it doesn't happen very often). Suddenly you look in the other direction and some confusion or other has prompted a slow down so that those going by the confusion can look at the confusion, define it and file it in their portable mental storage system. You continue on, glance over at the opposite side and it appears that the "slow down" has now graduated to a vehicular alert. Brakes are squealing, people are quickly changing lanes to avoid hitting the car with squealing brakes thereby setting up a chain reaction of noise and new forms of confusion. And there you are, safely and quickly motoring on in the other direction with this really smug look on your face. You know what it going on and they don't. Remember that? I thought so.

For some cosmic reason that I have yet to figure out, city-based traffic reports seem to forget about Long Island in their rush (there's that word again) to tell us all about the mayhem out there on the road. They get about as far as the Throggs Neck or Whitestone Bridge with a brief mention of the flooded out Cross Island and then skip, without taking a breath, to the Verrazano and Staten Island Expressway. Just the other day I was eastbound on the Grand Central wedged between a misplaced commercial vehicle that just made it under the bridges (wanna have your heart stop, get next to one that doesn't make it) a Winston Limousine Van loaded to the hilt and an original issue 1967 Camaro, primer coated grey, no tail lights and a bumper sticker that said "I don't brake for nothing." All of us were at a dead stop except for intermittent pauses to creep up one car length. We stayed that way for a total of 6, count them 6 radio traffic reports and not once was the problem mentioned. Wanna know the kicker? The "problem" turned out to be a Nassau County Police speed trap at the Queens/ Nassau border!

Like the guy on the Honda commercial says, "You can't make this stuff up."