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Poll: Drivers growing aggravated

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Linda Marin was traveling on Interstate 20 on Wednesday when she was enraged by another driver's actions.

The commuter glided across three lanes of traffic, to the Common Street exit, without using a turn signal, causing Marin to slam on her brakes.

"The one thing that intimidates me is when people don't indicate which way they are going," she said. "Oh gosh, it's almost happening daily. That incident on I-20 could have easily caused road rage."

Marin, 50, joins the growing number of Americans whose temper usually rises while driving.

A poll being released today shows that more and more drivers are becoming aggravated as they travel the nation's highways and byways.

Forty percent of drivers describe driving as "aggravating" and "more aggravating than two years ago," according to a poll by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research Inc. of Washington, D.C., commissioned by Drive for Life, a public education initiative of American Automobile Association, Volvo Cars of North American and other highway safety and law enforcement groups.



A driver at Bossier Parish Community College is unfazed by the traffic in between classes and continues to talk on her cell phone. (Jessica Leigh/The Times)

"Some of these people are just discourteous and stupid," Marin said.

The nationwide poll of 1,100 licensed drivers, conducted July 29 through Aug. 5, also shows that 21- to 24-year-olds are most likely to be fast and aggressive drivers. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Generally, the actions that usually push motorists to the limit are failure to use turn signals, not paying attention, blocking a passing lane and tailgating, according to the American Automobile Association.

Women and men, however, have different views. One in four men admits to driving angry, compared to one in five women.

Like Marin, women seem to be more bothered by aggressive behaviors such as speeding and tailgating. That's because women are more protective, said Bud Chauncy, owner/instructor of 1st Class Driving School Inc. in Shreveport/Bossier City. Chauncy is an eyewitness to it all; he spends 10 hours a day on the streets in training.

Many women become upset when someone pulls an act while their children are in the vehicle, he said.

"I've heard moms say they drive safer because their children are in the car. My wife has said 'I wouldn't have got mad if the kids weren't in the car,'" Chauncy said.

Men, on the other hand, complain of those who drive while distracted and talk on cell phones, according to the poll.

Typically, because men visually see the cell phone in use, they automatically make the assumption that it's an interference, Chauncy said.

"The male driver is usually more aggressive," Chauncy said.

"When you ask them if they are good drivers, 90 percent of them say they are. Therefore, when they see a source, they see a problem."

Distracted drivers pose a major threat on the road, according to 23 percent of those polled. But many adults polled admitted to being distracted themselves, with 54 percent talking on a cell phone, 48 percent changing CDs or DVDs, and 51 percent taking their eyes off the road to deal with children.

Distractions aren't the only problem, though. Eighteen percent of Americans polled said aggressive drivers pose the biggest threat on the road, second to drunken drivers.

Studies point out that traffic congestions contribute to the behavior, but so do longer commutes and an overall increase in daily stress.

People who easily succumb to the stress and pressure of everyday life are taking out their aggressions on the road. They honk their horns, use vulgar language and obscene gestures. There is a certain sense of power and an enormous sense of personal space and safety motorists obtain from driving an automobile.

Charles Butler, 20, of Shreveport, once flipped off a driver that was tailgating his motorcycle. Even so, Butler still considers himself a safe, calm driver.

But it's those with aggressive behavior who tick him off.

"I'm a motorcycle rider and normally I stay cautious and aware of everything on the road," he said. "The vehicle was driving entirely too close to me, messing up the performance of my bike," he said.

Shreveport police sometimes are dispatched to check out aggressive behavior, Jim Taliaferro, police spokesman said. For the most part, the actions go unreported.

Every day there are cases of irritated drivers, and nearly all drivers have been involved, including Taliaferro, he said. Once he made an unsafe movement in his patrol car and an angry driver beeped at him.

"The irritated actions jeopardize our safety," Taliaferro said.

"Personally, I become concerned with those motorists who make unsafe lane changes, stop when trying to merge into traffic or when they merge into higher speed traffic at a slower speed.

"The good thing is that I'm in the position to write tickets to the irresponsible and inconsiderate drivers."

Brandon Counts, 21, has been driving for four years and has already been involved in three or four collisions, he said. He confesses, in a couple of them, he was either not paying attention or in hurry. Counts "drives real defensive now," but he still becomes irritated by other drivers, he said.

"I hate it when I'm trying to pull out into an intersection and no one will let me out. It's nerve racking," the Bossier City resident said.

"And, oh man, I try not to drive around 5 p.m. It's crazy around here at 5 p.m. Just the other day my mom had an accident, on I-20, around 5 p.m."