

# Long weekend means time to relax, so why the stressful drive?

*If more of us take the time to be RoadWise drivers “getting there” can be fun and a safe experience for all*

It begins innocuously enough. You hardly notice the faint humming sound over the incessant lawnmowers and weed-wackers droning through your neighbourhood.

But as Friday 5 p.m. approaches, the hum becomes louder, more distracting. The lawnmowers and the weed-wackers, fixtures during the week, are disappearing from your street’s landscape.

What’s going on? By 7 p.m. the streets are deserted. The community has become a virtual ghost town. All you need is a couple of tumbleweeds blowing through to complete the desolate picture.

And what of that buzzing sound? An elite squadron of mosquitoes laughing in the face of fogging? A construction crew coming ever closer, searching for pavement to dig up?

No, nothing like that. That buzzing noise is the sound of a hundred thousand camper vans gearing up and heading for the highway.

Because, ladies and gentlemen: it’s the September long weekend. And



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there’s a lake with my name on it. At least, that’s the case for 95 per cent of the population. The rest of us, for whatever reason unable to go camping or “cottaging,” are stuck back in the city, fighting with the tumbleweeds.

But, from what I’ve heard, heading to the lake is not exactly relaxing.

It’s not bad once you get there, assuming the bugs and the rain stay away and you haven’t picked a campsite hosting a 300-person family reunion or ball tournament.

## **Stressed out? Relax**

It’s the “getting there” that’s a problem. Everyone is in a massive hurry to get somewhere and do nothing. Imagine highways bumper to

bumper full of people planning on relaxing. Soon. Very Soon. Now. If not now, at least within the next 15 minutes or they will drive over the car in front of them.

That seems to be the mentality, anyway. I haven’t experienced the phenomenon myself, but I’ve been told that the highways heading out to cottage country are simply insane on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons. And, heading into a long weekend, they should be predictably worse.

It’s statistically more dangerous to be on the roads on long weekends than on any other holiday, Christmas and New Year’s included. There are a couple of good reasons why.

First is the amount of traffic on the road. What used to be a reasonably quiet roadway during the week can become a major thoroughfare during the weekend as everyone packs up and heads out. The more vehicles there are on the roads, the greater the chance of an accident occurring.

Then there are the kinds of vehicles on the roads. You’ve got your family

sedan/sport utility vehicle, packed to the rafters so the driver can’t see out the back window. You’ve got your 4-cylinder with a canoe roped to the top and a tent-trailer dragging behind. And my personal favourite: the camping train. You’ve seen these. The massive RV unit (about the size of a modest mobile home) towing a car which is still nicer than any vehicle I’ve ever owned. Sigh.

Anyway, keep in mind that all of these oddball configurations are battling for position with everybody else on the road. Now, let’s throw a couple more catalysts into the mix.

## **Drivers with attitude**

Let’s start with driver attitude. That “me first” mentality we’ve talked about before is bad enough, but there seems to be an almost desperate quality in “Friday night heading to the lake” drivers. Many take more chances, drive faster, and drive more aggressively than usual. They forget, too, that loaded vehicles or vehicles hauling trailers and boats handle differently than unloaded vehicles, and require more careful

handling than they usually do. Add that to the mix as well.

The other deadly factor is alcohol. It’s a long weekend, a party weekend. Unfortunately, some drivers start the party before they park the car.

I’m not trying to ruin your long weekend. I’m just trying to raise awareness of a very real problem. Between 1992 and 1996, 13 people died on the Labour Day weekend.

Bottom line: lying around doing nothing isn’t nearly as much fun in the hospital as it is at the lake. Take it easy, and make sure you and your passengers arrive in one piece. Then, break out the bug spray and the sunscreen and have a blast.

That’s it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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