

Post-Thanksgiving gratitude for improvements in vehicle safety

Not easy to measure prevention efforts, but reflection shows that the last generation has seen positive changes

I love October. It means we're entering that wonderful time of year when you're allowed to pour gravy over everything on your plate, and worry about the consequences later. Hey, that's what New Year Resolutions are for, right?

Last weekend, my wife and I had a discussion after our Thanksgiving meal (extra gravy), detailing the things we were most grateful for.

I'm still thinking along those lines, but from road safety perspective. We spend a great deal of time talking about crashes, injuries and deaths, and I thought perhaps it was time to take a moment and think about what we, as motorists, should be grateful for.

How about we start small, and work our way up.

I, for one, am grateful that a genius of an automotive engineer designed a warning dinger that goes off when you leave your lights on. Simple improvement, really, but how many



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times has it saved you the frustration of a dead battery in the middle of the parking lot?

I'm sure you can think of your own vehicular small blessings, everything from a cup holder that actually holds a cup, to the little rear view mirror attachment that allows you to observe your child as he pours his juice on the seat cover.

Staying alive

However, there are some bigger blessings we all should be grateful for. While there is no doubt that vehicles are the biggest threat to our safety on the roads, I'm thankful that we are making such strides in making

them as safe as possible.

Literally hundreds of people have walked away from serious crashes thanks to airbags, a safety feature that was unheard of not too long ago. And, airbag technology is still improving, further increasing the safety component and decreasing the risks.

Vehicles are slowly being designed to keep passengers alive, not just to move them around. Anti-lock brakes, crumple zones, and side impact beams are showing up more often, not just in high-end vehicles, but in more mainstream vehicles, too. It wasn't an easy road, but manufacturers are finally taking vehicle safety seriously, and as a road safety professional, I appreciate their efforts.

I'm also thankful that our children are safer than we were at their age. Most parents these days won't even consider leaving the driveway unless their children are buckled up. That certainly wasn't always the case. I distinctly remember my sister and I

roaming all over the back seat of the family sedan, and no one in the front seat thought twice about it.

We've come a long way

Of course, my parents weren't wearing seatbelts in the front seat either, so why should they be thinking about buckling the kids up? I must admit that while I would like to see Manitoba's seatbelt wearing rate improve, it certainly is better than it used to be. Again, I'm grateful that seatbelts are now an "automatic" for most people.

Sometimes I need to step back to see the positives. My job isn't easy - road safety isn't exactly a glitzy profession, and very often drivers don't want to hear what I have to say. Changing another's behaviour is a very difficult task. Just ask your spouse how easy it was to get you properly "trained."

I once spoke to a group of volunteers who were beginning to question whether their efforts in road safety were making a difference. I explained to

them that it would be easy to see "results" if their job was to cause crashes. However, since their role was in prevention, it was more difficult to quantify. I had to remind them that they were having an impact, even if it wasn't as visible or dramatic as they may have liked.

My Thanksgiving conversation reminded me of that meeting. Occasionally I get frustrated in my role, much like those volunteers.

But, when I step back and look, I can see improvements.

And I'm grateful.

Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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