

Lying around doing nothing a lot more fun at the lake than in hospital

A vehicle handles differently when loaded to the roof and towing a boat or camper than when unencumbered

You'll notice the subtle signs as the grass gets greener, the really annoying birds in your neighbour's tree get louder, and the mosquito repellent section offers less and less selection.

Oh yes. The city (and by city I mean any place not located next to a lake) starts to hum. Now, this is not the hum of distant conversation, or even the cloud of bugs you know are coming now that the caterpillars are almost gone. This is the barely discernable Friday morning hum that reaches a fever pitch by about 5:30 p.m.

Are you ready? You can almost reach out and touch the tension! It's...the cottage crescendo! Oh yes, that hum is the sound of a province full of cottage dwellers gassing up (with today's pump prices, they mortgaged the house, I guess) and heading out to lake country.

It's the July long weekend. And that means a huge percentage of the population is shuffling from their main house to the auxiliary house—whether



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that is a family cottage, a rented or borrowed cabin or a tent in a bustling campground. The lure: unmatched dishes, “rustic” furniture, at least one cot with a broken spring—and utter relaxation.

That is, of course, if they get there in one piece.

Everyone in a hurry

It's the “getting there” that poses a problem. Granted, I have tried to avoid this particular ritual myself, but I've spoken to other “cottage crawlers” and they all say pretty much the same thing. Everyone (except them, of course) is in a big fat hurry to get there.

And nothing and no one—pouring rain, mudslides, or gosh forbid a vehicle ahead

of them—is going to get in the way of the vacation plans. And what are those plans? Loading the car up with kids, dogs and assorted paraphernalia, then filling every remaining space with time released stress vibes, all going off from the moment they leave the driveway until they see the lake framed in the windshield.

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.

Let's look at some of the reasons why long weekends are more dangerous than other weekends.

First is the amount of traffic. What tends to be a 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's the kinds of vehicles on

the roads. You've got everything from a fully loaded sport utility vehicle to a 4-cylinder with a canoe roped to the top and a tent-trailer dragging behind. And, let's not forget the innocents who rent a giant motor home and hit the open road (having never driven anything larger than a compact in their lives). They corner badly, can't park, misjudge distances... and that's just getting out of their neighbourhood!

Keep in mind that all of these configurations are jockeying for position with everybody else on the road. Now, let's throw a couple more catalysts into the mix.

Stress vibes in high gear

Let's start with driver attitude. Back to those stress vibes we were talking about. They tend to lurk in the vehicle at the best of times, but the lure of the lake seems to kick them into high gear. It's like they're spawning or something. Must get to the lake... must get to the lake...

The result is that many drivers take

more chances and drive faster and more aggressively than usual, all in the name of rest and relaxation. 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.

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.

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.

Until next time, be **RoadWise**.

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