

## CELLULAR DEMOLITION DERBY

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### *What to do about inattentive driving?*

This afternoon I'm out in my "enthusiast" vehicle as a third "cellphone shuffle" occurs at a stop sign—a movement requiring the utmost in dexterity:

The driver drapes his left hand lightly over the steering wheel, leans his head slightly to the right to help his other hand position the mobile phone to which he is intently listening and into which he is animatedly speaking... simultaneously.

At exactly the right instant, a full carlength through the stop sign and a foot from cross traffic, the driver casts his eyes to the left for two microseconds to check for anything coming down the road fast enough or close enough to result in body work that exceeds his deductible.

If he sees a big ol' truck, the driver immediately puts his foot through the anti-locking brakes and stops one inch from traffic. However, if you're a motorcyclist or a pizza delivery boy in a homemade Yugo, you better say your prayers: Cellphone Sam (or Sally) is coming thru.

*I've purposely used male pronouns in describing the shufflemeisters, but I'd have to give teenage girls—the teens are even into manual "texting" over the phone—and younger women top billing. "You can have her Nokia when you pry it out of her cold dead fingers."*

And coming thru wouldn't necessarily mean a life-threatening injury if these dingdongs with phones in their ears would accelerate vigorously out of your way. But, no, they wander into traffic just as they drifted through the stop sign, stuck in high gear without any hands remaining to shift down.

Where's a MAID (Mother Against Inattentive Driving) when you need one? A driving-enthusiast friend wonders if it might be time to do something:

"Brian," he says, "the manufacturers are contributing to the problem with navigation displays, audio-visual systems, even DVD players you can view from the driver's side! We're telling people driving is like playing video games in your rec room. I hate prohibitions as much as anyone, but the roads need some common sense rules."

That reminds me of Velda back in 2002 when New York implemented a handheld-cellphone-use ban. She heartily agreed, saying "Here, here! I'm tired of being cut off by some bimbo-princess in an SUV bubble-gumming her girlfriend!" I cautioned, "But, baby, what's next, a law to keep someone from listening to NPR (or Rush Limbaugh) on the radio?"

Now, after so many aurally distracted drivers trying to kill me and with the advent of the "driving as entertainment" crowd, I'm inclined to go along with some curbs.

What's realistic?

First, we need to avoid the Holy Inquisition approach now applied to drivers with small amounts of alcohol in their blood; no need to draw and quarter anybody. Instead, let's use the insurance carrot: on all traffic tickets require any distracting devices in the vehicle to be identified and inattentive behavior to be noted.

Encourage insurance companies to give much better rates to drivers who go hands-free, i.e. use headsets with their cellphones, or go entirely phone free while driving. (Correspondingly, have insurance rates rise substantially if a "distractor" is in play on any reported infraction or accident.)

That's about it.

The simple knowledge one's insurance premium will double if one gets caught cellphone shuffling thru a stop sign (or maybe quadruple if cell use causes an accident) will change driver behavior more effectively than anything else.

Then traffic cops can refocus on actually poor or dangerous driving than filling ticket quotas with victimless offenses.

What do you think?